

# Middle East Policy

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## THE GULF

SYMPOSIUM: Oman

Five Years after Desert Storm

From Alliance to Collective Security: Rethinking the GCC

Flashpoints in the Gulf: Abu Musa and the Tunb Islands  
Is the Dual Containment Strategy Viable?

## ISRAEL/PALESTINE

Murdering Rabin and the Jewish Covenant  
The PLO versus Hamas

ROBERT H. PELLETREAU, JR./JOHN PAGE, JR./  
MICHAEL COLLINS DUNN/JOSEPH A. KECHICHIAN/  
GEORGIE ANNE GEYER/CHRISTINE EICKELMAN

MICHAEL COLLINS DUNN

ROLIN G. MAINUDDIN/

JOSEPH R. AICHER, JR./JEFFREY M. ELLIOT

DAN CALDWELL

ALON BEN-MEIR

MARC H. ELLIS

MAHMOOD MONSHIPOURI

The Kurdish Question and Chechnya: Turkey versus Russia

ROBERT OLSON

Egyptian Elections

MONA MAKRAM-EBEID

Middle Eastern Economies' External Environment

MOHAMED A. EL-ERIAN

The Rise and Fall of Secularism in the Arab World

PAUL SALEM

## BOOK REVIEWS

DOCUMENTATION: Baker Institute Study by Edward Djerejian: Summary of Oslo II



10/01/2017

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## THE KURDISH QUESTION AND CHECHNYA: TURKISH AND RUSSIAN FOREIGN POLICIES SINCE THE GULF WAR

Robert Olson



*Dr. Olson is a member of the Department of History at the University of Kentucky in Lexington.*

**T**his article argues that the Kurdish problem in Turkey and Russia's war against Chechnya are linked more closely than is generally realized and acknowledged. I do not intend to discuss the entire gamut of Turkish-Russian relations which are multilayered and complex, but rather to investigate to what extent their relations are influenced by the Kurdish nationalist movement in Turkey and by that movement's relationship to the Kurdish nationalist movements in Iraq, Iran and Syria. I suggest also that Turkey's preoccupation with its war against the PKK (*Partia-Kakaren Kurdistan*), the Kurdish nationalist guerrilla organization in Turkey, has greatly weakened Turkey's foreign-policy leverage with Russia, especially regarding its war against Chechnya. Russia in turn has used the "Kurdish" card to reduce effectively Turkey's ability to influence its policy toward Chechnya. This became especially clear in 1995.

Turkish-Russian relations grew considerably in the late 1980s, and by the

time of the Gulf War the countries were engaged in growing economic and trading relations. Between 1980 and 1990 Turkey's economy averaged about 5.4 percent growth with most of that increase coming in the industrial sector, especially after the economic liberalization policies instituted by Turgut Özal when he became prime minister in 1983. But after 1986 Turkey's economy slowed, the foreign trade deficit grew dramatically, and political parties and figures began to criticize Özal's policies. It was the widening foreign-trade gap and the possibility that it would continue into the 1990s that seemed to be the principal reasons for Turkey to "look north."<sup>1</sup>

Looking north meant not only to Russia, but to the other republics of the Soviet Union, especially Ukraine, as well

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<sup>1</sup>Türkaya Ataöv, "Turkey's Expanding Relations with the CIS and Eastern Europe," in *Turkish Foreign Policy: New Prospects*, ed. Clement H. Dodd (Cambridgeshire: The Eothen Press, 1992), pp. 88-117.

as the Central Asian republics. After becoming prime minister in 1983, Turgut Özal visited several capitals of the soon-to-be Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and signed various economic, political and cultural agreements. By the time Özal visited Moscow in March, where he signed The Treaty of Friendship and Good-Neighborliness, Russian-Turkish trade had increased from \$411 million in 1985 to \$2 billion.<sup>2</sup> The two countries planned to raise their trade volume to \$9-10 billion by the year 2000. One of the most important areas of trade was the purchase of natural gas from Russia by Turkey. Another area of cooperation was construction. Turkish construction companies' presence in Russia and in other Soviet republics grew dramatically in the 1980s and 1990s. Turkish construction firms reconstructed the Moscow White House after it was burned in 1993, built homes for Russian soldiers returning from East Germany, constructed a five-star hotel in Sochi on the Crimean coast and also built a number of hospitals and factories. Turkish construction firms are also active in the Central Asian republics of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan.

