

## **Talking Turkey About Iraq: Democracy and Double-Talk**

By Jim Lobe

The new Turkish government, led by the moderately Islamist Justice and Development Party, finds itself almost quite literally between Iraq and a hard place.

On the one hand, more than eight out of ten Turks are opposed to Turkey's cooperation with the United States in an invasion of Iraq, according to a recent poll released last week by Pew Research Center for People and the Press.

On the other hand, the war plans of the Bush administration, which insists it favors democracy in Turkey and constantly extols it as a model for the Arab world, call for invading Iraq from bases in Turkey.

That's why the White House has invited Recep Tayyip Erdogan to Washington this week. He is the leader of Turkey's new ruling party, whose reputation for incorruptibility and responsiveness to public opinion swept it into power in last month's elections.

Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz, a neoconservative hawk obsessed with overthrowing Saddam Hussein, delivered the invitation to Erdogan. To win the Turkish leader's support for U.S. war plans, Wolfowitz promised lavish sums of new economic aid, diplomatic support, and the construction of permanent new military facilities in Turkey's predominantly Kurdish southeast. Wolfowitz has led the administration's campaign to persuade the rest of the world, particularly the Middle East, that Washington should now be seen as a liberator, not as an invader, of the region.

### **Muslim Role Model**

Ankara plays a crucial role in that campaign. Turkey "can be an example for the Muslim

World," Wolfowitz declared already last March in one of the first of many public declarations of the now-fashionable mantra that invading Iraq could transform the entire region by bringing democracy to Arab states long denied it.

The new government's Islamic leadership helps reinforce that message. In that respect, Erdogan's White House reception is aimed precisely at reassuring those who fear that Washington's confrontation with Iraq and its war on terrorism are stoking a "clash of civilizations." Richard Haass, director of policy planning at the State Department, seized on precisely this issue in a major policy address last week on democracy in the Middle East. "Our receptivity to the outcome of last month's election in Turkey clearly demonstrates this point," he said. "Democracy," he added, is indeed 'of the people, by the people, for the people'."

Such strong affirmations of support for Turkish democracy could lead one to believe that the administration would pay great heed to Turkish public opinion and to the country's constitutional processes requiring parliamentary approval for the stationing of foreign troops on Turkish soil. Yet it appears that the administration is doing quite the opposite by pressuring Turkey to be a pawn in its regional war game.

One November poll found that 83% of Turks oppose allowing the U.S. to use bases in their country to wage war against Iraq, presumably from the air, as well as on the ground. A second poll found a growing alienation of Turks from the United States, particularly since the advent of the Bush administration, which now so ardently insists on its respect for Turkish democracy. Only 30% of Turks hold a favorable view of the U.S., a precipitous drop from 52% just two years ago; indeed the biggest drop in

Washington's standing among 27 countries surveyed by Pew. The same poll found that three out of four Turks do not believe that Washington takes Turkey's interests into account in conducting its foreign policy.

The poll results, observed former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, helped illustrate the gap in "what we're asking countries to do in terms of [their] leadership versus what [their] people want us to do."

In Turkey, however, public opinion and statements by political leaders do not necessarily carry the final word, as Wolfowitz is well aware. During his visit, he also met with a number of senior generals, who are members of the military's powerful General Staff and also sit on Turkey's Security Council. Wolfowitz left Ankara on a confident note, saying that "Turkish support is assured." Apparently,

Wolfowitz is placing his trust in the fact that the final decision will be made by the country's Security Council and the Turkish military, which ousted the Turkey's last Islamist-led government.

Erdogan is indeed in a difficult spot. He can accept the extraordinary inducements Bush will undoubtedly offer him. Or he can reject Bush's blandishments, risking the wrath not only of Washington, but also of those redoubtable "senior generals," and assure his fellow Turks that they have finally elected someone who takes them seriously.

"The essence of what we believe in—we in the United States—is that people should be free to determine their own future," Wolfowitz told a group of Turkish journalists last July. Neoconservatives like Wolfowitz have been big fans of Turkey both for its

long-standing status as a loyal front-line state in NATO and for its past cooperation with Washington's policy toward Iraq. They have also lauded Turkey for its military alliance with Israel, which was actually midwived by Wolfowitz's deputy, Undersecretary of Defense for Policy Douglas Feith and Defense Policy Board chairman Richard Perle—both of whom have worked as lobbyists for Ankara.

"Turkey is proof that democracy can work for Muslims," said Wolfowitz last summer. Whether the new political leadership in Turkey decides to ignore public opinion and ally itself with the U.S. hawks will be a sign of just how democratic Turkey really is.

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