

Coming war against Iran: Increasing Anglo-American pressure on Turkey

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Covering the period of March-June 2008, this article will try to highlight the political pressure applied by the US and UK governments on Turkey in view of their war plans against Iran. It is complementary to an earlier article titled “Will Turkey be Complicit in Another War Against Another Neighbour?” [1]

“[The Middle East] is capable of a very bright future:... a place of innovation and discovery, driven by free men and women. In recent years, we’ve seen hopeful beginnings toward this vision. Turkey, a nation with a majority Muslim population, is a prosperous modern democracy. Afghanistan under the leadership of President Karzai is overcoming the Taliban and building a free society. Iraq under the leadership of Prime Minister Maliki is establishing a multi-ethnic democracy.” — US President George W. Bush (World Economic Forum, Sharm el Sheikh, 18 May 2008) [2]

Turkey was the last stop of US Vice President Dick Cheney’s tour in the Middle East in March. Coverage of the event by the Turkish press gave the impression that Mr Cheney did not make any demands from Turkey’s President, Prime Minister or Chief of General Staff, concerning the US foreign policy in the Middle East and/or Afghanistan. Given the increasingly evident Anglo-American hostility against Iran on all fronts, this wasn’t very plausible. In fact, all the evidence since then suggests otherwise.

Shortly after Mr Cheney’s visit, the US-based RAND Corporation published a report on the US-Turkish relations:

“Given its growing equities in the Middle East, as well as the current strains in U.S.-Turkish relations, Turkey will be even more reluctant to allow the United States to use its bases in the future, particularly the [U.S.] airbase at Incirlik, to undertake combat operations in the Middle East... Turkey is unlikely to support U.S. policies aimed at isolating Iran and Syria or overthrowing the regimes in either country.” [3]

Frequent visits by senior US officials continued after Mr Cheney. In April, US Ambassador to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Gregory Schulte commented on Iran’s Shahab-3 ballistic missile:

“Shahab-3 could strike most of Turkey and the Middle East, and the longer-range missiles would reach deeper into Europe.” [4]

The following month, in a conference held in Washington, Ambassador of Turkey to the US Nabi Sensoy echoed Mr Schulte:

“Iran has run ‘clandestine (nuclear) programs for more than two decades,’ and those programs are ‘a threat to Turkey as well as to the U.S.’ ” [5]

QUEEN ELIZABETH’S IMPERIAL VISIT

In a press conference with his Turkish counterpart Ali Babacan in April in London, UK Foreign Secretary David Miliband said:

“Bilateral relations are deep, excellent and sincerely felt... Turkey had a pivotal role to play on regional issues, such as the conflict in Iraq and concern over Iran’s nuclear programme.” [6]

The following month, Queen Elizabeth II and Mr Miliband held a state visit to Turkey. On May 13, she gave a speech at the state banquet in Ankara:

“For us, Turkey is as important now as it has ever been... Abroad, Turkey is uniquely positioned as a bridge between East and West at a crucial time for the European Union and the world in general... [Mr President Abdullah Gul], you are playing a key role in promoting peace, political stability and economic development in some of the world’s most unsettled areas.” [7]

Both statements were eerily reminiscent of Tony Blair’s speech three months before officially launching the ultimate invasion on Iraq:

“I think this is a very important and exciting moment for the European Union and for Turkey and I believe we have an historic opportunity to send the clearest possible signal that the European Union wants Turkey inside the European family as a full partner.” [8]

Yet again, according to the Turkish and international media, this was just a friendly visit by the Queen which had no agenda other than supporting Turkey’s accession to the European Union. Listening to a Quran recital with her head covered in a mosque located in Bursa (which is the first capital of the Ottoman Empire), moved even those who are otherwise deeply anti-religious.

Equally symbolic, but more revealing was the reception she held for Turkish President Abdullah Gul [9] on board of a Royal Navy aircraft carrier in Istanbul [10]. In fact, HMS Illustrious was on its way back from the ‘Operation Orion 08’, which was a multi-national naval exercise conducted in the Persian Gulf to rehearse a possible war on Iran. [11] [12]

Back in October 2007, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his British counterpart Mr Gordon Brown had signed the ‘Turkey-UK Strategic Partnership Agreement’. The following items on this document reveal the striking similarity between the UK and US foreign policy on Turkey:

- “Enhanced co-operation on the terrorist threat posed by PKK, ... Al-Qaida and other

associated extremist groups.” · “Support for the UN Security Council process on Iran, including for full implementation of any measures imposed.” · “Further co-operation between the UK and Turkish armed forces and mutual support in NATO fora.” · “Co-operation... to ensure that NATO can fully implement the deliverables agreed at the 2006 Riga Summit.” [13]

It is also important to remember what the UK Foreign Secretary David Miliband, who is widely considered as the successor to Mr Brown, said on the fifth anniversary of invasion of Iraq in March 2003:

“I think the war itself was a remarkable victory. It went better than most people expected.” [14]

The following statement a month earlier makes his stance on prospective Anglo-American wars crystal clear:

“I believe discussion about the Iraq war has clouded the debate about promoting democracy around the world. I understand the doubts about Iraq and Afghanistan, and the deep concerns at the mistakes made. But my plea is that we do not let divisions over those conflicts obscure our national interest, never mind our moral impulse, in supporting movements for democracy... In the 1990’s ... the left seemed conflicted between the desirability of the goal and its qualms about the use of military means. In fact, the goal of spreading democracy should be a great progressive project; the means need to combine soft and hard power.” [15]

US PRESSURE SHIFTING INTO HIGH GEAR

In early June, ‘The U.S.-Turkey Agreement for Cooperation Concerning Peaceful Uses’ came into force:

