

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

27 January 1995
Trabzon, Turkey

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Chechnya

I wrote about a month ago that I had come to Trabzon to get a first-hand look at how Soviet disintegration has affected a Turkish town. I find that my task has been complicated since then by the debacle in the Caucasus. It falls to me today to make some preliminary comments on how Trabzon has been affected, not exactly by Soviet disintegration, but by the Russians' heavy-handed attempt to halt the process. The invasion of Grozny, capital of a self-proclaimed independent Chechnya, sent a shock-wave along Turkey's Black Sea coast this winter. The distance from here to Grozny is 500 kilometres, approximately the same as to Ankara. The disaster in Kobe shook the Turks because their country too is earthquake-prone, but the upheaval in Caucasus shook them worse because the epicentre is geographically and psychologically nearer. The impact on Trabzon has been obvious in some ways but more subtle in others, since there have been emotional as well as material repercussions.

Chechens boys, Russian generals -- Material repercussions -- Urban emigrations

Trabzon merchants have relied heavily on the CIS trade for three years now. When the winter war started they were braced for a drop in business but they crossed their fingers for a quick rebound. Trade is slow during December and January anyway. Some have told me since that they expected either a successful blitzkrieg on Grozny, followed by pacification and calm, or a cut-your-losses retreat on the part of the Russian army if it got its nose stung: in either case, a short war and a hoped-for return to normality. Both scenarios were unrealistic from the start. It is easy to say so in retrospect but a drawn-out struggle was predictable beforehand too. Trabzon shopkeepers deluded themselves about the nature of the Chechen and Russian combatants.

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Since 1925 the Institute of Current World Affairs (the Crane-Rogers Foundation) has provided long-term fellowships to enable outstanding young adults to live outside the United States and write about international areas and issues. Endowed by the late Charles R. Crane, the Institute is also supported by contributions from like-minded individuals and foundations.

Others knew better, not least the Chechen boys hired by some of those same shopkeepers to spend their days on the street netting customers. I generally liked the Chechens that I met in Trabzon, but almost always inside there was something hard and locked-up about them. They liked to talk, but they were the sort of people who got serious and unsmiling about subjects quickly. I have mostly forgotten their names -- there was a Ruslan, and an Aptuallah, and a Müslim. Although Chechens are nominally Islamic, the cross-section I saw did not seem especially religious, and certainly not Muslim fanatics. If anything, they were national fanatics. The enmity towards Russia had been inculcated very deeply. "Don't go to a Russian doctor even if you die; for he is your enemy" is a representative (authentic!) Chechen proverb. They knew their history too, and their heroes who had fought Russia in the past -- Sheikh Mansur, Imam Gazi Muhammed and Sheikh Shamil: one boy easily lectured me on the glory days of anti-Russian resistance, the Age of the Imams 1829-1859, while I wrote furiously on a napkin.

They were telling me in mid-December that they would follow the Chechen leader Dudayev and battle to a man if the Russians moved to crush their bid for independence. I remember that the boy who gave the history lecture said his uncle lived on Avtürkhanova Avenue, the main drag which has since become Grozny's "death row." Grozny was also home to some ethnic Russians -- about 150,000 -- whose presence, they noted, could not be relied on as a tripwire or a deterrent to the Russian army since it was a company of savages accustomed to trampling even its own people underfoot. These words in particular, despite the element of exaggeration, have proved to be sadly prescient. Whether one thinks of eighteenth-century Suvorov crushing Pugachev's revolt, or of Tuchachevsky suppressing Antonov's after the Civil War, a dram of Russian history readily furnishes examples of generals who turned their sabres and guns on their fellow-citizens without much reluctance. [In fact, barring a special case like the 1825 Decembrist conspiracy, this General Babichev, who countermanded Yeltsin's orders to attack Chechnya and laid down his weapons, strikes me as being pretty much unique *in the whole of Russian history* as an officer willing to set himself at odds with the authorities.] So I suppose it should not have elicited the surprise and consternation it did in the Western press when the army went ahead and shelled Russians and Chechens alike in Grozny.

I was out of Trabzon three days before the New Year when the news broke of the Russian attack. By the time I had come back the town was empty of Chechens. Just like they said, to a man they had all gone back to fight and, of course, have not returned.