As of summer 1995, Russian and Turkish economic cooperation continued to grow. On July 28, 1995, the two countries signed in Moscow an agreement in which Turkey's purchase of natural gas was to rise to 10.5 billion cubic meters from the current 6 billion. The two countries agreed that the natural-gas agreement would continue for 20 years. Oleg Soskovets, first deputy prime minister, emphasized that Russia was very interested in having greater

participation by Turkish construction firms. Turkish State Minister Onur Kumbarcibasli promised that Turkey would also spend part of a \$350 million investment credit in Russia starting in 1995. In turn Turkey promised to begin to pay debts it still owed Russia for building an iron-steel plant in Isken-derun. Turkey promised to transfer \$10 million immediately to an open account in Moscow. The remainder of the debt was to be paid by Turkey's selling wheat and flour to Russia. Russia was also concerned that it be allowed to participate in constructing two bridges for the new ring road around Ankara, the hydroelectric plan in Tunceli and in the electrification of railroads in the Izmir region.<sup>3</sup>

The major factor in Russian-Turkish relations is Turkey's need for a sustained and secure energy supply. This need has increased since Ankara closed the two oil pipelines that came from Iraq, crossed southern Turkey and terminated at the Mediterranean port of Dörtyol near Iskanderun as a result of Turkey's cooperation with the American-led allied effort in the war against Iraq in 1991. This is, of course, only one of the "pipeline wars" that is raging currently in the region.<sup>4</sup> In order to meet its energy and national-security requirements, Turkey needs to have the planned oil pipeline from the Caspian oil fields near Baku terminate in Turkey. Turkey could also serve as a distribution point for moving the gas and/or oil to Europe.

<sup>3</sup>*Hürriyet*, July 29, 1995.

<sup>4</sup>For a good and recent account of the battles over oil and natural gas pipelines and their various distribution routes and their significance see Robert Baryliski, "Russia, the West and the Caspian Energy Hub," *The Middle East Journal*, vol. 49, no. 2, Spring 1995, pp. 217-232.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 92.

Whether the pipeline enters Turkey from Iran or Georgia makes little difference to the Turks. Turkey might well prefer a route that traverses Iran (in order to bypass Armenia) as this would enable Ankara to encourage Iran to control more forcefully the PKK camps and activities in northwestern Iran. This in turn would increase Turkey's ability to eliminate the PKK in Turkey, especially in the southeast. But U.S. opposition to the pipeline's passing through Iran means that the route through Georgia, or Georgia via Chechnya, is favored. But the latter could only be accomplished against Russia's desire to have the oil and gas pipeline network mesh with the Russian web already in place and which could be expanded with the construction of some minor spurs. The Russian plan is for the merging pipelines to terminate in Novorossiysk on the Black Sea and from there to be transported to other destinations. The U.S. position seems to favor the Russian scheme for the pipeline web, although Washington emphasizes to Ankara that it is in favor of the Caspian, Baku, Chechnya, Georgia, Turkey route. Stephen Blank asserts that Russia is attempting to control the pipelines emanating from the Caspian region—Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan—and wants to claim "rights to all CIS energy ventures, and thereby claim a virtually imperial right to energy across the whole of the CIS."<sup>5</sup>

Turkey is in a weak position to control the energy sources of the Caspian region or to leverage access to their distributive pipeline webs. The major rea-

son for this is Ankara's perception that the United States will not interfere in Russia's backyard, i.e., the Muslim republics of the former Soviet Union (FSU). In an interview with Ertugrul Özkök, the managing editor of *Hürriyet*, and an influential political commentator generally known to be close to the government, Tansu Çiller, the Turkish prime minister, stated that "the United States and Russia had an understanding (*mutabakat*) that the United States would not interfere (*karismayacak*) in the Central Asian republics." She added, "We [the Turks] will destroy this understanding."<sup>6</sup> Özkök stated that Vice-President Al Gore and Prime Minister Victor Chernomyrdin had reached such an understanding, but that Çiller hoped

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***The final route of the oil and gas pipelines will indicate how successful Turkey will be in changing the alleged understanding of the United States not to interfere in Russia's backyard.***

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to persuade the United States that it was not in its interest to abide by such an understanding. She made this statement in the context that to have a pipeline from the Caspian region terminate in Turkey was an opportunity "that only comes to this country once in a hundred years."<sup>7</sup> The final route of the oil and gas pipelines will indicate how successful Turkey will be in changing the alleged understanding of the United States not to interfere in Russia's backyard.

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 222; also see Stephen Blank, "Russians Back in the Caucasus," *Middle East Quarterly*, vol. II, no. 2, June 1994, p. 55.

