

Why is Turkey supporting the war against Serbia?

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Turkey has made its military air facilities available to NATO for the alliance's attacks against Yugoslavia, as well as supplying F-16 fighter jets as escorts for the squads of bombers. In recent days Turkish planes have directly taken part in the bombing, and Turkey has provided several hundred men for NATO ground missions.

In contradistinction to the United States and Europe, the media and politicians in Turkey have not limited their arguments for participation in the war to the plight of the Albanian population in Kosovo. From time to time they have quite bluntly asserted the real aims behind the war: the control of the Balkans as a strategically and economically important region.

On May 17 a commentary by a former Turkish ambassador, Sukru Elekdag, appeared in the newspaper *Milliyet*, dealing at length with Turkish, NATO and Western interests in the region:

“Turkey is deeply concerned with the security and stability of the Balkans because of her geo-strategic interests, and has to follow an active policy towards this region. The Balkan peninsula is an advanced defence zone for Thrace, the Turkish Straits and Istanbul. Therefore, Ankara's sensitivity toward the conflicts and geopolitical changes in the region has an understandable source.... Turkey, in a key location and a bridge between three continents, has a unique geo-political identity within the region, controlling all the communication lines via air, land or sea. With its location Turkey is a focus of power not only for the Balkans, but also for the Caucasus-Central Asia corridor and the Middle East. If the future EU strategy is to open itself up to Eurasia, Turkey's integration with the defence system of the [European] Union is a must” (quoted from Anadolu Agency).

Control over the region from the Adriatic to

Asia—known historically as the “Silk Road”—was already dealt with in the *Milliyet* of April 26 . A report on the NATO summit read as follows: “President Suleyman Demirel, who delivered a speech during the ‘Silk Road’ countries meeting organised with the participation of a number of Central Asian and Caucasian countries as part of the NATO summit in the US, remarked that the Silk Road is still of remarkable geo-political significance, and that Turkey functions as a bridge between the East and the West. Demirel also noted that there are ongoing efforts to facilitate the Baku-Ceyhan Pipeline and Transcaucasian energy corridor, which will supplement peace and stability in the region” (Anadolu Agency).

In the West, Turkey's arch-rival Greece and its ally Serbia stand in the way. Turkey is therefore deliberately using the war against Yugoslavia to secure its domination in the Balkans in opposition to Greece. On May 21 a commentary along these lines appeared in *Hürriyet*, shortly after it was made known that Turkish bombers would not just act as escorts, but actively take part in the bombing:

“What can be the reasons or expectations which have changed our policy? President Demirel has answered this question with the statement that we cannot act like Greece. This statement shows that the main consideration is to place Turkey above Greece, which is standing close to Serbia. The president went on to say that loyalty was one of the main factors in deciding Turkish policy. He added that Turkey was a first-class member of NATO, and to drop to the position of a second- or third-class member would go against Turkey's interests. In NATO, Turkey is among the top five states, and she should not lose this position. This means that the decision is being taken to consolidate Turkey's position in the West and strengthen its pro-

Western policy” (Anadolu Agency).

The enormous economic and political significance of the “Silk Road” and the status of the pipeline from Baku in Aserbaidjan on the Caspian Sea to the Turkish Mediterranean port of Ceyhan is explained in a report from the May 17 *Turkish Daily News* on the Trade Exhibition “Petroleum ‘99”, which was also featured in other Turkish newspapers:

“Energy will remain one of the most critical factors in national economies in the twenty-first century, said [Turkish] Energy and Natural Resources Minister Ziya Aktas. Aktas made a speech at the Petroleum '99 fair on ‘Caspian Petroleum and Turkey's Strategy over the Transportation of Petroleum'. He said that providing for the transportation, distribution and marketing of energy is as important as owning energy sources for strengthening one's position in international bargaining talks. Turkey is a natural bridge between the Middle East and Central Asia, where most of the world's energy sources are located, and Western countries, which are the major consumers of energy, giving Turkey a great advantage.... The energy minister added that, as stressed by both the president and the prime minister, the Baku-Ceyhan oil pipeline and Turkmenistan natural gas pipeline are priorities for Turkey.”

Here is made clear not just Turkish interests in the war against Yugoslavia, but also why the Turkish army receives military hardware and know-how from NATO for the massacres and expulsions it carries out in Turkey's own “Kosovo”, i.e., in the southeast province of Turkey which is predominantly occupied by Kurds. What does it matter if human lives are lost when what is up for grabs is control of the “Silk Road” and billions of dollars to be earned from oil and gas?!



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