

# Turkey in uproar over Gulf policy

by Joseph Brewda

A mid-December request by Turkish President Turgut Özal for the deployment of 5,000 men from the NATO Allied Mobile Force to Turkey's border region with Iraq, has accelerated the political crisis in Turkey. The Turkish population is overwhelmingly opposed to Turkey's participation in a Persian Gulf adventure.

Simultaneous with the request, approximately 100,000 Turkish soldiers were deployed to the border district with Iraq, which has been administratively transferred from civilian to military control.

The political response to the recently disclosed troop request and border militarization has been harsh. Former Prime Minister Suleyman Demirel, leader of the True Path party, in a debate in parliament on Dec. 26, accused Özal of "high treason" for trying to entangle the nation in war. Earlier, Demirel said that Özal's compliant policy toward Washington would transform Turkey into another "Israel"—that is, a country serving Anglo-American interests rather than its national interests and the interests of the region.

Social Democratic Populist Party parliamentary leader Erdal Inonu stated in the same debate that "the adventurist ambition of our President is leading us straight into a war which the Turkish people does not want. What Özal is doing is playing roulette with the lives of innocent human beings."

## New elections possible

The two opposition leaders have entered into discussions over collaborating on forcing new elections, to bring down the ruling Motherland Party over the foreign policy crisis.

The stance of these opposition politicians is backed up by most Turks. A poll published in the Turkish daily *Milliyet* in October showed only 35% of the population supports the government's overall Gulf policy, while 74% of the population is against the proposal to deploy Turkish troops into the Gulf. Since the poll, popular opposition to the government's policies has increased.

Turkey is also the only country in the world where a major labor strike is in process against the war. The ongoing strike of 47,000 coal miners of the Black Sea city of Zonguldak—the heart of Turkey's coal-mining district—began on Nov. 30. The union is demanding that Turkey withdraw from

the anti-Iraq war coalition, in addition to meeting the union's economic demands. The district is the political base of former Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit, the leader of Turkey's Social Democratic Party, who has condemned Bush's war policy as an example of the old imperial technique of "divide and conquer," which, he says, is opposed to Turkish national security.

A national general strike of Turkey's unions, the first in 10 years, took place on Jan. 3, even though the panicked government had declared the strike illegal.

Even chunks of Turkey's military are opposed to the military adventure. On Dec. 3, Chief of Staff Gen. Necip Torumtay abruptly resigned because, he declared, "I don't believe it possible to continue in my duty because of my principles." The resignation followed, by three days, the U.N. Security Council vote which set Jan. 15 as a date following which the Anglo-Americans would go to war with Iraq. Torumtay's resignation is widely seen as provoked by his opposition to the war policy, although the general is not talking about the specific reasons for his departure. His resignation was preceded by that of Minister of National Defense Safa Giray and Foreign Minister Ali Bozer the previous month, both of whom were expressly in opposition to the Gulf deployment policy.

Turkish and U.S. press report that one reason for military opposition to the war is that the Anglo-Americans are funding and arming Kurdish separatists in northern Iraq. Many of these terrorist organizations, which typically maintain their headquarters in France and the Netherlands, have now opened up offices in Saudi Arabia. It has not escaped the Turkish military's attention that these Kurdish separatists lay claim to large adjoining regions of Turkey, claims now supported by some Saudi press.

## Economy headed toward ruin

Tensions are high, in part because Özal's agreement to comply with the embargo against Iraq, one of its largest trading partners, has already had disastrous effects on the Turkish economy. The government officially estimates that it is losing \$8 billion in foreign earnings a year as a result of the blockade. The result is mass unemployment. In the transportation sector alone, for example, some 30,000 truck drivers and other transport workers have been laid off.

At the same time, Turkey is being gouged for the increased price it has to pay for petroleum. Before the embargo, Turkey purchased oil from Iraq at the preferential price of \$15 per barrel, and paid for this oil with Turkish export credits rather than cash. Now Turkey must purchase oil from other producers at the market prices more than twice as high, and must pay for the oil in cash.

Meanwhile, Turkey has received none of the aid it desperately needs in return for taking such grave military, political, and economic risks, except that the United States has increased its import quota on Turkish textiles by 50%.