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<sup>6</sup>*Hürriyet*, June 28, 1995.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

Russia, however, on its own has been fairly successful in restraining Turkey's influence in its own backyard. Part of the reason for Turkey's less influential role in Central Asia and in the Caucasus than was anticipated when the Central Asian republics and Azerbaijan declared their independence from Moscow in 1991 is the inability of Turkey to supply substantial investment funds, technological equipment and expertise to the Caucasian and Central Asian republics. In addition, the Central Asian republics want to establish political and economic relations with as many Western countries as possible as well as with adjacent countries such as Iran, a competitor of Turkey's for Central Asian favors. Iran is in close proximity to the Central Asian republics and shares an 800-mile border with Turkmenistan. While the 1991 expectations of Turkey as well as the Central Asian republics have not been met, relations, especially cultural exchanges, are good and improving.<sup>8</sup>

Lowell A. Bezemis has suggested other reasons for the non-fulfillment of the expectations of 1991.<sup>9</sup> First, the discontent and depth of hostility to the So-

viet order (in the Central Asian republics) appears to have been exaggerated; second, Central Asians seem to have even accepted the Soviet territorial delimitations of the 1920s; third, the Central Asian republics, with the exception of Tajikistan, have not experienced strong demands for change and democratization. In 1995, the states of Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan all have more authoritarian governments than they had in 1991. Fourth, Turkey's lack of knowledge of the Central Asian states and its dependence for knowledge on émigré groups, usually nationalists with right-wing ideologies, have contributed to Ankara's overestimating the strength and force of pan-Turkism and of Turkic solidarity in the Turkic republics of Central Asia. Tribalism and ethnic hatreds abound in the region. In short, in 1991 Turkey had no strategic understanding of the challenges it faced in its relations with the Central Asian republics nor of the problems challenging these states themselves. This in turn contributed to Turkey's misunderstanding of Turkic nationalism and Islam as forces that bound the Turkic states together and provided bases for close cooperation with Turkey. Central Asian intellectuals have been indoctrinated for decades with anti-Islamic and atheistic propaganda that will not dissipate overnight.

There are at least six major impediments to Turkish foreign-policy initiatives in Central Asia and the Caucasus since 1991: (1) the lack of sufficient investment funds and technological resources, expertise and equipment; (2) Turkey's inadequate information bases on the Central Asian states and a lack of a trained cadre of Central Asian specialists; (3) the social, religious and political structures currently existing in Central

<sup>8</sup>For a good survey of Turkey's relations with Azerbaijan and the Central Asian republics up to 1983 see Philip Robins, "Between Sentiment and Self-Interest: Turkey's Policy toward Azerbaijan and the Central Asian States," *The Middle East Journal*, vol. 47, no. 4, Autumn 1993, pp. 593-609.

<sup>9</sup>Lowell A. Bezemis, "Menace or Self-Fulfilling Prophecy? Reflections on the Islamic Threat and Forces Opposed to Theocratic Rule in Former Central Asia, AACAR [Association for the Advancement of Central Asian Research], vol. VIII, no. 1, Spring 1995, pp. 2-15. The arguments in the next few paragraphs are taken from Bezemis's article.

Asia that impede democratization and Turkic solidarity based on nationalism and/or religion; (4) Russia's intent to incorporate and tie the Central Asian states as closely as possible to Moscow; (5) Russia's desire and attempts to control the energy resources of Central Asia, the pipeline webs and distribution networks; and (6) the U.S. policy as perceived by Turkey, and which is probably accurate, that the United States has an understanding with Russia not to "mess around in its backyard." Such an understanding would imply that the United States favors Russian military control of the Central Asian states and of their energy resources and distributive networks. The U.S. understanding with Russia is probably flexible enough, at least in American eyes, to allow the Turkic Central Asian states to cooperate with Turkey and with Western oil and gas companies in sharing their energy sources. But the U.S. priority, as the Turks suspect, is on U.S.-Russian relations.

It is in the above context that the Kurdish question in 1994-95 began to play an important role in Turkish-Russian relations.<sup>10</sup> The Kurdish nationalist movement in Turkey and the government's efforts to crush it began to dominate Turkey's policy after 1991. By 1995 it was estimated that the war against the Kurds and its collateral expenses were costing up to \$7 billion a year. It is not my purpose here to argue the costs of the war, the number of troops deployed or the number of vil-

lages destroyed and the ethnic cleansing of Kurds that has taken place in south-eastern Turkey, as I have done so in detail elsewhere.<sup>11</sup>

By early 1994, the Kurdish question had begun to play a prominent role in Turkish-Russian relations, as it impinged directly on Russia's war against Chech-

