

Turkey's new prime minister: Joan of Arc or Margaret Thatcher?

by Dean Andromidas

The election of Mrs. Tansu Ciller as the first woman prime minister of Turkey has evoked comparisons with India's Indira Gandhi and Pakistan's Benazir Bhutto. It has been called "a breath of fresh air" in Turkish politics, "unprecedented," and a tribute to Turkey's commitment, as a Muslim country, to "secularism." Nonetheless, reports of the death of old Turkish politics are a bit premature. Unlike Gandhi and Bhutto, who enjoyed massive popular support, Ciller, a former university professor with less than three years' experience in politics, could only claim a majority support of a few hundred Turkish deputies, hardly qualifying her as the Joan of Arc of Turkish politics. Quite the contrary: Her ascension to the prime ministership represents a potentially dangerous shift, pointing to an accommodation with Anglo-American geopolitical interests which will have serious implications for Turkey's internal political and economic stability and development, as well as its foreign policies.

Who is Tansu Ciller?

Ciller, by her own admission, likes to style herself as the Turkish equivalent of Britain's Margaret Thatcher. The comparison goes beyond gender and designer business suits. Although Ciller is not known to carry as large a hand bag as her British counterpart, her close personal consultative affiliation to Thatcher was demonstrated the day before her election as prime minister-designate, when the only incoming call she allowed to be put through came from the British Iron Lady herself.

A graduate of Yale University and a former World Bank adviser, Ciller championed Thatcherite economic policies in her three years as Turkey's economics minister. On accepting her new post, she pledged as her top priority a sweeping privatization of the large Turkish state sector industrial and other enterprises, which accounts for a large percentage of the Turkish economy, especially heavy industry and engineering, the mainstay of Turkish national sovereignty. In addition to closing these "deficit-ridden" enterprises, she has reiterated her commitment to drastically cutting social expenditures and the budget deficit as the key to cutting inflation.

Unlike Thatcher, who was a green grocer's daughter,

Ciller was born into an old and very wealthy Istanbul merchant family, which holds some of the choicest pieces of Istanbul real estate. Her father, a former provincial governor with no male heir, managed to prevail upon his son-in-law, Istanbul banker Ozer Ucuran, to take on the Ciller family name, so that it could be passed on to the next generation. Thus Ciller's married name is her maiden name, something almost without precedent in the Islamic world, even in "secular" Turkey.

Anti-German campaign erupts

The naming of Ciller as prime minister coincides with the launching of a campaign by the Turkish press and political elite to use the killings of Turks in Germany to adopt the British slanderous "Germany is the new Fourth Reich" line. Shortly after Ciller was sworn in, the Turkish Parliament passed an all-party resolution denouncing the neo-Nazi arson attacks on Turks in Solingen, Germany on May 29 as "genocidal," and resembling the "situation in Germany shortly before the outbreak of the Second World War."

Rather than attack these brutal killings as an obvious attempt to destabilize Turkish-German relations, the Parliament chose June 17, the anniversary of German unification, to pass the resolution.

The anti-German campaign has been carried throughout the Turkish media. Turkish national TV carried an interview with the former ambassador to Germany and former foreign minister, Vahit Halefoglu, stating that even in Bonn during the 1960s and 1970s, he was of the opinion that the Germans never really made the transition from the Nazi ideology toward democracy.

The same was echoed in the leading daily *Milliyet*, which carried a commentary by Sukru Elekdog, a former ambassador to the United States, saying that the fact that violence against Turks in Germany has been carried out in the form of arson attacks, is typical of the German racist ideology: The German people have an "almost mystical proclivity to the flames." Those who wanted to keep the German race "clean," have repeatedly, throughout history, used fire to eliminate others. Thus, it was not by accident that the Jews were burned

by the Nazis in Auschwitz, and that 60,000 Jews died in the flames of the Warsaw Ghetto, Elekdag raved.

Turkey as a strategic target All this political uproar serves to mask the unfolding of a Turkish political, economic, and strategic crisis. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Turkey has sought to transform itself from a junior partner in NATO into the gateway to the newly independent Central Asian states of the former Soviet Union. It also has seen itself as the bridge between Europe and the Middle East. Turkish policymakers enthusiastically point to a map to prove that these aspirations not only make good sense, but could prove a benefit in any new world order. Putting itself forward as an Islamic nation committed to secular democracy while having a foothold on the European continent, it has pinned much of its hopes on joining the European Community. Nonetheless, recent developments have led to significant setbacks in all these policy goals, which could have profound internal and international political consequences.

