

# Euphrates rising?

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*The drying up of the Euphrates as foretold in the sixth vial was mostly fulfilled by the demise of the Ottoman Empire. Yet as long as Turkey still exists the Euphrates is not fully dry. In fact, Turkey has recently been seeking to increase its influence in the Middle East.*

**R**EVELATION 16 states, "And the sixth angel poured out his vial upon the great river Euphrates; and the water thereof was dried up, that the way of the kings of the east might be prepared" (v. 12). The Euphrates symbolises Turkey and the former Ottoman Empire. The demise of the Ottoman Empire in the nineteenth century was a dramatic fulfilment of this prophecy. As Brother Thomas wrote:

"Admitting, then, that 'the Great River Euphrates' is the symbol of the Ottoman Power to whose empire it belongs, who can doubt that its water has been drying up during all the past forty-eight years; and that therefore we are assuredly contemporary with the outpouring of the sixth vial, in the course of which Christ reappears upon the earth? It is evident, that nothing supports the feeble remains of the once mighty power of Turkey, figuratively and proverbially styled 'the Sick Man', but the Policy of the Antichristian Powers, founded upon their mutual jealousies and ambitions".<sup>1</sup>

Christadelphians have tended to regard the drying up of the Euphrates as something which has long been completed, being marked by the final demise of the Ottoman Empire in the First World War. However, the Euphrates power has not yet been completely dried up. The existence of Turkey itself is testimony to this. But, in addition, the Turkish power has been threatening once more to overflow its borders.

## Kurdish rebels

On 15 October 2007 the BBC reported that "Global oil prices have surged to fresh highs after increased tensions between Turkey and Kurdish rebels in northern Iraq and concerns over production".<sup>2</sup> The Kurdish rebels belong to the Kurdistan Worker's Party (known as the PKK). This group was formed in the late 1970s with the ultimate goal

of an independent state in southeast Turkey. The increase in oil prices is a measure of how potentially serious this conflict may become.

Around 35,000 Turks and Kurds have been killed in southeastern Turkey during the past twenty years. A unilateral ceasefire was declared by the PKK in 1999 when their leader, Abdullah Öcalan, was captured. But in 2004 the PKK resorted to arms, and regular attacks have been carried out against Turkish territory from camps based in the Kandil Mountains in northern Iraq. The PKK has been a supporter of the US and therefore the US has been reluctant to attack them. Moreover, the US has been keen to preserve the comparative stability in northern Iraq.

Turkey has threatened to make raids across the border into northern Iraq to deal with the PKK. Turkey is also concerned that the Iraqi city of Kirkuk, with its nearby oil deposits, may become a capital of a Kurdistan Regional Government. At the time of writing, there is great concern being expressed at what could follow from any Turkish action. The Iraqi deputy prime minister, Barham Saleh, told the BBC, "If Turkey as a neighbour of Iraq allows itself the right to intervene militarily in Iraq, what is there to prevent other neighbours from intervening?"<sup>3</sup> Turkey has been massing troops on the border with Iraq. Whether or not it intervenes, clearly Turkey is currently more like a river that is going to burst its banks rather than a river which is drying up.

## Harking back to the past

It would clearly be wrong to overstate the case with regard to possible Turkish military action across the border in Iraq. It is a far cry from the empire-building of the Ottomans. However, it is interesting to note that commentators have detected a change in Turkish society, one of the characteristics of which is a harking back to its Ottoman past.

1. Thomas, J. (1921, eighth edition), *Eureka: An Exposition of the Apocalypse*, Vol. III, Birmingham, C. C. Walker, pp. 551-2.
2. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/business/7044937.stm>.
3. [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle\\_east/7046765.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/7046765.stm).

According to the academic Stephen Larrabee, there is “a more positive attitude toward Turkey’s Ottoman past”.<sup>4</sup> And, as he further writes, “in effect, Turkey is rediscovering the region of which it has historically been an integral part. Especially under the Ottomans, Turkey was the dominant power in the Middle East; its republican period—with its emphasis on non-involvement in Middle Eastern affairs—was an anomaly. Turkey’s current activism is a return to a more traditional pattern”. There is, then, at least the desire amongst Turks to reactivate their Ottoman past, if not the actual ability to do so. Such a desire, of course, flies in the face of the prophecy of the sixth vial and will therefore be ultimately doomed. The river Euphrates will eventually dry up.

The aspiration towards the Ottoman past is just one aspect of other changes taking place in Turkish society. For example, traditionally there has been a pro-Western elite in Turkey, but this is weakening. The emerging new elite is more nationalist, conservative and religious. As part of this trend, the prime minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, has succeeded, in part, in fusing nationalism and Islam.