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<sup>11</sup>Mesut Yilmaz, the leader of the oppositional Motherland party (MP), stated in an interview with several reporters of *Hürriyet* on August 16 that Turkey had 300,000 troops deployed in the war against the Kurds. This is the first time of which I am aware that a prominent politician has placed the figure so high. For more foreign policy background in addition to note 10, see my "The Kurdish Question Four Years On: The Policies of Turkey, Syria, Iran and Iraq," *Middle East Policy*, vol. III, no. 3, 1994, pp. 36-44; "The Kurdish Question and the Kurdish Problem: Some Geopolitic and Geostrategic Comparisons," *Peuples Méditerranéens* no. 68-69, July-December 1994, pp. 215-241; "The Kurdish Question and Geopolitic and Geostrategic Changes in the Middle East after the Gulf War," *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. XVII, no. 4, Summer 1994, pp. 49-67; "The Kurdish Question in the Aftermath of the Gulf War: Geopolitical and Geostrategic Changes in the Middle East," *Third World Quarterly* 13, no. 3, 1992, pp. 475-499; "The Creation of a Kurdish State in the 1990s?" *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies* XVII, no. 4, Summer 1994, pp. 49-67; also see Henri Barkey, "Turkey's Kurdish Dilemma," *Survival* 35, no. 4, Winter 1993, pp. 51-70; Philip Robins, "The Overlord State: Turkish Policy and the Kurdish Issue," *International Affairs* 69, no. 4, October 1993, pp. 657-671; Nevzat Soguk, "A Study of the Historico-Cultural Reasons for Turkey's Inconclusive Democracy," *New Political Science* no. 26, Fall 1993, pp. 89-116; David McDowall, "The Kurdish Question in the 1990s," *Peuples Méditerranéens* no. 68-69, July-December 1994, pp. 243-266.

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<sup>10</sup>For the foreign policy background see my "The Kurdish Question and Turkey's Foreign Policy, 1991-95: From the Gulf War to the Incursion into Iraq," *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. XIX, no. 1, Fall 1995, pp. 1-30.

nya, which commenced in force in December 1994. The Russians were quick to play the Kurdish card in efforts to persuade Turkey not to support the Chechens. The Turks protested in late 1994, when they learned that Moscow would be the site of an international conference to discuss the problems of the Kurds in the Russian Federation (whose population Russian authorities estimated at one million) and the Kurds in Turkey. The tensions between the two capitals increased in January 1995, when Ali Yigit and Necdat Buldan, two former Kurdish members of the Turkish parliament who had fled to Europe to escape imprisonment, visited Moscow in order to ascertain Russian authorities' views regarding the possibility of establishing a Kurdish parliament in exile in Moscow. Attempts to establish the parliament in Brussels had been rejected by the Belgian government.<sup>12</sup> While the Russian Foreign Ministry stated that Russians would not "open their arms to the PKK," they did seem inclined to allow a Kurdish House (*Kürt Evi*), in which the PKK would obviously participate, to be located in Moscow.

The Turks were not satisfied with the Russian Foreign Ministry statement inasmuch as a large portrait of Abdallah Öcalan, the PKK leader, hung over the speakers' table. The Moscow conference rang alarm bells in Ankara, and exactly one week later Turkish Interior Minister Nahit Mentese and a coterie of other high-ranking national security officials were in Moscow. After two days of ne-

gotiations, Turkey and Russia signed a "Protocol to Prevent Terrorism," in which the two countries agreed to exchange intelligence information. The Russian interior minister stated that the PKK would "not be a legal organization in Russia."<sup>13</sup>

In late February, two more high-ranking Russian delegations visited Turkey in order to strengthen further intelligence cooperation between the two countries. Turkey's efforts to curtail PKK operations in the Russian Federation were high on the agenda. Yevgeny Primakov, then head of the foreign intelligence service (now foreign minister), and Sergei Stepashin, head of the Russian Federation counter-intelligence service, arrived in Ankara accompanied by five high-ranking Russian generals. Before becoming director of the Russian Federation intelligence service, Primakov was the top national security adviser to former Soviet Premier Mikhail Gorbachev. In January he was appointed foreign secretary. One of the leading Turkish newspapers reported that the main topic of discussion was to be that Russia would not allow the PKK or a Kurdish House to be set up in Moscow in return for Turkish support for its policies in Chechnya.<sup>14</sup> The Russians reportedly received a promise on the part of the Turks that Ankara would not allow volunteers to go and fight in Chechnya and would not sell arms to the Chechens. The Russians also wanted Turkey to exercise its influence on Chechen President Dzhokar Dudayev and his advisers to persuade them to negotiate with the Russians. In return the Russians promised they would not allow

<sup>12</sup>The Kurds were successful in getting the Dutch government to recognize the Parliament in Exile in March 1994. At the time this article was written in September 1995, the Netherlands was still the only country to have recognized the Parliament in Exile.

<sup>13</sup>*Hürriyet*, January 25, 1995.

<sup>14</sup>*Hürriyet*, February 24, 1995.





any "activities" in Russia directed against Turkey.