Turkey as a strategic target

The return to power of former Communist Party boss Gaidar Aliyev in the oil-rich Central Asian republic of Azerbaijan, has served to dash Turkish dreams of being the leader of a pan-Turkic sphere of influence from the eastern Aegean to the borders of China. An old fox, Aliyev was formerly a Soviet Politburo member and, as a leading KGB officer, played the "Islamic card" for the Soviet secret service. Furthermore, as Communist Party boss in Baku in the 1980s, he forged good ties to British oil companies. Aliyev's teaming up with Russian-backed rebel leader Surat Huseinov to overthrow Turkish-backed President Abulfaz Elcibey, is the opening shot of an imperial Russian drive to bring Central Asia back into its sphere of influence—a move that appears to be backed by the British.

A leading Central Asia observer told *EIR*, "What we're seeing is a repeat of the cooperation between the British and Russian empires in the 18th century." He went on to say that British oil companies have invested over \$3 billion into Central Asian oil. They would not have invested that amount if they did not have some guarantees from the Russians. "This cooperation is to keep Turkey, and therefore the United States which stands behind Turkey, and Iran, out of Central Asia." He went on to say that one of the reasons for the revolt that brought Aliyev to power was the discontent among various factions over contracts that were about to be signed with western oil companies. "You see, Aliyev doesn't want new friends, but wants to work with his old friends in Russia."

Russia's ability to manipulate the conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia over the disputed territory of Nagorno-Karabakh continues to make it impossible to build an oil pipeline between Azerbaijan and Turkey through Armenian territory. Meanwhile, the Anglo-American refusal to finance a pipeline via Iran could leave Turkey totally out of the

picture. Without a pipeline, the oil riches of Central Asia stay in the ground. The only other option is, of course, the already-existing pipelines in the Russian Federation.

The failure of the West to mount a military intervention to stop the genocide in Bosnia, the only other Muslim nation in Europe, is only the latest signal to the Turks that they are not welcome in the European Community. Under the initiative of France and Great Britain, the EC states are adopting "zero immigration" policies, and therefore are dead set against a Turkish entry into the EC, which would give Turks the same ability as other EC citizens to live and work in any country of the Community. In this context, Turkey's taking up the "Germany is the new Fourth Reich" campaign can be especially dangerous. It should be clear that these arson attacks are aimed also at destroying German-Turkish relations as a potential counterweight to the Entente Cordiale of France and Britain. Germany accounts for 25% of Turkey's foreign trade. The substantial trade surplus it enjoys with Germany and the remittances from nearly 1.6 million Turks who reside in Germany, are Turkey's most important sources of hard currency.

Destabilization of the region

The dashing of Turkey's aspirations in Central Asia and Europe would serve to define it as another Middle Eastern Islamic country and potential victim of the same Anglo-American geopolitical doctrines that have had tragic consequences for all the countries of the region. Yet this is the domain where Turkey is seen with most suspicion by its Arab neighbors. As a NATO nation, it is seen as a stalking horse for imperialist powers. Its support of the anti-Iraq coalition in the Gulf war cut Turkey off from Iraq, its major source of non-cartel-controlled oil. Its control of the headwaters of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers and the massive Ataturk Dam project are viewed with suspicion by both Syria and Iraq.

The escalation of the Kurdish insurgency, with the recent announcement by Abdullah Ocalan, leader of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), of an all-out and bloody offensive against the Turkish government, must be seen in this context. With a death toll into the thousands since the beginning of 1993, it cannot be dismissed as simply a terrorist problem, but it is undermining the very stability of the Turkish state. While much has been said about the role of Syria and Iraq in backing the PKK, that insurgent party enjoys equal support from Anglo-American and Russian intelligence services, as well as the Israelis.

The Turkish government's escalation of security operations against the PKK in the southeast region brings Turkey into potential conflict with bordering Syria, Iraq, and Iran. An equal danger is posed by the threat that the current insurgency in the southeast could be transformed into a full-blown ethnic conflict that could pit ethnic Turks against ethnic Kurds, plunging Turkey into an extremely severe internal crisis, fraught with dangers for the Middle East as a whole.