

## IRAQ AND THE MIDDLE EAST POLICIES OF TURKEY AND THE USA

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Before and after the US attack on Iraq, very important and critical processes have been experienced in Turkish–American relations. Events that unfolded during this period and parties' attitudes toward these events have brought post–Cold War relations between the two countries almost to the point of parting ways. To understand the current position clearly, it is useful to outline these events and respective attitudes to them.

First, we should state that Turkey's policy vis-à-vis the north of Iraq has been pursued with great determination and correctness lately. As of late 2001 when the American attack on Iraq was pronounced, Turkish officials have clearly expressed the following at all levels:

1. We are in favor of the territorial integrity of Iraq.
2. We will not allow the establishment of a new state in the north of Iraq.
3. Protection of the lives and properties alongside the rights of Iraqi Turks is one of our priorities.

Turkish officials of all ranks have stated the above conditions as Turkey's irreversibles with respect to the policy on the north of Iraq. In fact, they went even further and the emergence of a structure in the north of Iraq threatening to Turkish security was declared as a *casus belli*.

The new government as well has repeated our aforementioned sensitivities at all levels parallel to the official organs of the state. The determined attitude of the Turkish Armed Forces in the days whether or not the second troops motion would be endorsed by the Turkish Grand National Assembly was being discussed should be added to this. In the days when both the US and the EU were clearly demanding Turkey not to enter the north of Iraq, Turkish Armed Forces has declared in coordinated statements with the government that it would not enter the north of Iraq should the following conditions not appear:

1. The emergence of a migration movement from the north toward our borders,
2. An attack by one group in the north on another,
3. An attack on Iraqi Turks,
4. Entry of peshmerge groups into Mousul and Kerkuk.

Unfortunately, the US attack on Iraq commenced afterwards. On the 18th–19th day of the attack, Iraqi Forces dissolved and the peshmerge in the north of Iraq have seized the opportunity of the power vacuum in the north of Iraq emanating from the shortage of US troops and the collapse of the Ba'ath regime to enter Kerkuk first and Mousul later on. Not only have they entered these two Turkish cities – cities which Turkey has assertively stated from the outset that it does not want the peshmerge to enter– but also they have looted government buildings in the cities. That the first venues to be looted were land and population registry offices in both cities shows that the peshmerge wanted to

erase records to relegate the Turkish (Turkmen) population into a minority on paper. Peshmerge declared that they would withdraw from the two cities as soon as American troops arrive and transfer the control of the cities to US troops upon Turkey's sensitivities and US pressure indirectly. Peshmerge who have entered Kerkuk on April 10th have still not evacuated the two cities. Peshmerge exerted pressure on Iraqi Turks for the evacuation of Turkmen offices in Kerkuk and they even demanded the evacuation of Iraqi Turkmen Front offices within a given period. Furthermore, dozens of Iraqi Turks were massacred by the peshmerge. Upon this, there were reports that Iraqi Turks in Kerkuk have started arming themselves.

Of course, what Turkey should have done was not to overlook its former commitments. One of the fundamental sensitivities of the Turkish state and the Turkish nation is the Mousul–Kerkuk issue. Declaring that "I will enter the north of Iraq should these conditions occur or I will consider these conditions as a *casus belli*" requires exhibiting the necessary determination when those conditions hold. It is understood that the peshmerge, in coordination with the USA, are testing Turkey's determination. Events that unfolded in Kerkuk and Mousul can be thought of as the infrastructure of a new "formation". Moreover, Turkey has listed breaches to the security of the lives and properties of Iraqi Turks as a reason requiring entry into the north of Iraq.

What we say should not be construed as "we should have entered the north of Iraq and taken part in the war". However, Turkey's determination and that it would live up to its words should have been emphasized clearly, should still be emphasized.