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The agreement between the two countries included other matters such as cooperation against international drug trafficking etc., but it was clear that the main topic of discussion was Russian succor to the Kurdish nationalist movement and particularly to PKK efforts to establish an office in Moscow and other cities within the Russian Federation. In return for rejecting the Kurdish request, the Russians demanded that Ankara consider Russia's war against Chechnya as an "internal affair."<sup>15</sup> The agreement seemed to imply that Turkey would take a low profile regarding Russian efforts to reassert its presence in the entire Caucasus region, including Azerbaijan and Armenia and those two countries' conflict over Norgorno-Karabagh. In March, less than one month after the signing of the security and intelligence agreements, Russia escalated its war against Chechnya and Turkey mounted a large incursion into northern Iraq.

The ferocious Russian attack on Chechnya, which continued throughout the spring and summer of 1995 and continued into early 1996, brought loud protests from the Turkish government, but much of it seemed intended for public consumption. In spite of its protests, and undoubtedly real consterna-

tion, Ankara continued to abide by the January and February agreements, as did Moscow. There were, however, continuing disagreements between the two capitals. On March 16, Walter Shoniya, the Russian ambassador to Azerbaijan, in a media interview in Baku, noted that "Turkey has been fighting the Kurds for ten years and the Russians have said nothing....If the Turks want to help the Chechens, when they talk to Dudayev every day on the phone, one day let them [the Turks] say, 'Surrender,'" that is how the Chechens will be saved from war.<sup>16</sup> On April 24, two members of the Kurdistan Parliament-in-Exile, Rustam Broyev and Asiri Serif, after being rebuffed by the Russian administration in their attempts to establish a Kurdish office in Moscow, sought support from members of the Duma. Mikail Burlakov, a member of Vladimir Zhirinovsky's Liberal Democratic party, stated that he supported the Kurdish cause. He said that the Turkish army was annihilating the Kurds in northern Iraq and added, "We don't see Turkey as an independent country but rather as a pawn of NATO, and we request that Turkey be thrown out of the alliance because of its aggression [against the Kurds]."<sup>17</sup>

On July 17, it was reported in the Turkish press that Russia would send Albert Chernishev, one of its top diplomats, who had spent seven years in Turkey in the late 1980s and early 1990s as Russian ambassador. Chernishev is also quite fluent in Turkish. His mission was to request that Turkey curtail the activities of the Caucasian and Chechnya Solidarity Associations in Turkey, which were supporting the Chechens by send-

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>*Hürriyet*, March 17, 1995.

<sup>17</sup>*Hürriyet*, April 25, 1995.

ing food, arms and volunteers. Chernishev arrived in Ankara on July 20 and proclaimed there was no "Chechen question between Turkey and Russia." But, he added, obviously referring to the Kurdish question and Turkey's war against the Kurds, "We must understand one another. People who live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones."<sup>18</sup>

Chernishev stressed this point by saying it in Turkish. After meeting with Foreign Minister Erdal İnönü and President Süleyman Demirel, the Russian envoy stated that his anxieties regarding Turkey's policy toward the war in Chechnya had disappeared. He announced that the Turkish government had assured him that the Caucasian and Chechnya Solidarity Associations would not be able to harm relations between Turkey and Russia. Chernishev stated that Turkey had received similar assurances that Russia would not allow Kurdish organizations sympathetic to the PKK to operate in Russia. He emphasized that Russia and Turkey had come to a profound understanding on the subject of the Chechens and the Kurds. The Russian envoy concluded his remarks, again in Turkish, by saying, "Turkey and Russia are in the same boat. If the boat sinks, we both sink. It is necessary that we find the means for both of us to stay on the surface."<sup>19</sup>

Turkish-Russian relations took a nose dive in October and November 1995, when members of the Russian Duma, led by Viktor Ustinov, director of the Geopolitical Affairs Committee, agreed to host the third international conference of the Kurdistan Parliament-in-Exile (KPE) October 30-November 1.

The conference was not officially recognized by the Yeltsin government, but it appeared to the Turks that the conference would not have taken place if the Russian Foreign Ministry had not given its tacit approval. The Turkish Foreign Ministry labeled the affair as a "deep wound that only Russia could bandage."<sup>20</sup> The Turkish press called the conference an act of "Russian treachery."<sup>21</sup> Russian perfidy was compounded by the fact that four former Kurdish members—Ali Yigit, Nizamittin Toguc, Remzi Kartal and Mahmut Kiliç—of the Turkish parliament, who had fled Turkey in 1994 under threat of being jailed, were in attendance. This semi-official recognition of the KPE broke agreements reached in February and July.