### Turkey and the West

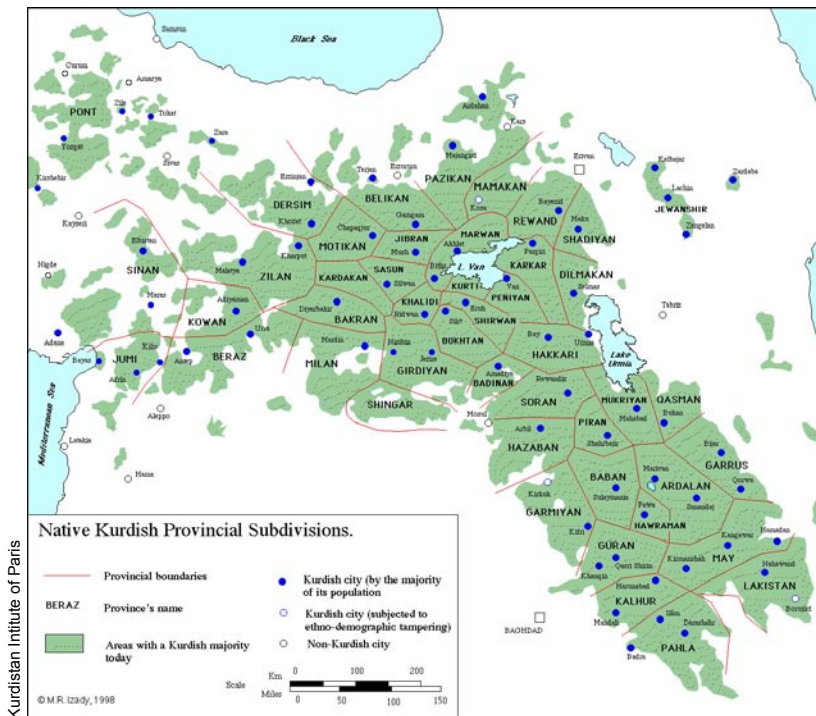
Although it is still seeking EU membership, the relationship that Turkey has with the West has

changed for the worse in recent years. Reasons for this have included disagreements over Cyprus, stalled political and economic reforms in Turkey, and European concerns with regard to immigration, unemployment and EU enlargement. The relationship with the US has particularly changed for the worse.

During the first Gulf War in 1990-91, Turkey supported the US. However, the war led to Turkey losing billions of dollars in pipeline fees and trade. Also, it led to the Kurdish problem in the north of Iraq escalating. The West provided protection to the Kurds, but at the same time Kurdish nationalism increased and there was an increase in attacks by the PKK. The lack of US action against the PKK since the 2003 invasion of Iraq has contributed to increased anti-US sentiment in Turkey. Turkey has placed restrictions on the use of the US base at Incirlik in Turkey, not allowing combat aircraft to fly from there.

The relationship with the US deteriorated in October with the decision by a US Congress committee to label as genocide the massacre by Turkey

- Larrabee, F. S. (2007), “Turkey rediscovers the Middle East”, *Foreign Affairs*, July / Aug., pp. 103-14. This is an excellent and detailed analysis of Turkey, and it provided useful background information for the writing of this article.



Map taken from a Kurdish website, showing areas where Kurds live.

of over a million Armenians between 1915 and 1917.

### Turkey and the Middle East

In the 1980s and 1990s Iran and Syria supported the PKK because they wished to destabilise Turkey. However, recently Kurdish nationalism has become a threat to Iran and Syria. Iran has Kurdish populated areas which threaten its security. Kurds in Iran with links to the PKK have carried out attacks on Iranian security officials. In response, Iran has shelled PKK bases in the Kandil mountains.

As with other countries in the region, Turkey sees Iran's nuclear ambition as a potential threat. On the other hand, Iran is the second largest supplier of natural gas to Turkey and the Turkish Petroleum Corporation (TPAO) has acquired rights to explore for oil and natural gas in Iran. There is also a proposed deal to allow gas to come by pipeline from Turkmenistan through Iran to Turkey. So overall, Turkey's relationship with Iran has improved.

According to Larrabee, Turkey threatened to invade Syria in October 1998 if Syria continued supporting the PKK. Syria responded by expelling Öcalan from their country and closing PKK training camps. In 2005, the Syrian leader, Bashar al-Assad, visited Ankara, the first such visit by a Syrian leader since Syrian independence in 1946. Initially, Turkey's closer ties to Syria led to tension with Washington, but recently Washington has sought dialogue with Syria, and this may weaken tension.

Over the years, Turkey has been pro-Israel. Israel has used Turkey to reduce its isolation in the region and to put pressure on Syria. Turkey has acquired weapons and advanced technology from Israel. Recently, however, Turkey has become more pro-Palestinian. It has been critical of Israel with regard to Gaza and Lebanon. It has also provided 1,000 troops to the UN force in Lebanon.

In short, Turkey is trying to play a more active role in the Middle East, a role made possible by the invasion of Iraq by the US. As the BBC stated:



**Kurdish village in the region of Tur Abdin, Turkey.**

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“The removal of a strong Iraq from the Middle East's political chessboard has, though, greatly changed the regional dynamics. It has served to accentuate Turkish aspirations of becoming a key diplomatic player”.<sup>5</sup> This trend would seem to run counter to the prophecy of the sixth vial. Any role Turkey acquires will eventually be deactivated as Armageddon approaches.

### Conclusion

For much of the latter half of the twentieth century Russia was seen as providing the main threat to Turkey. As Larrabee wrote: “During the Cold War, the main threats to Turkish security came almost exclusively from the Soviet Union”.<sup>6</sup> Now, though, he identifies the threats to Turkey as coming from a variety of other sources, including Kurdish separatism, sectarian violence in Iraq, the rise of Iran and the fragmentation of Lebanon.

However, we know that Russia will yet prove to be the main threat to Turkey. As the latter-day little horn of the goat (see Daniel 8) and the dragon of the sixth vial, Russia will move south and occupy Turkey *en route* to its invasion of Israel and Egypt. Only then will the Euphrates power of Turkey be truly dried up.

5. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/7039506.stm>.

6. *Op. cit.*