One of the questions that comes to mind here is the question of "why Turkey does not execute what it said before?". It is understood from attitudes and statements up until now that Turkey has left the resolution of matters which it had said would require its entry into the north of Iraq to the US. Verbal guarantee from the US to Turkey that "your sensitivities will be taken into account and matters that worry you will not be allowed to flourish" was considered sufficient. However, it cannot be said that the US really takes Turkey's worries with respect to the north of Iraq into account. Everyone knows that the peshmerge in the north of Iraq have organized themselves into tribal structures and they operate within this structure. It was sufficient for peshmerge leaders Talabani and Barzani to say "Don't enter Mousul and Kerkuk!". However, what was said seems to be the contrary. So much so that when one peshmerge group acted quickly and entered Kerkuk, the other proposed cooperation to Turkey to evacuate that group from there. After Turkey's silence, the peshmerge group that made the proposal to Turkey has entered the city of Mousul this time and maintained balance according to itself. The seizure of heavy weaponry possessed by the Iraqi army left during the retreat by the two groups alongside PKK–KADEK militants as they entered these cities formerly controlled by the Saddam regime is a matter of concern and a condition to the disadvantage of Turkey and Iraqi Turks.

The US has not prevented peshmerge groups in the north of Iraq from entering Mousul and Kerkuk. This cannot be explained on the basis of the absence of a sufficient amount of troops in the region. Thinking that Talabani and Barzani can deviate from US direction is not realistic at this stage. What is understood is that the US has taken a blind eye on peshmerge entry into Mousul and Kerkuk. Verbal guarantees given to Turkey over this issue may have no meaning beyond saving the day. As far as international relations and international law are concerned, these promises are not binding guarantees. The US seems to be willing to review its relations with Turkey in a new framework upon the rejection by the TGNA of the request to open a northern front. In this new assessment, the US seems to be intent

on making Turkey feel its thought that the political, economic and military support it offered to Turkey for years has not been reciprocated (?).

However, such an approach in relations between states is quite wrong and dangerous. Regional interests and evaluations on the region of very distant states like Turkey and the US in different geographical regions will naturally be different from each other and at times clash. In such cases, it will be wrong for the parties to instantly react and take up a position that might harm the other party.

For instance, what will the result be if Turkey thinks that it might have been exploited in the Iraq issue, that what is demanded of it is entirely geared toward maintaining the security of another country, that in the long-term the demands would hurt Turkey's interests in the region and of a nature destroying its prestige in the region and determine its position in the light of these thoughts? What is conceivable is that Turkey might not be strong enough to take such a position and in that case the US position would be more meaningful. In my view this is not an acceptable approach either. It needs to be remembered that economic, political and military power are not permanent. When who was a strong power ten years, fifteen years, two centuries ago is recalled, the incorrectness of this approach will be evident.

It is imperative to look at latest developments regarding the north of Iraq from the standpoints of both the future of Turkish-American relations and Turkey's security. News that "the US demanded Turkey to terminate Turkish military presence in the north of Iraq" has rightfully attracted the attention of the Turkish public to the north of Iraq again. In particular, the capture of heavy weaponry belonging to the Iraqi army by PKK or KADEK militants, which the US either tolerates or overlooks, has introduced a new and very important security dimension to the issue. Turkish officials have stated that there are around 5000 PKK militants equipped with heavy weaponry in the region, that this constitutes an important security problem and that the Turkish Armed Forces would not retreat its forces in the region until this threat is completely eliminated. Despite that highest-ranking US officials have stated that PKK militants would be disarmed and passivated, it can be predicted that promises of this sort will serve more than keeping us busy when rather unfriendly statements and procedures from the US to Turkey lately are taken into account. US has been stating that it will disarm PKK militants in the region and either integrate them into the Iraqi army or expel them from the region. What seems to be the case is that US officials are continuing their delaying tactics.

As we know, for a long time Turkish foreign policy is unfortunately based on preserving and maintaining the status quo. Such a policy is not dynamic, it is not prepared for unexpected events. However, just as much as it is not possible to maintain the status quo at all times, sometimes not maintaining it may be a more correct policy. In any case, strong and sudden deviations particularly in foreign policy should be avoided.

Turkey has deliberately and insistently sought to join the Western alliance after the Second World War. Post-1950s Turkish foreign policy and defense have been centered around the US and NATO. Of course the biggest reason for this is the communist threat from the Soviet Union and the Soviet threat. This policy has been successful for 50 years. Despite that Turkey has served as the forward outpost of the West against the Soviets for long years, it is clear that this has brought more benefits than costs. Owing to this, Turkey was protected from the Soviet threat, got closer to the Western countries and the values of the Western civilization, Turkish democracy has persistently improved and

strengthened and some, albeit temporary, relief was provided in the difficult years of the country by Western economic aid. Yet this period has had some drawbacks as well.

