

U.S. seeks to redraw map of the Eastern Mediterranean

by Joseph Brewda

In mid-July, George Bush traveled to Greece and Turkey, in the first visit by a U.S. President to either state since 1959. Upon his arrival in Athens on July 18, Bush told the press that he was committed to solving the problem of Cyprus, the island of mixed Greek and Turkish populations which remains a continuing trigger-point for war between the two NATO states. "In this new world I have discussed," he said, "none of us should accept the *status quo* in Cyprus." He pledged to "settle the Cyprus problem, and do so this year."

Meanwhile, Secretary of State James Baker was conducting shuttle diplomacy among Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Israel. On July 18, as Bush was arriving in Athens, Baker announced to a press conference in Damascus that Syrian President Hafez al-Assad had formally agreed to a U.S. proposal for direct talks between Israel and its Arab neighbors. "I had a very good meeting with President Assad," Baker said, adding that the Syrian agreement to attend regional talks with Israel will "promote the cause of peace." Baker then left for Egypt and Saudi Arabia, where he secured commitments by President Hosni Mubarak and King Fahd to suspend participation in the 43-year-old Arab boycott on trade with Israel, in exchange for an Israeli suspension of settlements in the Occupied Territories. The Israelis have refused any such deal.

Commenting on all these developments in Ankara, Turkey on July 20, Bush told the press that the "time for peace is at hand." Such talk certainly seems ironic, since just a week earlier, the U.S. government, together with the four other permanent members of the U.N. Security Council, threatened Iraq that if it did not "come clean" on its alleged nuclear bomb program by July 25, there would be "dire consequences."

An Ottoman revival

Upon his arrival in Ankara, Bush announced a broad range of agreements with Turkey which confirm that the Anglo-Americans intend to redraw the map of the Mideast and the Balkans, with an aggrandized Turkey as their junior partner. Such efforts carry the seeds of future wars. The details of Bush's offers, even in their public version, explain what had previously been unclear: why Turkish President Turgut Özal would have agreed to participate in the war against Iraq, even though its relations with Iraq had been better than its relations with its other neighbors.

While in Ankara, Bush announced a "new strategic relationship" with Turkey. This new relationship appears to center around the conception that Turkey has legitimate interests in the Balkans and on the Arabian peninsula, a claim that modern Turkey had abandoned with the overthrow of the Ottoman Empire and the creation of modern Turkey under the nationalist, anti-imperialist leadership of Mustapha Kemal Atatürk in 1922. Now Özal seems to think that U.S. guarantees will allow Turkey to return to Ottoman pretensions.

Militarization of the region

There are several recent developments that indicate the nature of this emerging relationship.

- While Bush called vaguely for solving the "Cyprus problem" while he was in Athens, his solution, as proclaimed later in Ankara, was hardly even-handed; it was a complete endorsement of the Turkish position. By agreeing to the Özal plan for four-party negotiations among Turkey, Greece, and the two Turkish and Greek Cypriot communities—but omitting the Greek-backed government of Cyprus—Bush gave official sanction to the Turkish occupation of northern Cy-

prus, and also the policy that motivated that occupation: the Turkish claim to the right to militarily intervene beyond Turkish borders to protect Turkish minorities.

The announcement alarmed Athens, and by July 22, Greek Prime Minister Constantine Mitsotakis was in Moscow, seeking to know the Soviet position. The trip had already been planned, but Bush's statements gave it an entirely different character.

- On July 15, NATO headquarters in Belgium announced that Greece, but especially Turkey, will be militarized as never before. NATO reported that most of the U.S. M-60 and German Leopard 1 tanks, being demobilized under the Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) agreement, will be transferred to Greece (700 tanks) and Turkey (1,050 tanks). In a bilateral agreement announced by Bush and Özal, Turkey will also acquire 160 F-16 fighter bombers, funded by the United States, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait.