The material losses to Trabzon are easy to spot and to describe. The Trabzon leather shops that stretch in an unbroken line down some streets, the crystal shops and the shoe stores did the brisklest trade in town with the Chechens. It is a fair index of hard times that they tend to close at dusk now whereas before the New Year they stayed open until 7:30 or 8pm. Clearly the war damages them not only by denying them their Chechen customers but by destabilizing the whole region. The Ingush, the Ossetians and the Dagistanis, directly embroiled in the conflict, have vanished from the marketplaces. The numbers of Georgians and Russians dropped too as the rouble fell again. In Sochi, in the lobbies of the mafia-controlled Sochi and

Magnolia Hotels, where cash-currency exchanges informally establish the exchange rates for the whole region, the rouble fell from \$1=3,500r ten days after the war started to \$1=4,500r ten days later.

Coincidentally, the new Russian tax rates were announced in mid-January. They were accompanied by promises and threats from Moscow that this tax regime would be enforced more strictly than the old one. It is nowhere near as unreasonable as the pessimists feared -- 20% on yearly income of 5 million to 10 million roubles, 30% on yearly income above 10 million. Moreover, tax evasion is still widespread. But the feed-box noise in Trabzon market is that the announcement is making Russian traders cautious and conservative as they digest what it means for their profit margins. In summary, no one in Trabzon expected business to thrive in winter anyway but now it does not look like it will bounce back in spring either, certainly not to its previous levels.

So what will happen now? To describe Trabzon as a boom-and-bust town is an exaggeration but, as I mentioned last time, for some time now its fortunes have been cyclical. Chechnya has accelerated a downturn. That is when those who can, think about leaving. One catches more snatches of conversation today about relatives who have moved away in search of work. Local kids in the billiard halls (billiards is very big in Trabzon) or kids in from the nearby towns of Bayburt or Gümüşhane say they might try their chances and join the urban emigrations to Ankara and Istanbul.

The dimensions and dislocations involved in these emigrations, incidentally -- which are becoming a feature of modern life in many second- and third-world countries -- are staggering. In its relative impact, I am sure the like has not been seen since the days when the first megapolises collected under the Sung or the Abassids. Istanbul is a city of about 13 million today and grows by half-a-million people per year (one person per minute). This number puts it third in terms of demographic expansion behind Mexico City (2 million/year) and Cairo (1 million/year). A study by the Istanbul City Dynamics Institute, published this month, calculated that 20.91% of the total emigrant population in Istanbul came from the Black Sea region (second most came from East Anatolia, 14.71%). The truth is that the Black Sea Turks and Laz have always been the country's most mobile element, even during the last century. Most Ottoman subjects landing at Ellis Island were Sephardi Jews or Greek and Armenian Christians, but among the Muslims the majority were villagers, small farmers and shepherds from the Black Sea.

Emotional repercussions -- Green headbands

The emotional fall-out from the war is trickier to sort out. The Chechens garner widespread support and sympathy in Turkey. They resonate in the Turkish collective imagination for being a Muslim, Caucasian people facing off against Turkey's historical enemy Russia. Ten million Turks claim to be Caucasian in origin, some with genuinely close links but many whose connections are tenuous and distant but who are dusting off those lineages for the

luxury of feeling that they can share in the struggles of their Chechen brothers. A group called the Turkish North Caucasian Cultural Association became active as the war heated up. Its directorate began issuing some pretty inflammatory anti-Russian soundbites but they have piped down now, mainly, one suspects, under pressure from Ankara. Many Caucasian Turks live on the eastern Black Sea. When Deputy Prime Minister Murat Karayalcin came to Trabzon seeking support for his party, he read his audience well. He shrewdly assured them that Turkey was ready to shelter and care for refugees and wounded from Chechnya. It was an easy promise to make, since there have been none to date. But these words were received positively.

The recasting of the war as a struggle between Orthodox Christianity and Islam has sold newspapers. But I think it is a dangerously short-sighted piece of opportunism that will rebound on all our heads by making the "Clash of Civilizations" scenario a self-fulfilling prophecy. I note with regret that the Turkish media has only been following the practice of the Western wire services, where the Chechens interviewed are always named Ali, wear a green headband, and profess themselves either gazis or jihad warriors in the service of Allah. Consequently, the Turkish daily Zaman, close to the Islamic-oriented Refah ("Welfare") Party, regularly carries letters from readers brimming with praise for Caucasian Muslim freedom fighters.