The debt policy of the Mustafa Kemal Atatürk was abandoned and foreign debt has increasingly grown. As a result of foreign debt and excessive dependence, foreign policy (and sometimes domestic policy) could not be formulated independently. At times when Turkey executed policies along the lines of its national interests, it faced embargoes from the US and its Western friends. Sometimes, the embargoes were brought to the agenda in an insulting manner that escaped rules of respect and protocol. Over time, relations were put back on track and Turkish foreign policy continued to be US-centered. Turkish foreign policy, politics and even economy continued to depend on the US. Turkey has always been cordial in its relations in line with its right attitude. However, it is difficult to suggest that the US and other Western states have exhibited the same cordiality over such issues as Cyprus in particular, Armenian question and Turkish-Greek relations.

The world conjuncture has changed after the 1990s. The US had the position of the sole super power. Turkey has continued to carry its US-centered foreign policy out and has viewed the US as the most reliable ally. However, although the US has expressed the same rhetoric, it started to view Turkey differently. Unfortunately, Turkey has stayed distant to new formations and new opportunities as required by its status quo policy. So much so that it has not seen some cases to its advantage, or simply overlooked them.

As Turkey fought PKK terrorism, the US and its Western friends have for a long time not recognized the PKK as a terrorist organization and this terrorist network was considered as a "freedom fighter". Only when the West itself was hurt by terrorism and the PKK changed its name was it included in the list of terrorist organizations. During the Gulf War, the US, by almost doing away with the 36th parallel as a parallel, declared regions of the north of Iraq where the peshmerge lived as a "Security Zone" and excluded Iraqi Turks from this zone, leaving them to Saddam's mercy. All would remember that US helicopters have dropped down mystery (?) packages in the north of Iraq on Mount Cudi and regions inhabited by PKK militants. US went even further and supported the infrastructure of a new state in the north of Iraq after the Gulf War whose name is given yet one that is not recognized.

Prior to and during the imperialist American attack on Iraq, the TGNA has, in an honorable move, not taken the type of decision the US had expected as a result of the difference in the historical, political and ethical perception and understanding between the two countries toward the region. Plans of US imperialism were spoiled. This case has created disappointment in the US, which views Turkey as one of its provinces and evaluates it as such. However, the biggest share in the decision again belonged to the US. US unwillingness to see Turkish Armed Forces in the region amid an awareness of Turkey's sensitivities in the north of Iraq (its demand to take them under its own control and limit them in number), its getting peshmerge leaders to issue statements that cross the line in order to intimidate Turkey and its making Turkey the subject of cartoons which show it both to its own public and to the international public in a position that does anything for money taking advantage of the economic hardship it was in were the fundamental reasons behind the rejection of the troops motion.

The US assesses all these developments as serious as far as its own interests and interests in the region are concerned. Today, the US presents the image that it is taking revenge from Turkey looking at the attitudes it adopts

towards development both in the north of Iraq and in the region. Mosul–Kerkuk events, attitudes of retired US General Garner with respect to Barzani and Talabani, attitude of Rumsfeld who landed on Incirlik air base and ignored diplomatic etiquette to make a show of anger to Turkey, the opening of a branch in Baghdad by PKK militants after changing their name and finally the statements made by Wolfowitz and Grossman are significant reflections of this approach.

Turkey will of course continue its efforts aimed at the West, and it should. But pursuing a single–centered and excessively dependent foreign policy is not right. It is time a broad–based, active and prepared foreign policy was pursued. Our history, geography and strategic position force us to pursue such a policy. Above, we tried to demonstrate that considerable differences appear between Turkish and US foreign policies that seemed to coincide up until the 1990s. US and Turkish policies vis–à–vis the region can be evaluated as follows:

– The international conjuncture has had a huge transformation after the 1990s. With this transformation, many new opportunities and new areas of problem parallel to this have emerged for our country. Despite that the principles of traditional Turkish foreign policy have tried to preserve the status quo oriented structure, great transformations have been experienced in the region Turkey is located since those years. This transformation process still goes on. Turkey's desire to preserve the status quo and avoid harm have rightfully led it to enhance its defensive force and defense systems. As such enhancement would be facilitated by economic prosperity and technological know–how, latest developments have led Turkey to cooperate with international institutions and with economically and militarily powerful states. However, over time, this cooperation has turned into dependence and in some vital national matters, Turkey faced economic, political and military pressures over its use of military power. Turkey's moves to act in line with its national interests have brought about the desire of states supplying Turkey with weapons and equipment to either prevent or control its military power in particular through the introduction of restrictions.

