

# Iraq -Turkey relation after 2003

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For years, fears about Kurdish separatism and ambiguity toward the regime of Saddam Hussein and its successors defined Turkey's relationship with Iraq. Nonetheless, after the 1991 Gulf war, Turkey allowed U.S. and British planes flying from In cirlik Air Base in southeast Turkey to enforce a no-fly zone over northern Iraq (Operation Provide Comfort/Operation Northern Watch) in order to protect Iraq's Kurds from Saddam Hussein and to monitor Iraq's armed forces.

This protective shield enabled an autonomous Iraqi Kurdish administration to develop despite Turkish unease about its potential as a role model for Turkish Kurds. Turkish leaders later expressed doubts about U.S. regime change plans for Iraq before the 2003 invasion and, on March 1, 2003, the Turkish parliament refused to authorize the deployment of U.S. forces to Turkey for the purpose of opening a northern front against Iraq.

In the aftermath of the war, Turkey has sought a stable, democratic, and unified Iraq. Foremost, Turkish officials desire an Iraq that retains its territorial integrity, without being dismembered or dominated by any ethnic or sectarian group, an outcome they view as key to regional stability.

They have some concern, mainly voiced in private, that Iran could gain control over a Shiite dominated Iraq. They also are apprehensive that a U.S. military withdrawal will lead to chaos in Iraq and the region. In order to avoid that outcome, Turkey has established a dialogue with and encouraged all Iraqi parties to resolve problems through reconciliation and negotiation and to participate in the Baghdad government. It wants the federal structure of Iraq to function and the Kurds to play a constructive role in it. As a related issue, Turks care especially about the Iraqi Turkomen (or Turkmen), their ethnic kin, although they claim that it is the same as their concern for all Iraqis. They also seek to strengthen bilateral economic ties.

In August 2009, Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu stated that Iraq was a strategic partner and friendly country for Turkey, adding that every development in Iraq would affect Turkey, too.(2)

Turkey's interest in regional stability has extended to assisting Iraq and Syria to reduce bilateral tensions that arose after the former accused the latter of harboring Iraqi Ba'thist terrorists responsible for deadly bombings in Iraq on August 19, 2009, which Syria denies.

### **Policy Priorities**

The high priority that Turkey puts on Iraq's territorial integrity stems from its desire to thwart the emergence of an independent Iraqi Kurdish state that could serve as a model for separatist Turkish Kurds and a staging site for anti-Turkish terror. From 1984 to 1999, Turkey fought a war costing more than 30,000 lives against the separatist PKK, mainly in southeast Turkey.

The U.S. State Department lists the Kongra-Gel(KGK)/PKK as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO). Of an estimated 4,000-5,000 PKK members, about 3,000-3,500 are believed to be in the Qandil (or Kandil) Mountains of northern Iraq.(3) The Turkish government has deployed military forces into northern Iraq to combat the threat, and increasingly also has engaged in diplomacy with Iraqi and Iraqi Kurdish officials for that and broader reasons. Ankara maintains that if Iraq is unable to stop terrorists from using its territory against Turkey, then it is Turkey's right under international law to defend itself. While Ankara addressed Baghdad on this issue, it also challenged Washington because most Turks viewed the United States as the authority in Iraq.

In the summer of 2006, Turkey mobilized military forces on the border to signal impatience with the continuing PKK presence in northern Iraq. The Bush Administration responded by appointing retired General Joseph Ralston, former Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and former NATO Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR), as Special Envoy for Countering the PKK. His mission was to coordinate with the governments of Turkey and Iraq in order to eliminate the threat of the PKK operating across the border. The Turkish government initially viewed Ralston's appointment positively as an indication of high-level U.S. interest and named a retired general to be his counterpart. However, Ralston never achieved concrete results, traveled to the region infrequently, and even suggested that his mission was reconciling Turkey and the Iraqi Kurds, not combating the PKK.(4) In October 2007, the State Department confirmed that Ralston had resigned. His appointment succeeded only in preventing Turkey from acting against the PKK for a year, which Turks believe was his purpose.

Another Turkish military buildup occurred in spring 2007, but action then was limited to increased operations within southeast Turkey and to “hot pursuit” raids and artillery shelling of alleged PKK camps in northern Iraq. Later in 2007, Ankara opened a diplomatic track.

On August 7, at the invitation of Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al Maliki visited Ankara to sign a memorandum of understanding (MOU) on countering terrorism, including the PKK. However, Maliki noted that the MOU needed parliamentary approval, and he was unable to implement it without the cooperation of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in northern Iraq. At the time, Turkey would not engage the KRG because its president, Massoud Barzani, used inflammatory language regarding Turkey and admitted that he supported the PKK.(5)

After a spate of deadly PKK attacks in southeast Turkey in September and October 2007, Turkish forces again massed on the border. Fearing that an invasion would destabilize Iraq, President

Bush invited Prime Minister Erdogan to the White House on November 5. The President referred to the PKK as “our common enemy” and promised the Turks “real time” or “actionable” intelligence. He also established consultations among then Commander of the Multinational Force in Iraq General David Petraeus, then Deputy Chief of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff General James Cartwright, and then Turkish Deputy Chief of the General Staff General Ergin Saygun. As a result, the Turks concluded that the United States was finally taking their concerns seriously.