Chechnya has the makings of "Bosnia II" insofar as Turks might understand from it that Western powers connive at the death of Muslims. On the other hand, I have found men in the coffeehouses to be surprisingly sophisticated in appreciating the dilemma Ankara finds itself in: it cannot officially support the Chechens' attempt to secede from Russia, lest it open the door to accusations of hypocrisy from its own Kurdish secessionists. There is a twist to this, however. Every one of my coffeehouse friends, without exception, supports Ankara's war against the PKK to the hilt. They want terrorism stamped out. During the process, they stoically accept that there might be "collateral damage" to civilians, citing some version of utilitarian sacrifice for the greater good. The greater good entails keeping Turkey unified and whole without capitulating to traitors who want to carve out a separate Kurdistan. I enjoy pointing out that Moscow might feel rather similarly about their situation, substituting "Kurds" with "Chechens" and "collateral damage" with "the citizens in Grozny." My reward is always a glassy stare.

Slogans -- Pins and epaulettes

The Trabzon municipal government, controlled by the Refah Party, has launched two new slogans. I would be sorry to see them pass into oblivion so I thought I would immortalize them here.

The first could summarize the town's whole policy towards visitors from the CIS: "Ticaret Evet, Fuhusa Hayir" -- "Yes to Trade, No to Prostitution." (The number of prostitutes in town remains around a couple thousand, primarily Russians and Georgians.) I had to laugh at that

when I saw it because if prostitution is not trade then I do not know what is. There's a false syllogism here: "Yes to A but No to B" is a doomed attempt to separate categories because in reality A and B overlap.

The train of thought concerning this uninspiring slogan might happily end there. It is fun, though, to take a short step further and dig up a deeper problem with it. "Yes to Trade" endorses free movement of goods and people, the right to own and dispose of property, etc. "No to Prostitution" reflects an imperative to morally regulate people's conduct. Not only do A and B overlap, they conflict at many points. To separate out the requirements of a healthy economy and a healthy social order and then keep them in balance is truly a very hard undertaking, as a cursory look at any Western-style democracy will prove. Suddenly a slogan that implies in a jingle that making such choices is easy looks less benign than at first sight. Indeed, the Refah Party has attracted many with simplistic, Koran-infused messages that suggest that there are clear-cut answers, and that things could be straightened out with a little more moral discipline and righteousness... naturally without giving any sense that to make those choices, something else will have to be sacrificed... Refah's little slogan pleases me because, admittedly with some stretching and intellectual game-playing, it can be made inadvertently to point toward some of the rocks on which Refah would most likely founder if it ever won national power.

The second slogan is less deserving of comment: "Sanata Evet!" -- "Yes to Art!" That has its funny sides too, though (What is the counterproposition? No to Art?). The "Yes to Art!" campaign is primarily directed at supporting the local theatre. Its first victory came this month, when it attract a well-known dance company, the Modern Dans Toplulugu, from the capital to the provinces for an evening. Not surprisingly, anyone who is anyone in Trabzon was in the audience. Despite being no one in Trabzon, I got a ticket from a friend in the Town Hall. I arrived for the performance as people were taking their seats.

The Trabzon State Theatre is a provincial theatre with no frills beyond a small foyer. The seats are all stall-seats, arranged meeting-hall style on a slight gradient. I had a good place close to the stage. Just before the lights dimmed, I became aware of the woman sitting to the front-left of me. My attention was drawn to her because she was stretching her back and I saw that she must be fully six feet tall. Her hair seen from the back was straight and severe. I was feeling well, bold enough to try an exchange of pleasantries, so I leant forward intending to tap her shoulder. Moving closer I saw her more carefully. I was instantly so transfixed with surprise that I jumped back in my seat and drew back my hand as if it had landed on a hotplate. Where I had expected a jacket or a chemise I had seen she was wearing a wolf-grey military uniform. Moreover the finger sent to do the tapping had been heading for an epaulette bearing officer stripes. I had never heard of a female Turkish officer before -- certainly not in Trabzon! -- and anyway the uniform was wrong. So I collected myself and peered forward again, itching with curiosity. I had just managed to read off from her shoulders and high collar studded with naval pins that she was a Georgian Navy Commander, when the theatre went dark.

