

Turkish opposition leaders speak out against war in the Gulf

by Joseph Brewda

Little attention has been paid in the U.S. press to the growing opposition to the Anglo-American brinkmanship in the Persian Gulf, within other nations in the Mideast region, including those nations whose governments officially support that war policy. Turkey, a Muslim but non-Arab nation bordering Iraq, and a member of NATO, has been thrown into crisis as a result of its government's support of the U.S. policy.

EIR interviewed two Turkish leaders who differ with their government's Gulf policy—former Prime Minister Suleyman Demirel, the leader of the True Path party, and Erdal Inonu, the leader of the Social Democratic Populist party, Turkey's largest opposition party. They advocate patience and a continuing effort to find a diplomatic solution to the crisis.

Both Demirel and Inonu are involved in efforts to bring down the current government of Prime Minister Yildirim Akbulut, leader of the Motherland party. (Former Prime Minister Turgut Özal, now President of Turkey, is the leader of Turkey, many experts say, despite the Constitution's provisions.) Inonu's party holds 82 seats in the 450-member Parliament, while Demirel's party holds 60 seats. Although the ruling Motherland party dominates the Parliament with its 276 seats, the party only won 20% of the seats in nationwide municipal elections held in 1989. Some sources view the party as having become quite weak since the current Parliament was voted into office in 1987. This decline in popularity has dramatically worsened since the war crisis began, these sources say.

According to public opinion polls, most Turks oppose Turkey's participating in the war. Moreover, the government's participation in the embargo against Iraq has ravaged the Turkish economy, since Iraq had been one of Turkey's largest trading partners. Even government spokesmen estimate that the six-month-old embargo has already increased the rate of inflation from 45% to 54%. The embargo has also increased unemployment. On Jan. 3, the Turkish labor federation led a nationwide one-day general strike, the first in 10 years and the largest in its history, triggered in part by the economic effects of the embargo, but also expressing anti-war sentiment within the population.

There is also evidence that many military leaders are opposed to any Gulf adventure. In recent weeks, both the defense minister and military chief of staff resigned, apparently in protest against the war policy, as did the foreign

minister. Part of the reason for the opposition of such leaders, some observers say, is that the Anglo-Americans have been aiding Kurdish separatists in northern Iraq. These separatists have repeatedly been involved in assassinations of Turkish military and civilian personnel across the border in Turkey.

Interview: Suleyman Demirel

'War will not bring good to any country'

Suleyman Demirel is the leader of Turkey's True Path party and has held the post of prime minister of Turkey on three occasions, the latest during 1978-80. The interview was conducted by telephone by Joseph Brewda on Jan. 5.

EIR: Mr. Demirel, over the recent weeks, you have made numerous statements before the Turkish Parliament and to the Turkish press criticizing the policy of the Turkish government in respect to a possible Gulf war. Could you explain your views to an American audience?

Demirel: The invasion of Kuwait by Iraq is an open violation of international law. No one will approve it. But what we want is to find a solution, a peaceful solution, without war. And I think that all political efforts, all diplomatic efforts, should be directed in that direction. You can start war, all right; but what will be the result? No one knows. Many people will be killed and many wrong things will happen. Therefore, we do not want war.

We do not approve of Saddam. He is wrong. He should withdraw from Kuwait, and he should withdraw without conditions. Maybe he will do it—we don't know. But, the crisis was not inevitable, because the people did not think such a thing would happen. The whole world, including Turkey, the United States, the Soviet Union, France, the United Kingdom, did not expect such a thing to develop. But it developed. Now, while the crisis was not inevitable, war should also not

be inevitable. And that's what we are trying to do. Some patience is needed. That's what we are advocating. And I don't think war will bring any good to any country, including the U.S., including Turkey. Saddam will definitely be beaten all right. But how much life will it cost, and what will be the other costs? That's why we oppose the war.

EIR: The Turkish government recently requested that a 5,000-man NATO rapid deployment force be sent to one of its airbases.

Demirel: It wasn't a 5,000-man force; it was a force of 576 men and 42 planes. According to my mind, this is nonsense. There is no threat from Iraq to Turkey. There couldn't be a threat. Maybe they wanted to involve NATO in this Gulf situation. You know, everyone is criticizing this in Turkey right now. You could not eliminate an Iraqi threat, if there were a threat, simply by 42 planes—18 from Italy, 18 from Germany, and 6 from Belgium. For Turkey, this is a shame.

EIR: When U.S. Secretary of State James Baker was in Turkey last September, he requested, or demanded, that a second front be opened up against Iraq. The militarization of the border has now led some people to think that the Turkish government has given in to this pressure.

Demirel: I don't think such a thing will happen, because the Turkish government ignores such rumors. I don't think there will be a second front. The distance from the Turkish border to Kuwait is about 1,000 kilometers, about 700 miles. The struggle is in Kuwait, not around Turkey, or around the Turkish border. It would not help any. For the time being, this is a rumor.

EIR: Shortly after the crisis broke, various British and American think tanks suggested that the United States and Britain support Kurdish separatists in northern Iraq. Around that time, one of the Kurdish separatist leaders, Jalal Talbani, met with various U.S. government officials. Some say that various Western intelligence services have been trying to fan the flames of Kurdish separatism. What does this mean for Turkey, given the large number of Kurdish separatists within Turkey's borders?

Demirel: This policy will irritate Turkey. It will irritate Iran. It will irritate Syria. I don't think that such a policy will help any, and the U.S. would have trouble to keep the coalition going as a result. I don't think it is wise.

EIR: There have been suggestions in the British and American press that Iraq be split up after a war, and that the northern Mosul province revert back to Turkish control, as it had been under the Ottoman Empire. Is this a serious proposal?

Demirel: It's not serious. The United Nations Security Council decision is based on one member of the United Nations being taken over by another member. So while you are pushing the Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait, I don't think you

could split up Iraq and get a portion of it. Then here again, Iran will oppose it, Syria will oppose it, Saudi Arabia will oppose it, Egypt will oppose it. Even the Soviet Union will oppose it. It won't work.

EIR: It is said that a high percentage of the Turkish population is opposed to the current Gulf policy of the Turkish government. There is a great deal of unrest within the Turkish working population, which resulted in a one-day general strike on Jan. 3. It is reported that you and Mr. Inonu have suggested coming together to try to force new elections and bring down the government. What do you hope to see happen?

Demirel: I hope we will be able to have new elections in 1991, maybe sometime this fall. I don't think it will happen before the fall.

EIR: Over the recent weeks, Turkish Defense Minister Safa Giray and Chief of Staff Gen. Necip Torumtay resigned.

Demirel: They were not happy with the policy being carried out in the Gulf.

EIR: Even within professional military layers, is there opposition to the policy, as not being in the interest of Turkey?

Demirel: Yes.

Interview: Erdal Inonu

'Turkey should take no part in Gulf war'

Erdal Inonu is the leader of the Social Democratic Populist party, the main opposition party in the Turkish Parliament. The interview was conducted by telephone on Jan. 9.

EIR: What is your view of the Turkish government's decision to ally itself with the United States and Britain in a possible war with Iraq? It seems that Turkey's recent request of NATO headquarters to deploy troops and planes to Turkish airbases near Iraq, makes it much more likely that Turkey will be drawn into the war.

Inonu: In our view, Turkey should not take part in a possibly forthcoming war between Iraq and the U.S.A. and Great Britain. Such participation is not compatible with Turkish national interests. We have constantly warned the government to be careful about any move which may draw us into such a confrontation.