The harshness of Ustinov's words suggested deep dissatisfaction with Turkey's support of the Chechens. Ustinov stated boldly that the Lausanne Treaty (signed July 24, 1923) which did not mention the Kurds, unlike the Treaty of Sèvres (signed August 10, 1920), in which articles 62 and 64 recognized the conditions for the possibility of the creation of a Kurdish state, should be cancelled. "The Lausanne Treaty," he said, "had given birth to unjust consequences." Furthermore, Ustinov continued, "If Turkey, for the sake of Chechnya is meddling in Russia's affairs, we know how to prevent it."<sup>22</sup> By this he meant apparently that Russia well knew that the Achilles heel of all of Turkey's foreign and domestic policy is its preoccupation with the consolidation and spread of Kurdish nationalism. Offi-

<sup>20</sup>*Hürriyet*, November 2, 1995.

<sup>21</sup>*Hürriyet*, November 3, 1995.

<sup>22</sup>*Hürriyet*, November 1, 1995.

<sup>18</sup>*Hürriyet*, July 21, 1995.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*

cial Russian recognition of the KPE would be a significant victory for the PKK which has strong representation in the KPE. Russian recognition of the KPE would open the doors to recognition by other CIS states. The KPE has already been recognized officially by the Netherlands and has its headquarters in The Hague. Major conferences of organizations affiliated with the KPE have been held in Switzerland and Austria. In November 1995, Sweden also recognized the KPE. Although Yeltsin spokesmen and the Russian Foreign Ministry denied official support, KPE President Yasar Kaya deepened Ankara's suspicions when he stated at a news conference at the end of the meeting that although the Russian Foreign Ministry announced that the conference was illegal, it had done nothing to stop it and had not interfered with the proceedings. Kaya said the KPE received "help" from many countries, even though those countries did not recognize the KPE as a "state."

The Turkish Foreign Ministry made it clear that it was "unsatisfied" with the Russian response. It stated that the "healing of the wound" opened by the KPE conference was Moscow's responsibility. If Russia "did not bandage the wound," Turkey would be obliged to take actions that were "inescapable."<sup>23</sup>

The Turks were as good as their word. On November 4, Ankara announced that it would begin to concentrate troops on its border with Armenia and Georgia in order to pressure Russia to abide by the Conventional Forces Reduction Agreement (CFRA) in which Russia agreed to reduce its forces on NATO's northern and southern flanks. Russia was supposed to have carried out

these reductions by November 17, but it has continued to delay the agreed reductions on the southern flank, i.e., Turkey. The Turks requested that President Clinton bring their concerns to the attention of President Yeltsin when the two met in New York in late October. According to the Turks, Clinton did not raise the issue because he did not want to offend either Turkey or Russia.

The Turks could hardly have been surprised by Clinton's action. Ankara already knew by the time of the Clinton-Yeltsin meeting that the Americans would not put pressure on Russia to meet the concerns of the Turks. In a September meeting of NATO's defense ministers in which Russia participated, Turkey received no support from its NATO allies for its request that Moscow abide by CFRA. Pavel Grachev, the Russian defense minister, gave a speech in which he said that he saw nothing in Russian actions that should offend the Turks. Grachev made the argument that the South Caucasian countries were happy with the number of Russian troops deployed in the region (he did not mention Chechnya!). He saw no reason for the reduction of forces called for in CFRA. In the communiqué issued after the meeting, Turkish officials were unable to place a "reminder" in the text to the effect that the CFRA agreement was being violated in the "wings" of NATO. The "reminder" referred obviously to the southern wing since the reduction of forces in the northern wing, especially in the Baltic countries, was being carried out, albeit somewhat reluctantly.<sup>24</sup>

It seemed unlikely that the announced Turkish concentration of

<sup>23</sup>*Hürriyet*, November 2, 1995.

<sup>24</sup>*Hürriyet*, November 30, 1995.

troops on its eastern borders would frighten Russia into reducing its troops, which some sources estimate to be as high as half a million, in the Caucasus and Transcaucasian regions. In the last months of 1995, with the negotiations with the Chechens not going well and the situation in Chechnya posing a steady challenge to the Yeltsin administration, it seemed unlikely that Moscow would be in any mood to abide by CFRA. The Turks admitted as much, stating unsubtly that the announced troop concentration was meant to "intimidate" Russia for allowing the KPE conference to take place in the shadows of the Kremlin—tit for tat.

The Kurdish question and the Chechen question are playing an important role in Russian-Turkish relations in the 1990s. Russian control of Chechnya is vital if it is to maintain control of the Caucasus and Central Asia. Loss of Russian control of Chechnya would greatly encourage the nationalist forces in the Caucasus, especially in the republics and regions that are predominately Muslim—the north Caucasian republics of Dagestan, Chechnya-Ingushetia, Kabardino-Balkar, Karachai-Cherkess, Adygeya and Azerbaijan. If organized into a united North Caucasian Front, they would form a Muslim belt across the northern Caucasus separating the Christian republics of Georgia and Armenia from Russia. Such a development would make Armenia and Georgia not only dependent on their relations with their north Caucasian neighbors, but also on the big Muslim states of Turkey and Iran to the west and south.