It turned out she was a member of a four-person Georgian military delegation who were the official guests of the Turkish navy for the week. The whole party stood up together at the interval and trooped into the foyer. Their delegation was led by a Rear-Admiral. They had come to observe Turkey's "Black Sea-95" naval exercises, designed to test navy-air force C3 (ie. command, control, communications) cooperation. Parties from Ukraine, Russia, Romania and Bulgaria had also been invited. A Turkish naval group had sailed to Trabzon to pick the Georgians up. They would be sleeping on board, departing the next day. I went down to the water in the morning to see the two big warships pulled into the dock, the Adatepe and the Alcitepe. Two more (the Inonu II and the Capt. H. Burak) had dropped anchor just outside the harbour.

I don't know if the four had been selected more for their skills as warriors or as diplomats. During the break they were clinking glasses very cheerily with their Turkish hosts and putting on a good face considering that the bar only served tea. The tall woman showed them off pretty well and the Turkish men failed to conceal their admiration. I got her to say one interesting thing to me. I asked her if the exercises were in any way related to events in Chechnya. She said no, they had been planned well in advance; "but given the timing she had to admit that they were a useful reminder of Turkey's presence in the area."

APPENDIX

I attach an article I wrote this month for the Japanese journal Gendai. It is a treatment of one aspect of Central Asian energy politics as they relate to Turkey, focussing on this month's energy summit in Ankara. Its style and tone caters for its semi-academic, policy-concerned readership.

I consider "policy analysis" of this sort to be easy writing, certainly in comparison with stripping off the camouflage for newsletter writing, which is arduous. So I am not saying it's a bad article, but I am banishing it to an appendix in the spirit of those aristocratic families in literature who looked askance at their aberrant or half-witted relatives and shut them up in a separate wing of the house.

APPENDIX:

**PLAYING GEOPOLITICS IN CENTRAL ASIA:
THE TURKMENISTAN-IRAN-TURKEY GAS PIPELINE PROJECT**

(Adam Smith Albion)

A Prism to Bring Central Asia in Focus

On 17-18 January 1995 delegations from five countries met in the Turkish capital Ankara to concretize plans for building a natural gas pipeline from the Central Asian republic of Turkmenistan to Europe. The countries represented were Turkmenistan, Iran, Turkey -- the three whose territories the pipeline will cross -- Russia and Kazakhstan. This summit, hosted by Turkish President Süleyman Demirel and chaired by Turkmenistan President Saparmurad Niyazov, was the third in a series (previous meetings had taken place in the Turkmen capital Ashkhabad and in Tehran) to advance a project which has been hailed by Demirel as the flagship project of Turkish-Central Asian regional cooperation. Thus the issues at stake in Ankara were more far-reaching than just economics or business. The summit, especially its surprise -- and for Turkey, unwelcome -- conclusion, brought into sharp focus the competing political and geostrategic interests that will shape Central Asia's future.

The Players in the Drama

Since gaining their independence after the break-up of the Soviet Union, the Turkic republics of Central Asia and Azerbaijan have attracted interest for their exotic, romantic associations and for their huge, untapped natural resources -- in particular, Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan for their oil reserves and Turkmenistan for its natural gas reserves. Although Turkmenistan is the smallest of the Central Asian countries (3.9 million people), Niyazov believes selling its gas can quickly make it the richest, like a "natural gas Kuwait." (Niyazov's regime is also the most repressive in Central Asia, but, like the Kuwaiti ruling family, he has calculated -- correctly -- that interested Western business will easily overlook the fact.) Turkmenistan's gas fields are estimated to hold 8 trillion cubic metres of gas at the minimum (maximum estimates range as high as 21 trillion). To get an idea of what that number means, Turkmenistan on average has been producing 84 billion cubic metres/ year (1991 figures). At that rate, Turkmenistan's reserves would last between 100-250 years.

Turkmenistan (like Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan) has inherited the Soviet-era pipeline system through which, at Moscow's command, it used to supply the other Soviet republics. Georgia and Ukraine, fed by pipelines which cross Russian territory, today are economic basket-cases, millions of dollars behind in gas payments to Turkmenistan. Turkmenistan is anxious to reorient its exports in order to be linked directly to rich, industrialized hard-currency customers. Although there are plans to lay a pipeline running south to Iran's Harg Island, and

even to build another one running 6,000 km east to China, from where gas can eventually reach Japan, Turkmenistan's real hope is in a route to Europe.