General Ray Odierno and General Hasan Igsiz, the successors of Petraeus and Saygun, continued the consultation; the KRG was not included in any of these discussions.

After the November White House meeting, Turkish forces conducted frequent, targeted air strikes against the PKK. On February 21, 2008, Turkish special forces launched a week-long incursion into the Iraqi border area of Zap. (6) The operation was said to have seriously degraded PKK communications, supply depots, and training facilities, and Turkish officials expressed pleasure with U.S. intelligence assistance.(7) They were less pleased when President Bush and Secretary of Defense Robert Gates called for Turkish troops to withdraw rapidly.

On the same day that the offensive was launched, Turkish President Abdullah Gul invited Iraqi President Jalal Talabani to visit Ankara on March 7, 2008, to begin a mutual effort to ease tensions. Talabani is a Kurd who has described the PKK as a terrorist organization, although he

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also has called on Turkey to resolve the issue by non-military means. Prime Minister Erdogan then visited Iraq on July 10, 2008, the first such visit by a Turkish prime minister in 18 years.

During the visit, the two governments decided to set up a High-Level Strategic Cooperation Council with the prime ministers as co-chairs. Then, in March 2009, President Gul became the first Turkish president to visit Iraq in 33 years. He met in Baghdad with President Talabani, who gave the PKK two choices: lay down its guns or leave Iraq. Gul also met KRG Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani, who promised, "We will not allow (Kurdistan) to be a launching pad for attacks against neighboring countries." (8)

Turkey's diplomatic moves have not ended terror, as its forces suffer casualties regularly.

On October 3, 2008, some 350 PKK terrorists carried out an especially deadly attack at the Turkish border outpost of Aktüntün, killing 17 soldiers. Then, on October 7, the group attacked a police bus in Diyarbakir, in southeast Turkey, killing 6. Turkey responded with more air strikes and, on October 10, the Turkish parliament extended the government's authority to order cross-border operations into northern Iraq for another year. Yet, unexpectedly, the government at that time also decided to engage Massoud Barzani and authorized Special Envoy to Iraq Murat Ozelik and a military/diplomatic delegation to meet the KRG leader in Baghdad on October 14, 2008. KRG Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani reported, "I can confirm that much progress has taken place.... I am personally very optimistic about the future of the diplomatic relations between the Kurdistan region and Turkey." (9)

A new trilateral mechanism including Turkey, Iraq, and the United States began to operate to counter terrorism, this time with the participation of KRG representatives. In August 2009,

Massoud Barzani stated, "The PKK cannot maintain an armed struggle. The people will not support them." He encouraged (Turkish) Kurds to demand their rights in a peaceful way, not through violence. (10)

On October 6, 2009, the Turkish parliament extend the mandate for another year. Turkey's security cooperation with Iraq is multifaceted.

On June 9, 2009, the two countries' deputy chiefs of staff signed a memorandum of understanding on military training and technical and scientific cooperation. Other forms of bilateral cooperation are increasing as well.

According to the International Strategic Research Institute, an independent Turkish think tank, in October 2009, the High-Level Strategic Cooperation Council is scheduled to establish a common security framework, a high-level political dialogue, formal efforts for economic mutual interdependence, and cultural cooperation; toward these ends, ministerial-level meetings will be held three times a year.(11)

The Iraqi Turkomen, ethnic kin of the Turks who reside alongside the Kurds in northern Iraq, continue to be a policy concern for Turkey.(12)Ankara sympathizes with Turkomen complaints of being displaced and outnumbered by Iraqi Kurds returning to the north. (Saddam Hussein suppressed Turkomen rights and forcibly removed some Turkomen from the region.)(13)

Although the Turkomen issue appeared less acute after 2005 Iraqi national elections in which the group's turnout was far less than Turkey had expected, it

On September 3, the Turkish Minister of Environment and Forestry, Iraqi Minister of Water and Natural Resources, and Syrian Irrigation Minister signed a memorandum of understanding to establish joint measurement stations on both the Tigris and Euphrates, and on related matters. In light of Iraq's importance, Turkey has an ambassador in Baghdad, an ambassadorial-level Special Representative to Iraq, an ambassador based in Ankara responsible for reconstruction in Iraq and Afghanistan, a consulate in Mosul, and plans for a consulate in Basra.

In late September 2009, Prime Minister Erdogan also announced plans to open a consulate in Irbil (Arbil) in the territory that the KRG administers, perhaps thereby emphasizing the increased importance that Ankara is according to its relations with the KRG. Iraq has an ambassador in Ankara.

The Turkish government kept its embassy in Baghdad open despite a suicide bombing against it in 2003 and attacks on its diplomats.

