

Turkish elections may mean policy shift

by Joseph Brewda

Turkey's ruling Motherland party of President Turgut Özal went down in defeat in national parliamentary elections on Oct. 20. The vote became a plebiscite on Özal's compliance with U.S. and British demands to drag Turkey into first an embargo, and then a war, against neighboring Iraq. It seems that Turkish foreign policy over the coming period may change as a result.

Although the vote is not completely tallied as of Oct. 23, the Motherland party, which held 274 seats in the outgoing 450 member parliament, has been cut down to a projected 115 seats. The True Path party, led by former Prime Minister Suleyman Demirel, won 178 seats. This is insufficient for Demirel to form a majority government, but enables him to form a coalition government with the Social Democratic Populist Party led by Erdal Inonu, which won a projected 88 seats. Also possible, but less likely, he may form a coalition government with the Salvation party coalition of Islamic fundamentalists led by Necmettin Erbakan, which won 62 seats. The as-yet-uncounted votes in some outlying districts are not expected to shift more than one or two seats.

According to one scenario, Demirel might form a grand coalition with the Motherland party itself, contingent on current Prime Minister Mesut Yilmaz's support in ousting Özal from the presidency. The later post had been merely ceremonial until 1989, when then-Prime Minister Özal became President, installed a lackey as prime minister, and took the powers formerly associated with the latter post with him. It was as President that Özal dragged Turkey into the Gulf war, and, ousting Özal—which requires 66% of the parliament—was one of Demirel's main campaign promises.

A war most Turks opposed

Although the White House has downplayed the significance of the election and has claimed that it will have no affect on Turkish foreign policy or even the position of Özal, the London *Financial Times* has editorialized that Turkey's "western orientation"—by which they mean compliance with Anglo-American interests—is "threatened." The reasons for the paper's concern, and others in the Anglo-American alliance, are straightforward. With the exception of Özal and his tightly controlled Motherland party, every political party

in Turkey, and every top political leader, strongly condemned Turkey's involvement in the embargo and war.

"We do not want war," True Path party leader Demirel flatly told *EIR* on Jan. 5, 1990, adding, "The crisis was not inevitable." Similarly, Demirel's possible coalition partner, Social Democratic leader Inonu, told *EIR* on Jan. 9 that "Turkey should not take part in a possibly forthcoming war between Iraq and the U.S.A.," because "such participation is not compatible with Turkish interests."

The hostility to the then-impending war was also shared by the leadership, or at least a major faction, of the Turkish military, which is not to be taken lightly in a country with such a history of coups. The generals argued that the war would involve Turkey in conflict against the least hostile among its neighbors. Moreover, they projected, as events have since borne out, that the war would enflame the impoverished Kurdish regions of Turkey, its worst internal security problem. Both the Defense minister and the Chief of Staff resigned their posts in protest.

As for the Turkish public, some 80% of the population opposed the Turkish involvement in the war, according to media polls, and, in the beginning of January 1991, the Turkish labor federation held a general strike, the first in 10 years and the largest in Turkish history, in part in opposition to the then-impending war. Özal's acceptance of the U.S.-imposed embargo has alone cost Turkey an estimated \$7 billion, as Iraq had been one of Turkey's most important trade partners. Inflation is now running at 70% per year—up from 45% before the embargo—while unemployment has zoomed.

The man who would be Sultan

Given such near-universal opposition, and assuming that Özal was not merely suicidal, it might be reasonably asked why Özal complied with U.S. demands.

According to one account, George Bush made a series of promises to Özal and a section of the Turkish elite, which would reestablish Turkey as a dominant imperial power not only over Arab lands—which it ruled until the end of World War II—but also the Balkans. It still appears that the United States might opt to sever Iraq into three parts, with the oil-rich north reverting to Turkish control. Since the war, Bush has traveled to Turkey—the first U.S. President to do so since Eisenhower—where he supported the Turkish position on the Turkish-Greek contested island of Cyprus, while promising the Turks 160 fighter jets and over a thousand tanks. Turkey is being militarized like never before. Meanwhile, the word is that the United States is supporting Turkish ambitions over the oil-rich Turkic republics in the former Soviet Union, notably Kazakhstan.

However, these utopian plans, reflecting Anglo-Americans dreams on how they will redraw the map of the region, will not work. In the meantime, the eight-year Özal dynasty in Turkish politics is probably over, even if Demirel's current efforts to oust him fail.