The two possible routes are north above the Caspian Sea, crossing Russia, or south beneath it, crossing Iran and Turkey. (In the wake of Soviet disintegration, the new legal status of the Caspian Sea as a territorial or international waterway is presently under dispute, which makes building a pipeline under it problematical.) The northern option brought the prospect of unwelcome Russian involvement at a time when Turkmenistan was looking to reduce its dependence on Russia. There were manifest dangers that Russia could hold Turkmen gas hostage if a new pipeline ran over its territory.¹ On the other hand, there were risks in a rapprochement with Iran and in seeking to build a coalition between Turkey, Iran and the West, which the southern option required. The West's good-will and financial muscle will be necessary to realize the project, despite its apprehensions about a deal involving Iran. Reviewing its choices, Turkmenistan chose the southern option, signing a 30-year pipeline agreement with Turkey on 1 May 1992 and a 25-year agreement with Iran a little over a year later.

The government of President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani in Tehran, meanwhile, has shown itself eager to win back the confidence of the Western business community, and therefore willing to participate in a project where it could prove itself. The project also fits into a series of feints Iran has made towards promoting a notion of regional security centred on Tehran. Turkey, too, sees advantages to Iranian cooperation. Although relations with Iran are dicey, Turkey hopes that a successful gas project might re-open talks on an oil pipeline from Iran, much discussed but never realized.

Turkey has regarded the unforeseen creation of independent Central Asia as a godsend. Since the majority nations in five of the countries to emerge from the USSR are Turkic, it was quick off the mark in trying to make political and economic capital out of the new republics. Turkey, fearing that the loss of the Soviet threat might reduce its strategic role in the Western alliance, has been hard selling the idea that it is now a "bridge" to Central Asia. The Turks were quick to establish air routes and telecommunications links, while Turkish businessmen stressed that their common Turkishness made them excellent partners and middlemen for any ventures into Central Asian markets. There have been two summit meetings between the heads of the six Turkic countries (Turkey, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan). The first took place in the Azeri capital Baku in October 1993, held at the instigation of then Turkish President Turgut Özal; the second in Ankara in October 1994, hosted by Demirel. The summits emphasized common bonds, friendship and cooperation. Despite few practical results, they contributed to a perception of pan-Turkic unity and influence, which some found threatening.

In particular, watching these developments with growing apprehension and public protest has been Russia. Moscow was uneasy with the notion of a "Turkic bloc," and Özal's remark that there were Turks from Belgrade to the Wall of China unfortunately fed the flame. Russia's history of struggle with the Mongols, medieval Turkic peoples, and Islam in general began to

be topical in the Russian newspapers. Vladimir Zhirinovsky especially cultivated an anti-Turkish position and fed into a general sense of alarm, fostered by events in Afghanistan and Tajikistan, that Russia's southern borders might somehow be under threat again.

In addition, since late 1992 Moscow has pursued a foreign policy jealously defending its right to exert influence throughout the ex-Soviet space or "Near Abroad." In line with this policy, Russia threw its long shadow over the Second Turkic Summit by issuing statements on its eve that there would be grave consequences if any "anti-Russian" decisions were made. Moreover, President Boris Yeltsin flexed his muscles by announcing a CIS summit in Moscow immediately on the tail of the Turkic Summit in Ankara. In the spirit of a giant who tugs on his dog's leash to remind it who is master, Yeltsin thereby obliged Demirel's guests to fly directly from Ankara to Moscow. Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Azerbaijan still must rely quite heavily on Russia for their own economic stability and military security. Because of its southernmost geographical position (sharing no border with Russia), natural resources, and small population, Turkmenistan can afford to be the most independent of Moscow.

Russia has a concrete interest in ensuring that it has a say over how the Turkic republics' energy gets delivered. It has exerted heavy pressure from the beginning both to secure continued access to energy sources, and to get a share in any profits from exploiting them. In the case of Kazakhstan's massive Tengiz oil field, for example, Russia successfully pressed for a stake in the development, ostensibly on the grounds that, as the Soviet successor state, Russia should reap some of the benefits of the infrastructure that the Kazakhs inherited from the USSR. However, Russia's influence and strong-arm tactics may be seen most clearly over the development of Azerbaijan's oil fields. In addition to winning a significant stake in any Azeri oil profits, Russia has insisted that the pipeline carrying Azeri oil go over Russian territory to the Russian Black Sea port of Novorossiysk. From there it would be shipped by tanker through the Bosphorus Straits into the Mediterranean Sea.

