

Do the British Have a Hand In the Turkish Crisis?

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Is the British government involved in a new Sykes-Picot destabilization of Turkey? That was the question Lyndon LaRouche asked, in the wake of the fast-moving events around Turkey's Presidential election, and the unwarranted May 2 call by British Prime Minister Tony Blair, against an alleged "coup threat" by the military. In fact, it's impossible to understand what's going on in Turkey, LaRouche said, without understanding the history of British destabilization of the region.

Turkey was a target for the Sykes-Picot Treaty of 1916, when the founder of modern Turkey, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, resisted the geopolitical plans which had been drawn up by the French and the British, so that they could divide, conquer, and then dominate Southwest Asia. Turkey was supposed to be a helpless enclave in a region controlled by the imperial powers.

At present, the crisis is on hold, since the Turkish Constitutional Court has ruled the April 27 parliamentary election of a new President illegal, and Prime Minister Recep Erdoğan has called for new elections in June. The breather should be used by the Turks and others to realize the impetus behind the crisis.

The Chronology and the British Role

The turmoil in Turkey occurs in the context of the war in neighboring Iraq. Should an independent Kurdish government be formed, Turkey would likely take military action. Turkey has a large Kurdish population, and an active domestic Kurdish separatist insurgency. So a destabilization of this nature on its borders would constitute a potential threat to the unity and very existence of the Turkish state.

Although this is not what the international press has highlighted, the first signs of a looming crisis appeared when Chief

of Staff Gen. Yasar Buyukanit announced in an April 12 press conference, that Turkey would launch a three-month military campaign against the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), a Kurdish terrorist group in northern Iraq. "An operation in North Iraq," he said, "is imperative. It requires political will." He added that the planned pinpoint strikes at PKK positions were required to prevent infiltration of terrorists into Turkey, where large-scale fighting had taken place, with significant casualties on both sides. Buyukanit also denied, curiously, that a "group of senior army officers" was plotting to overthrow the Erdogan government.

The following day, April 13, President Ahmet Necdet Sezer, who is due to leave office in May, issued a warning that secularism was endangered. He added that "domestic and foreign forces with a common objective are acting together on this issue, to turn Turkey into an Islamic republic." The President cited attempts to place graduates of religious schools in positions of power, as well as opposition to the ban on women's headscarves, as signs of the "threat." Sezer then praised the military as the "protector and guarantor of the secular Republic," adding that there were attempts, again from "internal and foreign forces," to "erode its credibility and make it inefficient." The only concrete event Sezer referred to in his speech, to motivate his warnings, was the upcoming elections in Parliament for his replacement.

Prime Minister Erdogan had been profiled as the likely candidate. Sezer stressed that the next President "must be neutral from political aspects," and his impartiality must be guaranteed. He stressed that whereas the Prime Minister is a leader of a political party, the President must be an impartial leader of the nation.

On April 14, a mass rally took place in Ankara, with press accounts claiming up to 1.5 million participants, a figure

widely doubted by Turkish sources. The demonstrators were defending the secularist system and protesting the candidacy of Erdogan.

On April 24, Deputy Chief of Staff Gen. Ergin Saygun stated that the next President should be committed to secularism.

On April 27, the first round of the vote for the President took place in Parliament, with Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul the candidate for the AKP (Party of Justice and Development). Erdogan had withdrawn from the candidacy in his favor, in response to protests that he, Erdogan, was “too Islamist.” In Turkey’s first and second round votes, there must be a two-thirds majority; in the third round, a simple majority suffices. There was no two-thirds majority for Gul. In addition, the opposition Republican People’s Party (CHP) charged that the vote was illegal, and appealed to the Constitutional Court to annul the election. The Motherland Party and the True Path Party called for early elections, which Erdogan rejected.

Immediately after the first round vote, a statement was posted on the website of the General Staff, saying, “The Turkish Armed Forces are watching this situation with concern.” The statement said some circles had been “carrying out endless efforts to disturb fundamental values of the Republic of Turkey, especially secularism. . . .” The text spoke of such activities having been carried out “with the permission and within the knowledge of the administrative authorities, etc.” The statement continued: “The problem that emerged in the Presidential election process is focussed on arguments over secularism. . . . It should not be forgotten that the Turkish Armed Forces are a party to those debates and absolute defender of secularism. . . . It will display its attitude and action openly and clearly whenever it is necessary.” The last sentence was read as a threat of military coup.

While Erdogan delivered a speech on April 30, calling for calm and unity, the City of London intervened to call for early elections. This was carried in the online edition of the *Financial Times*, which stressed that democracy must prevail over the military. At the same time, Tony Blair, according to the *Financial Times*, “intervened in Turkey’s internal political crisis by urging the Turkish armed forces to abide by the country’s democratic constitution. In an unusual foray into the domestic affairs of a close ally,” the *Financial Times* went on, “Downing Street issued a statement in which Mr Blair said he was following closely developments in Turkey following the military’s threat on Friday to block the selection of a new president.”

On April 30 and May 1, Turkey’s financial markets took a nosedive. Citigroup issued a report advising investors to sell Turkish stocks, and downgraded the country’s equities from “overweight” to “underweight.” Following the ruling of the Constitutional Court, that the first round vote had been illegal, because there were not two-thirds of the members present (although this is not in the Constitution), Erdogan announced

he would call early elections in late June. He compared the court’s ruling to “a bullet fired at democracy.” He also proposed that the Constitution be amended to allow a direct popular vote for the President.

What’s Next?

Meanwhile, the parliamentary votes for President will continue, in three rounds. If, on the third round, Gul is elected by a simple majority, which is expected, several constitutional issues will emerge: Who is the real President? Which Parliament should vote on a constitutional amendment? And so on.

While the intervention by the City of London and Blair were singular, equally important is what may have happened behind the scenes, inside the military. As the German daily *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* reported on May 3 (from several Turkish media sources), the dramatic message placed on the General Staff’s website late at night after the first round, was out of profile. The *FAZ* wrote that Chief of Staff Buyukanit “is a rational person, who does not hide in the middle of the dark night, behind the anonymity of the Internet. Who wrote the clumsy declaration and put it on the Internet? Some people moot that the statement was hastily written, because they wanted to preempt moves by younger officers. In 1960, it was young officers who ran a coup.”

If this account is accurate, it indicates that senior officers (those Buyukanit had stated were *not* organizing a putsch) intervened to stop a coup being put together by another, younger group. It is well known that the Turkish military is divided into several factions, including Anglo-Americans, Islamists, and nationalists. Had the coup succeeded, it would have replayed the scenario desired by London: Turkey would have been condemned by the EU, the UN, the White House, and so forth for having violated the rules of democracy, and a full-fledged crisis would have unfolded.

To judge by press accounts in Turkey and abroad, it would seem that yet another confrontation between the secularists and the Islamists were coming to a head, and the specter of another military coup were on the horizon. If so, it would not be the first time. Indeed, three times over the past 50 years, the military has staged coups to take power, and, in 1997, moved to oust Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan, an Islamist of the party that spawned the AKP.

Meanwhile, the situation in Iraq continues to deteriorate. The PKK terrorists in northern Iraq, it must be remembered, are under the protective cover of the U.S. and U.K. occupying powers, and both Washington and London are supporting Kurdish pretensions to control the oil-rich city of Kirkuk as the capital of “Kurdistan,”—all measures geared to exacerbate tensions, and prompt nationalist military figures to ponder ways of protecting the nation of Turkey.

In short, there are many ways to destabilize a country. The current “secularist vs. Islamist” scenario is only one of those on the drawing boards of the geopolitical heirs to the Sykes-Picot deal.