

# Turkish Defense Policy

Mar 15, 1999



Brief Analysis

**O**n March 3, 1999, Hikmet Sami Turk, Turkish minister of defense, addressed The Washington Institute's Special Policy Forum. The following is a rapporteur's summary of the forum's question-and-answer session. [Read his opening remarks. \(templateC07.php?CID=34\)](#)

## Relations with Iraq

The Iraqi question can only be resolved peacefully, but Iraq must comply with all United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolutions. Turkey contributes to the upholding of these resolutions by hosting Operation Northern Watch (ONW), based on UNSC resolutions by which allied planes patrol the "no-fly" zone above the 36th parallel in northern Iraq.

Turkey recently reached an agreement with the United States on "rules of engagement" for ONW. Aircraft can attack Iraqi targets only in self-defense, but the concept of self-defense "must be interpreted in today's technological situation." For example, aircraft may have to respond in self-defense to radar-tracking, not merely missile-firings.

Turkey wants a democratic Iraq, but we are not in a position to interfere in the internal affairs of any state. We believe that, over time, the Iraqi people will have the possibility to change the regime, and open the way for democracy. We understand that the United States will "speed" the process through "other means," but the decision should belong to the Iraqi people. We can only help them. One must recognize the outlook of the Iraqi people, who have been fed misinformation by the regime; many Iraqis actually believe the Gulf War was the "mother of all victories." In this light, targeting Iraqi president Saddam Husayn might actually strengthen him.

Turkey faces two main problems because of the situation vis-a-vis Iraq. Although Turkey supports and participates in ONW, the no-fly zone helps to create an authority vacuum in northern Iraq; terrorists exploit the situation to attack Turkey. UN economic sanctions have also created huge economic losses for Turkey, which used to have considerable cross-border trade with Iraq.

## Kurdish Issue

The Turkish Republic is a unitary state in which all citizens are equal regardless of ethnicity or religious beliefs. Every citizen enjoys fundamental rights and liberties as enshrined in Turkey's constitution and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. While Turkey's official language is Turkish, all ethnic groups -- including those of "Kurdish origin" -- can speak their own language.

Likewise it is possible to publish Kurdish newspapers. According to Turkish "rules", radio and TV broadcasts must be in Turkish, but there are many channels and stations that broadcast songs, and even news, in the Kurdish language. Today there is tolerance for such things. In the future, we may consider offering the Kurdish language as an elective in schools, though the official language of instruction will remain Turkish.

There is no discrimination against any ethnic group, including the Kurdish people. Parliament includes more than 100 deputies of Kurdish origin, one of whom is the speaker. According to our constitution, all citizens are called

"Turks." No distinctions are made based on ethnicity. The issue is human rights for all people, not just certain ethnic groups. "Human rights" should not be used to create "racism."

### The Ocalan Case

Kurdistan Workers' Party leader Abdullah Ocalan will be tried in a state security court, a constitutionally-mandated body, in which there are two civilian judges and one military judge. The European Human Rights Court has criticized the presence of a military judge in these courts. Removal of military judges from the state security court system would require a constitutional amendment. Perhaps the new parliament, which will be elected on April 18, will pass such an amendment; indeed, it is highly possible it will do so. Recently the Turkish press reported that Turkey's powerful National Security Council (NSC) supports an amendment to remove the military judge. NSC deliberations are secret, so this report cannot be confirmed, but one "will understand" the NSC's position based on my preceding remarks. The Ocalan trial will be just and fair regardless whether a military judge participates.

### Civilian-Military Relations

In Turkish history, the armed forces have always been a promoter of progress. They have intervened in Turkish politics three times in fifty years. The military has the legal duty to protect the republic. Like all citizens, the military must protect Turkey's nature as a secular, democratic, social state based on rule of law. In recent times, the army took the lead in doing this, but it was supported by civilians. In fact, the military does not like to get involved in politics.

Some foreigners exhibit an unjust tendency: They seek meetings with Turkish military leaders to discuss non-military issues. They claim the Turkish military takes the leading role in Turkish policymaking. That is why the Turkish military leadership turned down a recent request for a meeting with a visiting U.S. congressional delegation.

### Relations with Europe

Other Europeans have been biased against Turkey for a variety of reasons, mainly historical and, to some extent, religious. This will change as they become better acquainted with the Turkish people.

◆ This Special Policy Forum Report was prepared by Sulay Ozturk.

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