This position has brought Russia into conflict with Turkey on two counts. First: Ankara strongly opposes the idea since it would imply a great increase in the volume, and hazards, of shipping through the straits. Turkey fears disastrous spillages in the middle of Istanbul, today a city of approximately 13 million people. Due to the perils of navigating the Bosphorus, which narrows to only 800 metres near the centre of Istanbul, there are already some 50-60 collisions per year. Consequently, Turkey began regulating shipping in the straits last year, a practice that Russia rejects as a contradiction of the 1936 Montreux Convention providing for free shipping through the straits during peacetime. Turkey has hinted that, if the Azeri pipeline is built to Novorossiysk, it may be forced to unilaterally revise the Montreux Convention even farther, a suggestion which the Russians resent.

Second: Turkey prefers that the Azeri pipeline be built across its own territory, debouching at a Mediterranean port on Turkey's southern coast, for the same reasons that Russia wants to have it on its territory: to win construction contracts, collect transit fees, and for strategic reasons to increase its own leverage.

The foregoing discussion has been intended as a sketch of the economic and geopolitical background to the January 17-18 summit held at the Ankara Sheraton Hotel, formally referred to as the Turkmenistan Natural Gas Interstate Council meeting.

The Meeting's Three Surprises

Sitting around the table, in addition to the delegations from the "Big Five" (Turkey, Turkmenistan, Iran, Russia and Kazakhstan), were representatives of six construction firms angling for contracts and eight international financial institutions that were reportedly interested in investing in the project. Also observing were officials from Bulgaria, Romania and Hungary, the countries that the pipeline will cross after leaving Turkey as it heads to its European terminus, which is intended at present to be Vienna. Observers from Ukraine lobbied for a diversion of the pipeline across their territory to serve East Central Europe. Niyazov was chairman.

First of all, as expected, the agenda included the formal creation of companies to supervise the project. Of the three new companies, the most important is Turkmenistan Transcontinental Pipeline (TTP), responsible for laying down pipelines, choosing materials and awarding contracts. It is to be financed 35% by the countries of the Interstate Council, 65% from overseas sources. The names of institutions to be approached reportedly included the World Bank, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, the Islamic Development Bank, and the Japan Overseas Investment Association. The two other new organizations created were the Turkmenistan Natural Gas Production Company and the Turkmenistan Natural Gas Finance Company.

On the other hand, given the extensive, coordinated work that had gone into preparing its agenda, the summit was rife with surprises. The first surprise came from the chair, in the form of Turkmenistan's request that, in future, Ukraine be added as the sixth member of the Interstate Council. Turkmenistan argued that Ukraine's skills and experience, derived from its relatively advanced metallurgy and automotive industries, could be a help in the pipeline project's construction work. Although it was not said so openly, by reading between the lines it is easy to see the shadow of a behind-the-scenes agreement whereby Ukraine has offered to repay a tranche of its \$700 million gas bill to Turkmenistan "in kind," in the form of skills and services. It was decided in a vote that Ukraine would participate at the next meeting.

The second surprise was an announcement by Iran that it favoured a change in the route of the pipeline. While the Iranians are only empowered to dictate the route insofar as it crosses Iran, the change would imply a new route through Turkey, which the Iranians consequently supported. Presumably with an eye to their own internal employment and consumption patterns, the Iranians now favoured a "northern alternative" for the pipeline, whereby it would pass through Tebriz, north of Tehran, via Ankara to Canakkale on the Dardanelles (Tebriz-Agri-Erzurum-Erzincan-Sivas-Yozgat-Ankara-Canakkale: northern route total distance, 3348 km). The Turks, however, favour the "southern alternative," whereby it would pass through Tehran, via Van on its way south to Adana (Tehran-Van-Bitlis-Siirt-Batman-Gaziantep-Adana:

southern route total distance, 3080 km). Near Adana it would be linked with an already existing Turkish gas pipeline.

The Turks were taken by surprise by the new proposal, maintaining that the southern route was what had originally been agreed to. Chairman Niyazov did not have a position, insofar as the Turkmen are themselves undecided precisely where the pipeline will leave their territory. They are still studying two gas fields close to one another in the south of the country, the Sovetabat and Duletabat fields. Thus the two competing proposals were left on the table with no immediate solution to the impasse foreseen between Iran and Turkey.

