
Interview: Zaki Yavuztürk

Look who gains, if Turkey is weakened

Webster Tarpley and Thierry Lalevée interviewed Turkish Defense Minister Zaki Yavuztürk, in Ankara on July 28.

EIR: We would like first to ask you for your evaluation of the overall strategic situation of Turkey.

Yavuztürk: I would like first to stress the geopolitical position of Turkey. If we look at a map, Turkey is a historical bridge between the West, the Middle East, and the East. . . . For thousands of years, many civilizations have developed here; they have established very powerful governments. . . . From a historical point of view, this land has always been important for the European countries, for the big powers. . . .

The Ottoman Empire extended up to Austria, from the Alps to the east of Persia. The whole of the Mediterranean became a lake of the Ottoman Empire, the Black Sea, the borders of the Black Sea, the Crimean, the Caucasus. Today, there are more than 17 states on the borders of the Ottoman Empire. This means that the area is strategically very important as a bridge between East and West, North and South. That's the first point.

Second, we historically have a long border with Russia, and we have had some disputes in the past. The main aim of Russia has been to reach warm waters. Historically, from the times of the czars to now, this has been the main idea of the Russian Empire. Today we are part of the Western alliance, a full member of NATO, a defense organization based on the democratic way of life. Turkey is the only democratic country in that part of the world. There is no other country, except Greece, in that area, which is ruled by democracy.

As our country is developing further, many of our neighbors do not like having a strong Turkey in that part of the world, because Turkey is a key to the stability of the area. A stable Turkey contributes to the stability of the Middle Eastern countries.

Among the constellation of our neighbors, we have Bulgaria. Bulgaria is a member of the Warsaw Pact, a strong ally of Russia. We then have a border with Russia, along the Black Sea coast, which can be considered as a border, and the land border with Russia, around 200 miles in the Eastern part of Turkey. We have borders with Iran, Iraq, and Syria. This southeastern region is very unstable, because of the war between Iran and Iraq, and the very close and developed relations between Syria and Russia. This is a factor we have

to take into account.

On the western side, there is Greece. We count them as an ally member of NATO, but the recent positions taken by the Greek people have undermined NATO; they are not participating in the maneuvers, in the joint training; there are not participating in joint efforts; . . . they are becoming something neutral within NATO, not as a full member. That is the overall picture.

EIR: In August 1985, the Soviets held seven days of maneuvers in the Caucasus to test their ability to invade Turkey. There has been also a dramatic increase in Soviet irregular warfare against Turkey through Kurdish terrorism. What's your evaluation?

Yavuztürk: Turkey is a member of the Western alliance. Until Sept. 12, 1980 [date of Turkey's military coup], we suffered a high level of terrorist actions. Now it has ceased. But, as I mentioned before, many external forces do not like to have a strong and stable Turkey. Instability in Turkey is to the benefit of the enemies of the Western alliance. . . . I do not want to name any of these external forces, but they are well known to the Western public. We have to be very careful, we have to go to the roots of these terrorist organizations.

EIR: Have you seen any change in Soviet policy since Gorbachov came to power?

Yavuztürk: The Soviet position in the world of politics never changes; Gorbachov and all others before, have the same views. The policies of the Soviets have never changed since the czars. Their main aim is to have this huge land under control and to reach warm waters; because their country is very cold, they have to have some outlets to the warm waters.

EIR: What about the Kurdish attacks, do you think that one aim of those manipulating the Kurds is to create a war-like situation between Syria and Turkey?

Yavuztürk: The Kurdish guerrillas—we call them gangs—are attacking villages at night, in remote areas. For the time being, we will take the necessary measures.

Our prime minister was in Syria 10 days ago, where he was warmly received by very high Syrian officials. The situation between Turkey and Syria is developing positively. However, the relationship between Syria and Russia should be looked at with a serious consideration. But for the time being, our relations are developing.

EIR: As you know, one crucial aspect of the war plans of Marshal Ogarkov is the use of irregular warfare. In the United States, an irregular warfare command, under the control of the Pentagon, has been established. Do you plan the same?

Yavuztürk: This is now becoming a new subject for our military people. This should be taught in the academies, they

should be trained according to irregular warfare, but we do not have any special unit.

