

Wolfowitz in Ankara:

US urges military to overrule Turkish government

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If any additional proof were needed to demonstrate that the aim of the US in the Middle East is the subjugation of the region rather than the introduction of “freedom” and “democracy,” then it was provided by the visit to Turkey two weeks ago by US Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz.

In an interview with the CNN channel Türk he lectured the Turkish government for bowing to public pressure (more than 90 percent of the population opposed the Iraq war) and refusing to allow the stationing of US troops on Turkish territory for the invasion of Iraq. Wolfowitz effectively demanded an apology, saying: “Lets have a Turkey that steps up and says we made a mistake. We should have known how bad things were in Iraq but we know now. Let’s figure out how we can be as helpful as possible to the Americans.”

Even more revealing was his criticism of the Turkish military, which he accused of holding back from forcing the elected government into line: “I think for whatever reason they did not play the strong leadership role on that issue that we would have expected.”

When politely reminded that the military (which has overthrown four elected governments in the last 45 years in Turkey) is usually criticized for interfering too much into politics, Wolfowitz responded: “I think it’s perfectly appropriate, especially in your system, for the military to say it was in Turkey’s interest to support the United States in that effort. (...) My impression is they didn’t say it with the kind of strength that would have made a difference.”

So far no representative of the U. S. government has made such a blunt public demand that Turkish generals force the will of the United States upon an elected

civilian government. Rather than express outrage over what could be interpreted as encouragement for a military coup, the Turkish media and politicians have reacted with a mixture of self-pity and gestures of obedience to Washington. At every opportunity, they stress that Turkey did not oppose the war and claim that the country was the most important US ally after Britain.

Initially, the Turkish parliament barred the use of any use of the country’s territory for US forces preparing to attack Iraq. Bowing to massive American pressure, however, it allowed the use of Turkish airspace for bombers and transport planes. In addition, the government allowed the use of Turkey territory for logistical support.

Nevertheless, Turkey’s standing with the Bush administration has been severely downgraded. Ankara was especially hard hit by the US refusal to allow the Turkish military occupation of northern Iraq. Whether Turkish firms get some crumbs in the form of being able to participate in the reconstruction of Iraq is also still very much in doubt.

In particular the Turkish military fears that, despite all US assurances, a basically autonomous Kurdish state could be set up in Northern Iraq—even if formally part of an Iraqi federation. Kirkuk, which would likely be the capital of such a state, is under the control of Kurdish nationalists who are systematically driving out Turkmen and Arab minorities.

While the Turkish military repeatedly threatened to send troops into Northern Iraq in the event of such a development, up to now it has bowed to American demands and refrained from doing so. This is the policy of at least the chief of the general staff, Hilmi Özök,

reflecting the fact that the Turkish military is heavily dependent on the supply of military equipment and financial and political support from the US.

Following the recent replacement of the US proconsul in Iraq, Jay Garner, by antiterrorism expert Paul Bremer, the far-right newspaper *Tercüman* even speculated that Turkey will be needed again when the US pushes ahead with its subordination of the region. The paper hopes that in the process the remains of the Kurdish nationalist PKK (Kurdish Workers Party) will also be wiped out.

“Bush’s choice of a retired antiterrorism expert rather than an ex-military man gives us clues to the answer to this question: The US’s top priority in Iraq is not the country’s reconstruction but rather gaining an extensive foothold in the region, under the guise of the war against terrorism, so as to be able to besiege all the countries of the Middle East. According to Bremer, to prevent new terrorist attacks against the US, countries such as Libya and Iran must be strictly controlled and kept under constant pressure. ...The appointment of Bremer to a position over Garner is a positive development for Turkey, since Bremer supports keeping a stranglehold on the terrorist group PKK/KADEK.” (*Tercüman*, May 8th)

Arising out of its decades-long role of suppressing the Turkish left and workers’ movements and crushing Kurdish uprisings, a fascistic faction has been fostered in the Turkish army, although it remains unclear whether this faction is in opposition to the military high command or protected by it. At the end of April, American newspapers wrote that US soldiers had intercepted a convoy with Turkish special forces in northern Iraq, which was set to arm the pro-Turkish “Iraqi Turkmen Front.”

Especially noteworthy about this episode was the speed with which it disappeared from the media and the low-key reaction of the U.S. government. Faced with similar accusations, neighboring Iran has been targeted with massive threats and intimidation by Washington. But while the accusations against Iran have not been backed up by any evidence, with only vague assertions of “intelligence” regarding “infiltration of Iranian agents,” Turkey has been, according to the U.S., caught in the act of a far more serious case of meddling in Iraqi affairs.

In his interview, Wolfowitz said merely: “What

happened shouldn’t have happened.” This would be “a good example I think, that whatever Turkey does in the north, and we understand Turkey has important interest in the north, it’s got to be coordinated now through the coalition, through General Franks.”

He warned Turkey against sending its own troops into Iraq. Turkish soldiers stationed there for years are now being called upon to leave as well. In exchange, the US has indicated it will move against the PKK. “The PKK is a terrorist organization,” he said. “I don’t think we can tolerate a terrorist organization in northern Iraq.”

Up to now, however, the US has not made clear how and when it intends to suppress the PKK/KADEK. Last week Turkish officials met with representatives of Kurdish and Turkmen groups as well as with American intelligence and military officials in Iraq.

For its part, the PKK/KADEK has taken pains to express its obedience to the US. At the end of April, it published a statement that favorably compared president George Bush to his predecessor Clinton. The statement said that Bill Clinton had preserved the “status quo” by supporting the Turkish state against the Kurds and “allow[ing] the Saddam regime to survive.” It was now the task of the US to bring democracy to the whole Middle East: “The intervention will be successful only if it paves the way for improving common human values. Any regime similar to the old one will only cause chaos. Therefore the only way for US is to create the possibility for setting up democratic regimes and then supporting them.” (*Kurdish Observer*, April 25 2003)



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