The source of the third and biggest surprise was the presence in Ankara of ex-US Secretary of State General Al Haig. Haig officially joined the meeting to present the report of an international consortium which includes US-CIS Ventures, a company operating in the post-Soviet space which Haig heads. The consortium had been commissioned by the Turkmen government to make recommendations on the extraction, marketing and transport of the Turkmen gas. According to Haig's presentation, a 1,260 km pipeline could be built from Turkmenistan's Hasan Kuli region to Turkey's Dogubeyazit region at an estimated cost of \$2.5 billion. (A connection to Dogubeyazit would lie on the "northern route" preferred by Iran.) The total cost of extending a pipeline to Europe by 2015 was given (with unnerving precision!) as \$8,679,202,000. Haig's report was formally accepted by the national delegations.

However, Haig had a larger role to play, and was wearing more hats, than anyone expected. The Turks were informed with fifteen minutes' notice that Niyazov would be having a private meeting with Haig. It turned out that Haig had also come to Ankara to lobby on behalf of US-CIS. At the end of the Haig-Niyazov private meeting, it was announced that the new company Turkmenistan Transcontinental Pipeline would be buying all its materials from USCIS. The value of those orders to US-CIS was estimated at \$2.56 billion. Haig snatched the cherry from under the noses of Turkish construction and supply firms, especially the Turkish state-owned pipeline company BOTAS, whose General Director Hayrettin Uzun had been part of the Turkish delegation and had been confidently assuring reporters that Turkey would be getting a juicy bite. Turkish columnists the next day sadly acknowledged that Haig was the summit's big winner and dubbed him "the Businessman General."

A Postmortem of the Meeting

The Turkmenistan Natural Gas Interstate Council meeting ended leaving a number of unanswered questions, as well as supplying some important pointers for the future. When will the pipeline begin construction? (Niyazov said that gas would be reaching Turkey by 1998, but the Iranians said it would take much longer.) Will national firms be responsible for the individual sections of pipeline? How is financial risk divided? What concrete roles will Russia and Kazakhstan play?

A postmortem of the summit suggests that there are some hard lessons for Ankara to absorb. In a way, it was a miniature morality play about Turkish hubris. It will teach Ankara to stop believing its own rhetoric about Turkey's role as guide and older-brother to the fledgling

Turkic republics. Central Asia does not need a matchmaker to introduce it to the West, to judge by the Haig-Niyazov deal. At the two Turkic Summits, the professions of unity, cooperation and preference among Turkic nations were not insincere, but they were unrealistic. All the new republics of that region are fragile and poor. As such they are up for the highest bidder. A fuzzy sense of shared past and culture will not outweigh tangible offers of economic benefit or military security. Kazakhstan, for example, which is a member of the CIS, is in the rouble zone, and is entering a customs union with Russia, sat at the table in Ankara as much as an ally of Russia's as a partner of Turkey's.

Although Turkey has been forthcoming in "soft aid" such as telecommunications help and university scholarships, it has failed to create a sense among Central Asians that they should be politically committed to Turkey. It has not won their "hearts and minds." Ankara tasted major disappointment for the first time when shares in the Azeri oil deal were carved up last year: the Turkish company was taken aback when, far from being treated as a preferred big brother, it was awarded only 1.7% by the Azeris. (There are suggestions that figure might be revised up.) The Haig-Niyazov deal was the second such major disappointment. To the extent that Turkey aimed to forge an open partnership with its fellow Turks based on common interests and culture, such as is enjoyed by the "Anglo-Saxon countries" Great Britain and the United States, it has failed; this too should have been brought home by the way in which the Haig-Niyazov deal was secretly negotiated and sprung on the Turkish hosts, embarrassing them on their own ground.

Turkey does still have cards up its sleeve. In particular, Russia's war in Chechnya is "good" for Turkey, at least from the viewpoint of its energy politics, because of Chechnya's geography. While that region is in turmoil, a pipeline route from Azerbaijan to Novorossiysk becomes very unattractive. The pipeline could be targetted for sabotage and or suffer accidental, "collateral damage." By comparison, Turkey -- despite its own turmoil in the east, as government troops battle the Kurdish PKK organization in a drawn-out guerilla war -- looks peaceful and secure. Ankara hopes that reminders that Russia can be unstable, plus the precedent of a successful gas pipeline project across Turkey, will make investors in the Azeri deal see Turkey in a more favourable light, apply pressure on Russia, and reject the oil route to Novorossiysk. Furthermore, a Turkish-Iranian oil pipeline, mentioned above, could become a reality. Finally, as a sideshow to the gas summit, a protocol was signed in Ankara between Turkey and Turkmenistan envisaging possible cooperation in bringing Turkmen oil out through Turkey as well. If Turkey could win any of these three projects, its position would be enhanced vis-a-vis other countries in the region looking for routes to the West.

