

US self interest and Turkey's real intentions in Iraq

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After discussions the Turkish Parliament finally decided to vote in favour of sending Turkish troops to Iraq. But why was it so important for the U.S. to get support from Turkey to establish security in Iraq? What does this mean for Turkey and what are its real intentions? And what does that mean for the Kurds of Iraq?

The United States knows that Turkish involvement in Iraq is not popular among the Iraqis, especially the Kurds. They probably know that the past historical relationship between Turks on one side and Arabs and Kurds on the other side does not augur well for Turkish involvement in Iraq's affairs. They must also be only too aware that Turkey has its own agenda in Iraq. As we know, the relationship between U.S. and Turkey took a knock when Turkey refused to help the Americans in the lead up to the Iraq war. However, circumstances have changed and self interest of both parties has also raised the opportunity to mend fences. The Americans have serious problems maintaining security and order in Iraq. There are daily attacks on the coalition troops, especially the Americans. The Americans feel in some way that Turkey owes a lot to the U.S., and that therefore they should help the Americans now. The Americans will perhaps not abandon Turkey's role in the region entirely, because Turkey has been a good ally in the past. It now seems that the U.S. will give Turkey a chance to play a stronger role in policing the region having failed to achieve stability on her own steam.

For Turkey this development came as a golden opportunity to repair the damaged relationship with the Americans and to make space for their financial and political interests in Iraq. If Turkey became involved in Iraq, the door of trade contracts would be opened. Moreover, and most importantly, Turkey would have a much more effective impact on the political landscape in Iraq. Turkey would be presented with the opportunity to curtail the Kurds political gains that accrued since 1991 in the de facto autonomous state of Kurdistan, and which were bolstered by support for the American led invasion of Iraq.

Turkey's irrational fear of Kurdish political power in Iraq is such that she would do almost anything to prevent it from increasing. Kurdish rights (anywhere) are equated to a threat to Turkey's integrity as a state and to her self-interest. The Turks fear that an autonomous Kurdistan in Iraq with full cultural, economic and political rights would fuel demands from Turkey's restive Kurdish community for similar rights. Instead of conceding such rights to its own Kurdish citizens it seems that the Turks would rather seek to destroy the success story that is Iraqi Kurdistan. We should not forget that Turkey occupies a large part of greater Kurdistan and has no intention of leaving it. That is why Turkey would do anything to prevent any steps, which could threaten Turkish territory. Nor should we forget that Turkish foreign policy supports Turkmen agitators in Iraqi Kurdistan to stir up ethnic strife in order to provide an excuse for Turkey to get involved militarily. Only last month American soldiers captured a dozen Turkish soldiers who had reportedly been sent to provide Turkmen groups with the logistics and munitions to assassinate Kirkuk's Kurdish mayor. If Turkey does send troops to Iraq they will no doubt side with the Turkmen with predictably violent ramifications. This will clearly destabilise the region further. The presence of Turkish troops would also mean that Arabs in Kurdistan would have

more bargaining power in disputes over land that had been ethnically cleansed of Kurds. In short, Turkish involvement in Iraq would give her several opportunities to harm the Kurds and to undermine the Kurdish dream of self-determination.

The deployment of the Turkish troops in Iraq is a huge disappointment for the Kurds. The Kurds know that a Turkish military presence would threaten the realisation of their freedom and undermine their security.

The Kurds would regard the American step as a betrayal, because they have been a good ally to the Americans and had legitimate expectations that the Americans would help the Kurds to consolidate their hard won political clout. The very step of a request for Turkish troops means that the Americans are putting their short term self-interests before a longer term solution to the Kurdish question in Iraq. The Kurdish question may thus be seen as just one problem among many other problems in Iraq. In other words, the Kurdish issue does not have any special status with them. The Americans have on various occasions marginalized Kurdish issues. But the latest development is one step too far.

The American step confirms that they are there, because of their own national interests, not because of security in the region or to install a democratic system. On the contrary, the Americans intend to justify the realisation of their interests under the pretext of the democratisation of Iraq.

The Americans are looking for a quick solution, which would reach some kind of stability and order in the region. That would give them the possibility to claim their success in their mission to the world and to the American population. But that is not the real solution to the real questions. Such a 'solution' would only postpone the problems and fail to address the real issues affecting the region. A federal Iraq with a Kurdish autonomous state would be the minimum expectation of the Kurds. However, the Americans and other powerful nations should have the courage to face the reality of the Kurdish issue and then take serious steps to solve the problem entirely, which means ultimately creating an independent Kurdish state. Without a real solution of the Kurdish issue, there will not be any stability in the region.