“The Agreement provides a comprehensive framework for peaceful nuclear cooperation between the United States and Turkey under agreed non-proliferation conditions and controls.” [16]

On June 5, The White House announced the nomination of the Deputy National Security Advisor James Franklin Jeffrey as US Ambassador to Turkey. In his earlier capacity as the principal deputy assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern Affairs, Mr Jeffrey had a prominent role on Iraq policy and was co-chairing the now defunct Iran-Syria Policy and Operations Group [17]:

“The infamous Iran-Syria Policy and Operations Group (ISOG) created in early 2006, integrated by officials from the White House, the [US] State Department, the CIA and the Treasury Department, had a mandate to destabilize Syria and Iran, and bring about ‘Regime Change’. ” [18]

The same day, during his visit to the US, which also included his participation to the Bilderberg Meeting (for the fifth time [19]), Turkish Foreign Minister Ali Babacan held a press conference with his US counterpart Condoleezza Rice:

“Question: Madame Secretary, what do you expect Turkey to do — increase pressure on Iran beyond the UN sanctions?”

Rice: All member states have an obligation to carry out the terms of those resolutions and to use whatever offices they have with the Iranians to insist that the Iranians carry out the obligations that the UN Security Council has imposed.

Babacan: Turkey is implementing the relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions. As long as the international community has one unified stance, Turkey [would also be] implementing those decisions.” [20]

Again on the same day, back in Turkey, the Chief of General Staff of the Turkish Armed Forces Yasar Buyukanit’s opening speech at an international symposium in Istanbul, titled “The Middle East: Its Uncertain Future and Security Problems”, was even more straightforward:

“Until mid-2003, Iran has built nuclear installations and conducted uranium enrichment work secretly from the International Atomic Agency (IAEA). It approved inspections by the IAEA, but didn’t implement this through a constitutional process. Iran needs to inspire trust that its nuclear program is for peaceful purposes entirely. Iran’s adoption of sensible policies, which will prevent new problems arising in the region, is very important in terms of restoring a peaceful and stable Middle East.” [21]

However, Mr Buyukanit was not forthcoming when asked a question about a recent press report on Turkish Armed Forces’ plans to extend the scope of “Irregular Warfare Units”, which function as a “counter-guerrilla” force. The report reveals “highly secret preparations on covert struggle methods to be used in an operation which will be conducted together with our armed forces in the event of a violation of our country’s territorial integrity by an enemy force”. [22] Mr Buyukanit replied:

“This is a very old concept from the Cold War Era which is no longer valid: If, within the context of NATO-Warsaw Pact, Turkey were to be invaded by the Soviets, then there would be resistance in occupied areas. This is over, we currently don’t have such structure as there is no need for it. In fact, who would invade Turkey?” [23]

Despite the evasive language, it is clear that Mr Buyukanit is referring to Article V of the NATO Charter, [24] which states that the members of the Alliance must consider coming to the aid of an ally under attack. According to the RAND Corporation report cited earlier:

“Turkey is the only NATO member that faces the threat of outside attack (Iran, Syria). It is thus very concerned that Article 5 (collective defense) remains a core Alliance mission and that emphasis on crisis management [does] not weaken the Alliance’s commitment to collective defense.” [3]

Whether Article V will be resorted as a justification for war is yet to be seen... Another RAND Corporation report released as early as 1992 reveals how old and consistent such propaganda is:

“The [1991] Gulf war and its aftermath have simply confirmed and re-inforced emerging perceptions about the regional ambitions and ex-panding arsenals across Turkey’s borders, not least the growing threat from weapons of mass destruction... The prospect of a revived Iraq posing a conventional and unconven-tional threat to Turkey is an obvious source of concern in light of Turkey’s prominent role in the coalition against Baghdad... Above all, Turkey faces longer-term security risks from Iran, with its competing aims in Azerbaijan and active interest in nuclear and bal-listic missile technology, and Syria... The United States, both bilaterally and through its role in NATO, will remain the best guarantor of Turkish security in relation to the most dangerous risks facing Turkey over the longer term...” [25]

On June 17, Turkish daily Hurriyet reported the following exchange:

“Recently [outgoing] U.S. Ambassador to Turkey Ross Wilson visited the Turkish Minister of Energy [Hilmi Guler] asking him to discontinue the energy projects with Iran. The Minister of Energy rejected the request on the basis of a lack of an alternative source. When Wilson suggested buying energy from Iraq, the Turkish minister expressed his pessimistic opinion about Iraq being an alternative, indicating that Iraq had no gas reserves. He said, ‘A bird in the hand is better than two birds on a tree.’ In response, Ambassador Wilson stated ‘in a short time, the bird may burn with the branch it is sitting on’ ” [26]

Two days later, in an interview with the Turkish daily Aksam, Israel’s Ambassador to Turkey Gabby Levy claimed that Iran’s weapons is a threat to the entire Middle East. [27]

On the other hand, in another recent interview with the same newspaper, US Congressman Mark Kirk presented a different strand of disinformation which aims to comfort an ever more anxious and sceptical public in Turkey. He argued that since the rejection of the March 2003 parliamentary motion (allowing US troops to use Turkish soil to invade Iraq), Turkey’s significance has decreased by 90%. When asked what the US would expect from Turkey in the event of an attack on Iran, he said:

“The US would expect Turkey not to interfere with anything. Just like Belgium.” [28]

Meanwhile, a US-sponsored political engineering process has entered its last phase, warning the entire political spectrum in Turkey to toe the line. It is relentlessly trying to ensure that a fully compliant government is in power before launching the next Anglo-American war on Iran and possibly on Syria.

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