The inclusion of Ukraine may have been solely motivated by Turkmenistan's need to collect its debts, but it has a beneficial side-effect by establishing Ukraine as a regional player. Ukraine has been left in limbo since 1991, essentially ignored internationally except as the object of a single-minded US policy to remove Soviet strategic missiles from its territory. However, this country of 52 million people cannot be left in the cold for too long. Its participation in a project of regional significance is a good sign.

Russia's presence at the table was a sign that Turkmenistan is able to reduce, but not to eliminate, Russian involvement in its affairs. Although it is an exaggeration to say that Russia is reasserting its hegemony over the "Near Abroad," it is clear that it intends to make its presence felt. As Russian Energy Ministry Undersecretary Anatoli Shatalov, a member of the Russian delegation, said: "This project cannot be realized without Russia." He drove home the point by reminding his audience that he was the same man who had said earlier, "The Azerbaijan [oil] pipeline project cannot happen without me." He rejected, however, the idea that Russia would help finance the Turkmen gas project, suggesting instead that Russia would supply technical know-how. In that Russia would neither be buying into the project nor shouldering any of its risk, Shatalov succeeded in leaving the impression that Russia's claim to a share in the project's decision-making was that Turkmenistan fell within the "Near Abroad" and thus within Russia's sphere of influence. Turkey will have to reconfigure its thinking and adjust to the reality that, from now on, it will have to contend with Russia's heavy presence in Central Asia.

As Russia expands its influence in Central Asia, smoothing its path may well be United States interests. A striking idea to emerge from the more thoughtful Turkish analyses of the Haig-Niyazov deal was that ultimately it would benefit Russia. Turks are increasingly suspicious that the United States is either complicit in Russia's "Near Abroad" policy, or turning a blind eye to it. The logic of those suspicions traces a windy route, from the US failure to help Muslims in Bosnia and Chechnya to a perception that both Russia and the US appear willing at times to support the Kurds over the Turkish government. Whatever the steps in the argument, the conclusion, which is valid and defensible, is that the US prioritizes stability in the "Near Abroad" and will compromise its principles for the greater good of supporting Russia if such support promotes stability.

This is a cynical interpretation of the US-Russian declared "strategic partnership." It is highly unlikely that official US foreign policy would be crafted to the advantage of Russia and to the detriment of Turkey, a long-standing ally. However, private American business interests may work differently as they work to maximize their own profits, inadvertently harming the interests of friendly countries. The business alliance between USCIS and TTP -- and the suggestions that an American, David Nicoll, would be named to be head of TTP in Turkmenistan -- may be a backdoor for Russia to penetrate and exert leverage over the project. Americans will almost certainly be less adverse to some Russian participation than the Turks would have been. Haig himself seemed to stress the opportunism of American firms when he was quoted as saying, "Wherever there is this much profit to be made, it is unthinkable that the USA will not be involved." Under such circumstances, it is easy to believe that Americans will take the path of least resistance and cooperate with Moscow when it is beneficial for them to do so, although it may be to the detriment of the long-term interests of a nominal ally such as Turkey. This is especially likely to happen in areas where Moscow is vigorously asserting its rights to involvement and influence, such as Central Asia.

These are unpleasant facts for Turkey which it should face nevertheless. Turkey did have a headstart in Central Asia but complacency as well as its own domestic economic woes prevented it from fully capitalizing on it. Alliances and orientations are shifting in Central

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Asia, in the same way that sunflowers change direction, turning their faces depending on the position of the sun. Turkey was bold but too hasty in assuming it would be that sun.

NOTES

¹These dangers were dramatized on the opening day of the summit, coincidentally. It was reported by the Bulgarians that the flow of natural gas in the Russia-Ukraine-Moldova-Romania-Bulgaria-Turkey pipeline had suddenly fallen by 10%. As a result, there was none left for Turkey. It was unknown whether Russia had temporarily closed the spigot to penalize Ukraine for unpaid bills, or whether Ukraine had siphoned off more than its share leaving less for the rest, both of which things have happened in the past.

January 20, 1995

Received in Hanover 2/21/95.