

Turkey and the Land-Bridge

As part of its development drive, Turkey is also taking part in the Eurasian Land-Bridge, and is engaged in major domestic rail, road, and port projects, to integrate Turkey into the overall plan.

Speaking at a Dec. 26, 1998 press conference summarizing developments over the previous year, President Demirel reiterated Turkey's commitment to the Land-Bridge policy. "The main transportation projects which constitute the infrastructure of the Silk Road that is re-emerging on the scene of history, and once again connects Europe with Asia, are being carried out in Turkey," Demirel said. "Turkey is the center of the transportation network which connects three continents."

The Turkish Foreign Ministry 1999 report, *Turkey and the World, 2010-2020*, emphasizes the importance of the project. In a section titled "Silk Route for the 21st Century," the ministry lists the following projects as priorities:

- Building deep sea ports and receiving terminals in the Mediterranean and in the Black Sea;
- Construction of a rail tunnel under the Bosphorus;
- Building of a bridge over the Dardenelles;
- Completion of the Kars, Turkey to Tbilisi, Georgia rail line;
- Extension of the Trans-European Motorway in an eastern and southeastern direction.

To pave the way for this role, Prime Minister Ecevit has accelerated plans to upgrade Turkey's domestic rail and road system. Under his direction, the Ankara-Istanbul and Antalya-Alanya rail projects, which were proposed and planned 20 years ago, have been taken off the shelf and put on the front burner. Tenders for feasibility studies on the lines were released in January. In mid-February, Japanese Overseas Investment and Financing Organization representatives travelled to Ankara to discuss both rail lines, as well as the Bosphorus rail tunnel.

As part of the Eurasian Land-Bridge project, Turkey has also begun construction on a \$717 million Black Sea coastal road, linking Turkey, Georgia, Russia, Ukraine, Romania, and Bulgaria. It has also announced plans to increase its annual harbor capacity to 200 million tons within 15 years.

One of Turkey's main concerns in proposing such projects, is to ensure a supply of cheap and reliable energy. Ironically, although three-quarters of the world's proven oil and natural gas reserves are in its immediate vicinity, Turkey is not energy self-sufficient, with domestic energy production accounting for only 42% of its total consumption in 1995. The proposed Baku-Ceyhan pipeline, to export Caucasus and Central Asian oil via the Azerbaijan capital of Baku to the Turkish Mediterranean port of Ceyhan and onto international markets, would be one way to solve this problem. The pipeline, which would be 1,730 kilometers in length, would carry 45 metric tons of oil per year.

Turkey pushed toward new 'Afghanistan'

by Joseph Brewda

Turkish Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit told Russia's NTV on March 28 that "there is a danger of a world war" because of the U.S.-led NATO assaults on Yugoslavia, in which Turkey is taking part. "I wish [U.S. President Bill] Clinton and [Russian President Boris] Yeltsin would meet as soon as possible," he said, "and search for a common policy." Ecevit welcomed the March 25 Russian initiative for a negotiated settlement, saying that "if Russia can throw its weight behind an effort to persuade Serbia to take a reasonable course, it will do humanity a great service." That same day, Prime Minister Ecevit told Turkish TV, "If this spreads to Albania, Macedonia, or Bosnia-Herzegovina, it will lead to disaster."

That the NATO adventure might boomerang against Turkey was referenced by Russian Prime Minister Yevgeni Primakov, during a March 22 stopover in Ireland, shortly before his meetings in Washington were cancelled. Denouncing the airstrikes as an act which "could destabilize the world situation," Primakov warned: "Maybe some will feel like attacking Turkey because the Kurdish issue is not solved."

However, the fallout from the British-American-Commonwealth faction's geopolitical games in the Balkans is not the only threat Turkey faces. Another, is that some British and American policy circles, represented by British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook, want to bust up Iraq along ethnic and regional lines—a policy which is an immediate threat to every nation in the region except Israel.

Because of such concerns, Prime Minister Ecevit told the press after meeting U.S. Ambassador Mark Parris on Jan. 26, that he is "deeply concerned" that if Iraq continues to collapse, it may lead to a Kurdish state in northern Iraq, which would also threaten Turkey. Similarly, Turkish President Suleyman Demirel has condemned U.S. plans to help the Iraqi opposition overthrow Saddam Hussein, telling the press on Jan. 30 that such efforts have "disastrous implications," and that U.S. plans against Iraq today should be compared to the failed U.S. intervention in Vietnam.

The push for a Turkish invasion

Despite Turkish opposition to such geopolitical games in the Balkans and the Mideast, media outlets in Europe and the Arab world, as well as some in Turkey itself, continue to report that the United States and Britain are pressuring Turkey to occupy northern Iraq, as part of their plans to

bust up that country. As it is, Turkey has launched several limited military interventions into northern Iraq since the 1991 war, to wipe out the bases there of Kurdish Worker's Party (PKK).

According to one report on Feb. 2 in the Turkish daily *Sabah* by Sedat Sertoglu, the U.S. government "wants Turkey to be responsible for the federation that will be established in northern Iraq." But, he reports, "neither the General Staff nor the bureaucratic officials in Ankara have adopted a favorable approach to the proposal."

Sertoglu says that the "the bargaining on the matter between the two countries began, when the United States proposed: 'A Federation will be established in northern Iraq. Can Turkey agree to be its 'elder brother?'" Ankara studied the military and civilian aspects of the proposal in detail, and found it wanting. It judged that the task "would require at least 100,000 Turkish troops to be permanently deployed in the area," and that it "would create the possibility of clashes between the Turkish troops and those who would oppose the order Turkey would establish." Sertoglu added that Turkey terminated the discussions, and lectured the Americans that "security cannot be established only through the use of arms in northern Iraq, if the income per capita is not increased to \$2,000," from its current \$435.

An article in the March 12 Saudi Arabian newspaper *Al Watan Al Arabi*, entitled "United States Is Baffled in Iraq Between the Bay of Pigs and the Afghan Scenario," says that the United States has three major options: use the U.S. Air Force to destroy the Iraqi regime and force Saddam to capitulate; help the Iraqi opposition take and hold areas of Iraqi territory, and extend its control, until Iraq is liberated; or, launch a war of attrition by neighboring countries against Iraq, similar to the Afghan struggle in the 1980s, until the regime falls.

According to the paper, "The U.S. experts add that the key element to make such a guerrilla war succeed [as per the third option] is the acquiescence of a neighboring country to play the role that Pakistan played in Afghanistan." This is where Turkey comes in. But, the paper reports that U.S. experts acknowledge that this option might fail, because "Turkey fears that such a guerrilla war in northern Iraq would rekindle Kurdish national sentiments once again. In the long run, this effort would be counterproductive, and would not bode well for Turkish national interests."

Turkish government sources ridicule the idea that Turkey would ever be so stupid as to invade Iraq, as such accounts envision. "The breakup of Iraq is one of the greatest possible threats to Turkey . . . and for such reasons we have always insisted on Iraq's territorial integrity," one official emphasized. "It is inconceivable that you could find such a fool in the Turkish General Staff or political command, who would want to invade and occupy northern Iraq as such accounts claim. . . . It would be madness! One of the worst things which could happen — and everyone knows this."

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