For these gangs, we have special civilian groups, policemen groups called "special teams," specially trained. They are not part of the army, but of the police forces.

EIR: There is a general weakening of the Southern Flank of NATO. Spain is negotiating the withdrawal of the F-16s at Torrejón base. Greece is a very weak member. How does that affect Turkey?

Yavuztürk: The Southern Flank has been an important question since the beginning of NATO, because it has different aspects and different culture. For example, Spain now just took a democratic regime. In Greece, for a very long time, they were under military rule.

The Southern Flank should be much more cohesive, keeping all members at the same level. Also, there should be a commitment to develop the least-militarily-developed countries like Portugal, Greece, and Turkey. NATO is taking special care of the matter. There are some minor misunderstandings, or rather different understanding. Some countries do not follow what has to be done, what is scheduled to be done by NATO authorities. From our side, we are trying to fulfill our commitments, to modernize our armed forces, all of them—land, air, and sea. We also have a new military development program out of our fiscal budget.

But as far as the relations between neighbors, there might be some different understanding, but I would not like to make any judgment about it. Joint training, joint exercises should be held. Through the participation of all neighboring countries and a continuous dialogue, many problems can be solved, because the main philosophy behind the NATO organization is the democratic way of life and respect for the U.N. Charter. All the other issues among neighbors are very minor. They should be solved by bilateral dialogue.

EIR: We wanted to ask you about the zero option.

Yavuztürk: The zero option is becoming a different option these days, because the Russians are insisting on the withdrawal of the German Pershing IAs, which means that the discussions have to start from the beginning again. The zero option on all nuclear weapons was supported by the Turkish government at the NATO meeting, but there are many problems, and the Russians are creating difficulties. . . . That means that it will have to start from zero again. It is becoming a new zero option.

EIR: What is the Turkish view of SDI?

Yavuztürk: The first invitation was made by the U.S. in the spring of 1985 at the Luxembourg meeting of the Nuclear Planning Group. Since that time, there has been some technological development of the SDI. Countries like Turkey are just following on the technological level. We also have sent some experts . . . to get some knowledge of what is going

on. In Turkey, there are no companies which can participate in this kind of project. We are following SDI on a theoretical basis.

EIR: There is much talk about decoupling Europe from the United States, by people like Kissinger and others, who are saying that it is time for an American disengagement from Europe. How do you see that?

Yavuztürk: This is a point of view from the American public, also from the Congress and the Senate; there are also some Europeans who have these ideas. . . . Without the United States, the defense of Europe is impossible. But you also have to take into account the French position, which is very important, also the British. . . . It is impossible to decouple Europe from the United States. We have to live together. Instead of speaking about decoupling, we have to speak about strong coupling, or rather a double-coupling.

EIR: You were in France recently?

Yavuztürk: Some two months ago, I visited officially the new government. They have a very important point of view on matters of defense; they are acting like we are, like other Europeans. I have a very good colleague over there. The French defense minister [André Giraud] is a very good friend of ours, and we also want to have French companies participate in our modernization program.

EIR: What is the scope of the modernization of the Turkish army?

Yavuztürk: We have a modernization program for our land, air, and naval forces. For the Air Force, we have the F-16s, and joint programs for the manufacture of the F-16 in Turkey, a modernization of our communication system, as well as of our low-air defense. For the land forces, that involves the modernization of our tanks and APCs, as well as communications. For our Navy, we have plans for the joint production with West Germany of frigates as well as of submarines.

The Defense and Economic Cooperation Agreement [with the U.S.] is providing some \$500 million annually for joint ventures and joint production. To bring the Turkish armed forces to the present level of the other NATO forces, the modernization program will cost \$30 billion for a 10-year period.

EIR: What would you like to see the Americans do to make the alliance stronger?

Yavuztürk: . . . I received Undersecretary Michael Armacost, we had a good discussion. I told him of our gratitude to the American taxpayers, who are spending a lot of money in keeping NATO together, through the aid program. The American administration also faces budgetary problems, but I think that the administration and the Europeans have to convince the U.S. Congress and Senate of the necessity of the aid program.