These developments are proceeding in the context of the superpower condominium which has emerged in the aftermath of the Gulf war. Former Reagan Secretary of the Navy John Lehman and various unidentified Bush administration officials told the U.S. media that Moscow's announcement that it would be sending a Kiev class destroyer through the Dardanelles straits over the coming months was "acceptable," even though it represents an explicit violation of the 1936 Montreaux Convention which bars warships of such a class from the straits. "Technically, yes, it is a violation," Lehman told the *Washington Times* on July 22, "but in reality the Montreaux Convention is kind of irrelevant at the present time." The main military task of NATO in the region had been defined historically as protecting the southern flank of the alliance from the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact, including, most emphatically, the control of the straits.

Since Moscow is no longer seen as the Anglo-American enemy, why the new U.S.-sponsored militarization?

- On the eve of Bush's trip to Turkey, the Bush administration announced that it had finally decided to construct a 5,000-man, Anglo-American-French infantry base in Silopi, Turkey, on the border with Iraq, to "protect the Iraqi Kurds." The Turkish acceptance of that plan allows for the first presence of foreign ground troops on Turkish soil since Atatürk expelled them in the 1920s.

The base, in effect a NATO base, will also target the Arabian peninsula. The weapons that will soon be delivered to Turkey and Greece are for that purpose.

The creation of the base is linked with other Anglo-American plans to transform NATO into a force used against North Africa and the Mideast. On July 14, U.S. Ambassador to Italy Peter Secchia told an Italian daily that the center of NATO has now shifted from Berlin to Rome, since "the Arab world begins on the other side of Sicily." There are also reports that NATO is establishing a new intelligence center in Spain to coordinate operations against North Africa, in close working partnership with Italy and Greece.

At the same time, Bush's deal with Turkey also entails Anglo-American-French backing of an Ottoman-style sphere of influence in the Balkans. One of the Yugoslav states, Bosnia-Herzegovina, is half-Muslim; another, Macedonia, has a significant Muslim minority. The heads of both states, Alija Izetbegovic and Vasil Tupurkovski, respectively, were in Ankara in the two weeks prior to Bush's trip. It was while Bush was in Turkey that Macedonia opened another dangerous potential embedded in the Yugoslav civil war, by giving Belgrade an ultimatum to withdraw all troops from Macedonia or be expelled by force.

Dividing up the Mideast

Meanwhile, the Anglo-Americans are attempting to carve out a new relationship among the states in the region, under the guise of "solving" the Palestinian problem. Anglo-American policy since last year has been to put together an Egyptian-Syrian-Saudi axis committed to destroy the PLO, crush the Palestinians, and cut a deal with Israel. Over recent months, the U.S. has sponsored the de facto division of Lebanon between Syria and Israel; the disarming of the PLO in southern Lebanon, preparatory to a new massacre there; and the ongoing massacre of Palestinians in U.S.-occupied Kuwait.

Baker's trip to the region in July was meant to further that process, whether or not a peace conference ever actually occurs. In fact, Baker's demands for further Palestinian concessions in respect to the talks, seem to be largely provocations. The U.S. apparently hopes to force the PLO into a situation where it will be blamed for the failure of talks which the U.S. does not really want anyway.

U.S. demands on the Palestinians include:

- No Palestinian resident of East Jerusalem will be allowed to attend the talks, only those from the "Occupied Territories" of the West Bank and Gaza. That is, the Israeli annexation of East Jerusalem is implicitly endorsed.

- No PLO representation at the talks; moreover Israel is given the right to decide whether or not proposed Palestinian members of the delegation are acceptable.

- Perhaps most importantly, the U.S. will not guarantee that the proposed Palestinian "autonomy" and "self-rule" will ever lead to a Palestinian state. In other words, the Palestinians may be allowed to supervise their own garbage collection and perhaps maintain a school system, but there is no guarantee that they will have such sovereign rights as maintaining a foreign ministry, an army, a police force, or even the right to grant citizenship or residence to the millions of Palestinian refugees living outside of their native land.

On July 23, Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir bluntly told Israeli television: "I don't believe in territorial compromise. I believe with my entire soul that we are forever connected to this entire homeland." In the most extreme Zionist jargon, "homeland," or Eretz Israel, means all the land from the Nile to the Euphrates.