

# Turkey: New Europe or Old?

By Michelle Ciarrocca | February 28, 2003

Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld hit a nerve last month when he dismissed French and German opposition to the U.S. rushing to war in Iraq, saying bluntly to reporters, “You’re thinking of Europe as Germany and France. I don’t.” He added: “I think that’s old Europe. If you look at the entire NATO Europe today, the center of gravity is shifting to the east.”

For Turkey, an old member of NATO and a key ally in the first Gulf War, the U.S. is offering to help Turkey become part of the “New Europe” in return for its cooperation if U.S. forces invade Iraq. Turkey has been striving to become a member of the European Union (EU) for years, but a number of hurdles remain.

On the eve of the December 2002 EU summit, President Bush and Secretary of State Colin Powell made phone calls to various EU leaders, including the Danish Prime Minister, the summit president, to urge them to set an early date for accession talks for Turkey. During the meeting, however, members decided to postpone membership talks until December 2004, pending completion of a number of human rights, political, and economic reforms by Turkey. Heading the list are ending the Turkish military’s indiscriminate use of force against Kurdish rebels in the southeastern part of the country and abolishing torture. As the Federation of American Scientists points out “the lure of membership in the European Union has resulted in the passage of several high profile “reform packages” that, at least on paper, represent real victories for human rights advocates. But much more needs to be done.

Turkey has been a staging ground for U.S. operations in the no-fly zones in Iraq for over a decade, but with the possibility of all-out war with Iraq, the Bush administration is seeking to seriously expand its presence in Turkey. U.S. military planners want to deploy more than 60,000 troops along Turkey’s border with northern Iraq and secure access to Turkish airbases for a possible attack. Troops, tanks, and other military equipment are waiting off Turkish coasts, renovation of Turkish air bases is already underway,

but alternatives are being considered in the event that the U.S. does not win Turkish approval. The U.S. plans to use other bases in the region as well, including two in Kuwait, one in Qatar, one in Oman, and air bases in Saudi Arabia.

New NATO military commander, U.S. Marine Corps General James Jones, met with Turkey’s top general to discuss Turkish cooperation with U.S. forces. At the urging of the Bush administration, NATO agreed to supply Turkey with AWAC surveillance planes, Patriot missile systems, and chemical and biological protective gear in case of an attack from Iraq.

The U.S. has discussed an overall aid package that could include up to \$15 billion in aid to offset the damage a war in the region could have on Turkey’s fragile economy, but the details are still being worked out. The U.S. has also offered Turkey generous terms to purchase new arms. Reuters reported that the Bush administration had approved \$324 million in U.S. Export-Import Bank credits for Turkey to purchase eight Seahawks and six Black Hawk helicopters.

Recalling the price Turkey had to pay for the first Gulf War and its aftermath, which is estimated to range from \$40 billion to \$100 billion in lost trade over the past decade, plus a flood of Kurdish refugees, Turkey is hesitant to support another war on its border. Turkey currently estimates that its financial losses in another Gulf War would be about \$28 billion. Turkey is also in the midst of a severe recession. In the past year more than two million jobs have been lost and the economy shrank by 9.4% in 2002.



Foreign Policy In Focus (FPF)

[www.fpf.org](http://www.fpf.org)  
A Think Tank Without Walls

---

Beyond the economic impact a war in Iraq would have on Turkey, of greater concern to Ankara is the possibility that the war could result in the creation of an independent Kurdish state and re-ignite separatist movements within its own Kurdish population. To ensure that doesn't happen, Turkey wants to deploy thousands of its own troops into northern Iraq and obtain U.S. assurances that it will block the formation of a Kurdish state, a position accepted by the Bush administration in an agreement signed on February 27th. Turkey also seeks to keep the oil fields near Kirkuk and Mosul in northern Iraq out of Kurdish hands.

With all of these issues in mind, Turkey hosted a meeting of regional neighbors in January to discuss the situation in Iraq, attended by foreign ministers from Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Syria, and Egypt. At the end of the conference, the six nations issued a joint declaration urging Iraq to cooperate with UN weapons inspectors. Commenting on the declaration, Syria's foreign minister Farouk al-Sharaa said, "the open message and the hidden message is peace, and no war."

Just as the first Bush administration used generous packages of military aid, arms transfers, and loans to persuade nations in the region to join the anti-Iraq coalition, the current administration is providing

similar incentives. But despite U.S. military and economic offerings, Ankara has maintained it will await a UN decision before deciding whether or not to support U.S. military action. Bulent Arinc, the speaker of the parliament, said, "it would be wrong for the government to send a request to parliament when the conditions for international legitimacy have not been met." There is also strong public opposition to a war in Iraq, with polls showing that 9 out of 10 Turks are against Turkey's participation in the war, and there have been daily anti-war demonstrations.

The combination of popular opposition to the war, economic uncertainty, and the long-standing desire to suppress demands for Kurdish self-determination (which a post-war Iraq would almost certainly accelerate), are mixed with political divisions between the ruling Justice and Development Party (an Islamist party) and the secular-dominated military. All of these factors have led the ruling party to delay the vote on the deployment of U.S. troops on its soil. Despite Rumsfeld's endorsement, the Turkish face of "New Europe" faces some old challenges.

---

*(Michelle Ciarrocca <CiarrM01@newschool.edu> is a research associate at the Arms Trade Resource Center, a project of the World Policy Institute. She writes regularly for Foreign Policy In Focus (online at [www.fpif.org](http://www.fpif.org)).)*

---

Published by Foreign Policy In Focus (FPiF), a joint project of the Interhemispheric Resource Center (IRC) and the Institute for Policy Studies (IPS). ©2003. All rights reserved.

## **Foreign Policy In Focus**

"A Think Tank Without Walls"

Established in 1996, Foreign Policy In Focus is a network of policy analysts, advocates, and activists committed to "making the United States a more responsible global leader and global partner." For more information, visit [www.fpif.org](http://www.fpif.org).

### Recommended citation:

Michelle Ciarrocca, "Turkey: New Europe or Old," (Silver City, NM & Washington, DC: Foreign Policy In Focus, February 28, 2003).

### Web location:

<http://www.fpif.org/commentary/2003/0302turkey.html>

### Production Information:

Writer: Michelle Ciarrocca  
Editor: John Gershman, IRC  
Layout: Tonya Cannariato, IRC