

Britain out to topple Turkish government

Are the British and United States preparing a coup option to topple the government of Turkish Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit? Ecevit was visited last week by both NATO Supreme Commander Alexander Haig and British chief of staff Sir Neil Cameron, who urged him to bolster Turkey's ties to NATO. But the British press has also been mooting some form of replacement of the Ecevit government — in the context of London and Washington objections to German and French proposals for a solution to Turkey's problems — and in some circles these articles are seen as signaling that a coup option against Ecevit is in place. This appeared in the Feb. 26 Financial Times of London:

The West Germans and French appear to put considerable store on Mr. Ecevit staying in office. The Americans and British, however, seem less committed, being concerned about his "multilateral foreign policy," even if it is one within NATO. They also look askance at his rhetoric about a "new defence concept" — an unidentified phrase which appears to

give focus to the growing reservations about the West within the Turkish armed forces and bureaucracy, not least because of the recent U.S. arms embargo on Turkey.

The U.S. and the UK thus would not be disturbed if a grand coalition emerged between Mr. Ecevit and his predecessor, the opposition leader, Mr. Suleyman Demirel — even if Mr. Demirel's mismanagement of the economy in the 1960s led to the economic crisis of 1969 and his failure to prevent even more serious profligacy between 1975 and 1977 is largely responsible for the country's present plight.

The U.S. now states publicly that Turkey must comply with the IMF's demands and that there is no such thing as money without strings — a view privately espoused by the British....

But the West Germans go somewhat further. In private their diplomats argue that a major mistake has been made in presenting the aid programme in terms which make it seem that the Turkish Government will have to capitulate before aid can flow.

Included in the IMF's demands — many of which have now been satisfied by the Turkish government's newly installed austerity program — are a hefty 40 percent devaluation, increased taxation of the population, and a sharp cut in public spending. The IMF is also out to cut state subsidies to state-controlled economic enterprises. Another target is Turkey's latest five-year plan, which, much to the ire of the zero-growth-oriented IMF, foresees a national growth rate of 8 percent. The IMF wants to trim this goal down to 4 or 5 percent. According to a State Department desk officer for Turkey, this would in effect mean no real growth, if Turkey's population growth rate is taken into account.

For years, the IMF has been the main stumbling block for Turkey and other developing countries which seek to become modern industrialized nations. With its often outrageous demands for austerity, devaluation, and backward "appropriate technologies," the IMF has repeatedly prevented Turkey from pursuing its ambitious economic development policies, by going so far as to topple Turkish governments that resisted IMF austerity dictates. In the present situation, Ecevit has been threatened with the "Iran treatment" if he continues to resist the IMF.

Now, with the declaration of his new austerity plan, Ecevit faces the wrath not of the IMF but of the Turkish population. "The IMF's ... conditions ... would be highly unpopular and could topple the government of Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit," wrote the March 7 *New York Times*. By creating the impression that the new austerity plan is his own, Ecevit hopes to save face and

shield himself as much as possible from charges by the population that Turkey capitulated to the IMF.

The fact remains, however, that the Turkish government, isolated internationally by the IMF and pressured from inside by pro-austerity groups such as the Turkish Industrialists and Businessmen's Association, did capitulate. And, unless the government is able to turn its situation around, the result is likely to accelerate the disintegration of the Turkish government.

Violent terrorist incidents and clashes between extremist left and right-wing groups — which have plagued Turkey for months — continue unabated. Martial law, activated in December in 13 provinces, was recently extended for another two months.

On Feb. 23, the *Daily Telegraph* of London predicted major upheavals in Turkey as a result of insurrections by Kurd tribesmen in the impoverished southeastern part of the country. The Kurds, who have been manipulated for decades by British intelligence, and more recently by Israeli intelligence, to oppose centralized authority, are demanding "autonomy" in concert with the Kurds of Iraq and Iran. And there are also efforts to stir up long-dormant rivalries between Turkey's Sunni Moslems and Alevi (Shi'ite).

Bigger NATO role?

A high Israeli military official last month told the Israeli Parliament in a private briefing that "Turkey will fall as Iran did." At the same time, Palestine Liberation Organization spokesman Hani al-Hassan predicted a