– US on the other hand carries out its main policy through its strategy based on the control of world's energy resources. It has also been openly informing the world of this strategy and undertakes what it requires. As a requirement of this fundamental policy which can be outlined as "the extraction and production of oil and other energy resources in a way that will not hurt the economies of the US and its developed country allies and the continuation of uninterrupted production at reasonable prices", the US wishes to permanently control oil and natural gas rich countries of the Middle East, Caucasus and Central Asia and tries to shape the balance of power in these regions in line with its national interests all the time.

– This is the region where we are located. We are part of the Middle East, Caucasus and Central Asia geographical region. In this region, which the US tries to reshape, under these circumstances, sustaining pre–1990 policies and undertaking efforts for the maintenance of these policies is not fit for the realpolitik context, and hence not possible.

We can outline US policies vis–à–vis the geographical region we are in as follows:

- Controlling oil and energy resources
- Securing the presence of Israel
- Weakening states which have a potential to constitute a threat to Israel
- Controlling Iraq, Syria and Iran within this context
- Reducing the threat of radical Islam which is against imperialism
- Doing away with chemical and biological weapons of mass destruction possessed by the states in the region.

These US policies clash with the policies of other states in the region we are in. However, what we see is that the US

tries to impose this issue. It is determined not to give a voice to any state in the region. Lately, we are observing an increase in US pressure on Syria. What is clear is that the US took the course of forcing important developments through pressure and threat against Syria instead of a direct military attack as with Iraq. We are also seeing that the US reacts strongly to moves to reduce the importance of political and military threat and pressure against Syria.

On the other hand, the US, which has been totally establishing itself in Iraq, is undertaking efforts to reduce Iranian influence in the region through the "closure" and "pressure" policy and tries to render its influence in the Persian Gulf permanent and absolute by isolating Iran from the world and from the region.

In the Caucasus and Central Asia, the US is keen to prioritize the wishes of the Russian Federation and not to clash with the Russian Federation; continues its inclination to execute its policies in the region through the support of the Russian Federation by economic assistance and credits. Upon the disagreement, which started with Russian Federation's opposition to Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty and went on with the NATO enlargement process, the US Senate has modified the CFE in line with the demands of the Russian Federation and ratified it as such. Thus, Russian Federation did not oppose NATO enlargement. Concessions to the Russian Federation do not go along with Turkish policy. Russian Federation's desire to establish bases in Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan and its actually doing so can give way to an adverse condition with respect to Turkey's policies vis-à-vis the states of the region. Yet the US has sided with the Russian Federation.

By now, Turkey has to see this: The world we live in is a new world. Moving stones are being relocated. Turkey has many areas of maneuver and cooperation in this new world. Rather than policies that are excessively dependent on the super power, new opportunities have become available in the Balkans, Eastern Europe, Middle East, Central Asia and the Caucasus.

Turkey should also see and understand this clearly: US policies in the aforementioned regions do not coincide with Turkey's long-term regional policies, and on the contrary they clash often times.

Turkey should seek for better relations and enhanced cooperation with diverse regions like Russia, Central Asia and Far East which are in fact directly and closely related to Turkey, and close relations with the US and the EU without submitting itself.

Turkey can assume an important role in the Caucasus, Central Asia and the Mediterranean together with Russia. On the other hand, regional cooperative undertakings in the spheres of economy and politics with Central Asian states and our Middle Eastern neighbors can contribute both to the region and to world stability and the development of peace. Such regional cooperation is against neither the EU nor the US. Furthermore, such cooperation is not an alternative to cooperation with those countries.

Turkey should avoid being excessively dependent on a single center in the new world conjuncture and seek for and find ways to pursue an active and multi-dimensional foreign policy. Turkey's national interests and regional policies in the Balkans, Middle East, Central Asia and the Caucasus can no longer be parallel to the policies of the EU and the US compared to the pre-1990s. At the center of these multi-dimensional new formations, Turkey has to pursue new

and national policies by being more confident in itself, by relying more on its young population, educated persons and on its entrepreneurship spirit. Our proximity to the aforementioned regions, common cultural bonds and values force us into forging new political, military and economic relationships in this region. In order to do that, there is a need to clearly lay down our goals and identify and pursue a permanent and rational strategy.

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