Marie Bennigsen Broxup has stated clearly the significance of Chechnya to Russia. She notes that if Chechnya and Dagestan were to become independent

"with their strategic mountain position, it would prevent Russia from meddling in the affairs of Transcaucasia and weaken its status as a regional power."<sup>25</sup> Broxup argues that Afghanistan was not Russia's Vietnam as it was a distant war that did not greatly affect Russian public opinion. "...the North Caucasus, on the other hand, has always been central to Russian concerns. Russia's grandeur was built on the ruins of the Caucasus."<sup>26</sup> It must be remembered that Chechnya was the only republic of the CIS to experience a genuine revolution and the only republic in which the communist structures and apparatus were removed, preventing Moscow "from finding channels of influence through old party networks."<sup>27</sup> Broxup, who is a close student of Russian affairs and an authority on Central Asia, also states, that contrary to much media opinion in the West, Dudayev is an ardent nationalist and that under his administration Grozny was becoming, "an important regional economic center and influential political actor."<sup>28</sup> Chechnya is also significant in that it is the starkest example, as yet, of "Russia's inability to develop a viable nationality policy and to allow genuine devolution of power to the Federation members."<sup>29</sup> Chechnya, as mentioned earlier, is also crucial to Russia's policy to control the energy sources of Central Asia and the Caucasus and their pipeline webs, distribution networks and termination points.

The Russian war against Chechnya has caused deep fissures in the Russian government, fissures which at times

<sup>25</sup> *Dialogue*, August 1995, p. 5.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.* Broxup is the editor of *Central Asian Survey*.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

challenged Yeltsin's hold on power. It created divisions in the military and between the armed forces and the civilian government. The war demonstrated that the Russian armed forces were weak, insubordination was rife in all ranks. The war also strained relations between Russia and the West and encouraged European and American groups who wished to expand NATO eastward. The Russian officials who advocated war against the Chechens—Sergei Stepashin, federal counterintelligence service head; Oleg Soskovets, first deputy prime minister; Nikolai Yegorov, deputy prime minister; Oleg Lobov, security council secretary; Aleksandr Korzhakov, head of Yeltsin's private security—also had major roles in formulating Russia's policy on Turkey and the Kurds and in determining the potential routes of the gas and oil pipelines. Michael McFaul argues that the differences between those officials eager to prosecute the war against Chechnya and the traditional core of Russia's reformers may have created a divide that cannot be bridged.<sup>30</sup> In addition, like Turkey's war against the Kurds, Russia's war against Chechnya proved to be expensive. By May 1995 some estimates put the cost of the war at \$6 billion; a figure close to what the Turks were estimated to be spending in their war against the PKK.<sup>31</sup> The cost of the war and the corruption it entailed imperiled further Russia's economic and political reforms. Turkey has

been unable to take advantage of the Russian predicament in Chechnya because of its war against the PKK and the cost of its efforts to suppress the Kurdish nationalist movement in Turkey. In 1995 Turkey had more than 300,000 troops deployed against the Kurds in southeast Turkey, excluding some 67,000 village guards. The guards are Kurdish militia organized and paid by the government to fight the PKK. In March Turkey made an incursion into Iraq with an estimated force of 35-50,000 troops.<sup>32</sup> In July, Turkey was compelled to make another incursion into northern Iraq with an estimated 3-5,000-man force of mountain-trained commandos to destroy PKK camps that had already been reconstructed since the March incursion. By 1995 some 20,000 people had been killed, most of them by government forces, in Ankara's efforts to destroy the PKK and suppress other activities of Kurdish nationalist groups. Over 2,300 villages had been destroyed, burned and emptied, and some 2-3 million people had fled their villages for the larger towns and cities of the southeast as well as the Mediterranean and Aegean coasts. Many refugees settled in the major cities of Istanbul, Ankara, Izmir and Adana.<sup>33</sup>

In short, the challenge of the PKK and Kurdish nationalism has dominated the political agenda, both foreign and domestic, of Turkey throughout the 1990s. The larger interstate Kurdish question and Turkish policy toward the Kurds in northern Iraq added to the

<sup>30</sup>Michael McFaul, "Russian Politics after Chechnya," *Foreign Affairs*, no. 99, Summer 1995, pp. 149-168. McFaul cites "career advancement" as the main factor influencing the Russian "party of war."

<sup>31</sup>Holly Burkhalter, *Christian Science Monitor*, May 8, 1995, p. 19. McFaul puts the cost of the war at \$5 billion as of March 1, 1995.