## **Prospects**

A unilateral declaration of an independent Iraqi Kurdistan might trigger a very large-scale Turkish military invasion as well as a breach in U.S.-Turkish ties. For now, however, Turkish authorities accept the Iraqi Kurds' claim that independence is not their goal and say that they will respect decisions made by all of the Iraqi people. As noted above, Ankara has made overtures to all Iraqi ethnic groups, encouraging Sunni Arab participation in elections and establishing good relations with Shiite prime

ministers and other figures, such as Moqtada al Sadr, in an effort to further Iraqi unity and bilateral relations. Turkey has improved ties with Iran and Syria and consults them regularly about Iraq. Kurdish and other media reports have alleged that Turkish military forces have operated with Iranians against the PKK and the Party for Freedom and Life in Kurdistan (PJAK), a related Iranian Kurdish group, in northern Iraq. Such cooperation is likely to continue.

Turkish officials insist that multilateral contact groups include all of Iraq's neighbors, meaning Syria and Iran, and meetings of neighbors have included Turkey, Syria, Iraq, Iran, Jordan, the United States, the United Kingdom, and the Arab League. Turkish officials contend that the public attitudes toward the United States, which had deteriorated due to the PKK issue, have been changing in a positive direction since President Bush's November 2007 meeting with Prime Minister Erdogan, subsequent U.S. intelligence support for Turkish military operations against the PKK, and President Obama's visit to Turkey in

April 2009. Yet, public opinion polls do not support that conclusion. A Pew Global Attitudes Project public opinion survey published in July 2009 found that the United States had only a 14% favorability rating in Turkey, which was practically unchanged from the prior year and the lowest of countries surveyed.(14) This is related to U.S. policies toward Muslim-majority countries, notably Iraq. According to the Pew survey, Turks have little confidence that efforts to establish a stable government in Iraq will succeed. Therefore, the prospects for a decrease in Turkish anti-Americanism may be poor.

Nonetheless, Turkey is likely to support the U.S. withdrawal from Iraq, and its officials have indicated a willingness to facilitate the withdrawal of U.S. troops and materiel via its Incirlik Air Base and the port of Mersin, provided that the United States ensures that no arms will fall into the hands of the PKK in northern Iraq. The United States has not (yet) made a formal request to use these installations, but one can be anticipated.(15)

Ankara advocates postponing a referendum on the fate of Kirkuk, fearing that it could prove that the city is predominantly Kurdish at the expense of Turkomen residents and that the oil resources on which the city sits could be used to finance an independent Iraqi Kurdish state. Turkish officials argue that Kirkuk and Iraq's natural resources must be equitably shared by all Iraqis. Turkish unease abated somewhat as Iraqi officials postponed both the referendum and a national census that also would affect the fate of the city, but Turkey remains watchful.

## Economic Relations

Turks have taken advantage of economic opportunities offered in post-Saddam Iraq. The neighbors hope that closer economic ties will stimulate economic development on both sides of the border and provide a foundation for other forms of cooperation. Iraq is Turkey's fifth-largest market and Turkey is Iraq's largest trading partner, and they reportedly plan to sign a free trade agreement. Turkish officials hope to increase trade from \$7 billion in 2008 to \$20 billion by 2011.(16) Some 3,000-4,000 trucks loaded with Turkish goods cross into Iraq daily, and the Iraqi Kurds collect tariffs on this trade. There also are plans to establish a common industrial zone on the border.

Bilateral cooperation in the energy field also is growing. In the fall of 2008, the state-run Turkish Petroleum Company (TPAO) and the Pipeline and Petroleum Transport Corporation (BOTAS) signed an agreement with the Shell Oil Company to cooperate in the exploration, operation, and transportation of oil in northern Iraq. The Baghdad government wants TPAO to help rehabilitate oil fields in Basra and elsewhere in Iraq. The Kirkuk-Yumurtalik oil pipeline is a source of income for both countries, and there are plans to construct a twin pipeline parallel to it and increase capacity. In June 2009, a small amount of oil (est. 90,000 barrels per day) began to flow from KRG-administered fields to the Turkish terminal at Ceyhan with Baghdad's consent.

The volume reached more than double by mid-2010. Turkey would like Iraq to use the planned Nabucco natural gas pipeline (from the Caspian to Europe) to export gas to Europe in order to make the project viable should some Central Asian governments decide not to participate.

Iraqi shipments via Nabucco would depend on the production of more gas. Prime Minister Nuri al Maliki attended the signing ceremony for the Nabucco agreement in July 2009, which some Turks view as a hopeful sign. With an economic dimension, bilateral water issues are sometimes problematic as Turkey is the controlling, upstream partner on the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers and has dams on the latter, while Iraq is the dependent, downstream riparian. (The Tigris flows directly from Turkey into Iraq, while the Euphrates flows through Syria before reaching Iraq.) In 2009, Iraq has claimed, as it had in prior years, that the flow of water from the Euphrates had fallen.

However, Turkey insists that it has kept its commitment to provide Iraq and Syria with 500 cubic meters per second from the river despite

severe drought conditions that lowered water levels.(17) All sides appear to want to address the issue in a cooperate technological way.

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### **Conclusions:**

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Turkey insist keep Iraq unified and to develop bilateral relation with Iraq in particular in energy projects such as Nabucco natural gas pipeline (from the Caspian to Europe).

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