<sup>32</sup>For the origins and developments surrounding this incursion see footnote 10.

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*

maelstrom.<sup>34</sup> The great challenge of the PKK and Kurdish nationalism and the costs of suppressing them have greatly affected Turkish relations with Russia. It is not a coincidence that Russia sent Albert Chernishev, a Turkish-speaking former Russian ambassador, to Ankara at the height of the Russian onslaught on Grozny. Chernishev, perhaps more than any other Russian diplomat, is deeply aware of the profound consequences of the Kurdish problem in Turkey and its

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<sup>34</sup>An example of the preoccupation of the Turkish government was the issuing of a report entitled *The Southeast Report: Diagnoses and Remedies*. Southeast in Turkish parlance is a euphemism for the Kurdish problem. The report was published in *Hürriyet* in serialized form from August 14 to September 6. (This is where I read it.) The report is purported to have been prepared for the government under the aegis of the Turkish Chambers of Commerce and Commodities Markets the president of which is Yalim Erez, a close adviser and confidant of Prime Minister Tansu Çiller and himself an ethnic Kurd. The research team that prepared the report was headed by Professor Dogu Ergil, an academic who teaches at Ankara University and who has long been interested in the "Eastern Question." Throughout August and September the report and the discussion of it in the press and in private think tanks created a brouhaha. The allegations questioned the provenance of the report, its political intentions and the validity of the data base and the reliability of the research methodology employed. Some oppositional political leaders claimed that the report was the brainchild of the United States through which the United States was laying the foundation to later establish an independent Kurdish state in southeast Turkey and in northern Iraq, the first goal of which was to persuade the Turkish government and the Turkish people of the necessity of granting the Kurds cultural and a large of measure of political autonomy in the south-east.

effects on Turkish domestic and foreign policies. He was acutely aware of the fear of Turkish officials that Russia would recognize the Kurdish Parliament in Exile and allow Kurdish nationalists to establish offices in Moscow and other cities of the CIS. Russian recognition of the KPE would have opened the flood-gates to a number of other countries, especially in Europe, to recognize the KPE. As of the summer of 1995, only the Netherlands had recognized it. If, in the wake of Russian recognition of the KPE, other European countries had followed suit, the whole spectrum of Turkey's complex relations with Europe would have been further complicated. Turkey wanted to avoid this occurrence at all costs. The *quid pro quo* of Russian non-recognition of the Kurdish Parliament in Exile was Turkish non-interference in Russia's war against Chechnya.

There is no doubt that the challenge of the PKK and of the Kurdish nationalist movement in Turkey has restricted severely Turkey's ability to play a strong role, even diplomatically in the Balkans, (especially in the Bosnian conflict) in Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia. It is in Turkey's interest to reduce Russian military and political presence in the Caucasus and in Central Asia and Azerbaijan.<sup>35</sup> Chechnya's

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<sup>35</sup>Ebülfez Elçibey, the former pro-Turkish president of Azerbaijan, in his first interview with a Turkish reporter on September 18, 1995, criticized Turkey for not supporting him during the rebellion of Suret Hüseyinov which led to his deposition and eventual replacement by the pro-Russian Haidar Aliev, the current president of Azerbaijan. Elçibey stated that he received no support from Turkey during the rebellion and that he was still "angry at Turkey." Furthermore, said the former president, "Russia

Declaration of Independence in autumn of 1991 provided an excellent opportunity for Turkey to lessen the presence and authority of Russia in the Caucasus, but it was unable to take advantage of it because of its war against the PKK and Kurdish nationalist movements and their

challenge to the Turkish state as now constituted.<sup>36</sup> At the end of 1995, Russia was able to use the "Kurdish card" much more effectively against Turkey than Turkey was able to use the "Chechen card" against Russia.



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is simply a blown-up balloon. It put all of its resources against the war in Chechnya. What did it accomplish? Nothing. Turkey must not be so timid in supporting the Turkic republics and must be in the forefront. Turkey today is pursuing the same hesitant policy against Russia that it has pursued for centuries." (*Hürriyet*, September 10, 1995)

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<sup>36</sup> The dilemmas, contradictions and paradoxes of Russian-Turkish relations are poignantly illustrated by reports that Turkish construction companies will be heavily involved in the reconstruction of Grozny. The problems on the domestic front also continued to mount. In the fall of 1995, Turkey began to experience a shortage of meat as a result of its policy of emptying the villages of the southeast. The resulting flight of the population to larger towns and cities left no one to attend the flocks of livestock that are one of the main exports of southeastern and eastern Turkey to the urban areas in the west. In 1995 Turkey was compelled to import millions of tons of meat. The skyrocketing cost of meat resulted in more criticism of the government's policy toward the PKK and the Kurdish nationalist movement.





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