

Turkish official urges Kurdish rebels to surrender

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Associated Press

ANKARA: Turkey on Friday urged Kurdish rebels to "lay down their arms and come home," but rejected calls from rebel supporters and Kurdish politicians to start a dialogue with imprisoned Kurdish rebel chief Abdullah Ocalan.

Interior Minister Besir Atalay said Friday that the government was trying to end fighting with the autonomy-seeking rebels by improving democracy and human rights in the process. However, Deputy Prime Minister Bulent Arinc ruled out any dialogue with Ocalan.

A group of unarmed Kurdish rebels and refugees arrived in Turkey from northern Iraq this week in a peace gesture. But celebrations by thousands of

Kurds chanting illegal pro-Ocalan slogans and waving banners of the rebel group angered Turkish authorities, triggering protests and legal action by prosecutors. The military strongly criticized the celebrations after their arrival.

"The incidents are in no way acceptable," Major General Ferit Guler told a news conference. "Everybody should refrain from acts that could drag the country toward polarization, separation and conflict." The military stressed that these developments would not deter its "determination in fighting terrorism." Atalay issued a stern warning, urging everyone to use common sense for the sake of the peace process.

"No one should even think about a repeat of these scenes," Atalay told a televised news

conference. "We are taking risks, making so many sacrifices. Don't block this process. It requires patience, we expect the public's support."

Atalay said: "All we want is to stop the bloodshed, to stop the killings. We want no more blood, no more tears." Amnesty for fighters and more rights for Turkey's Kurdish minority are key demands of the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, which began attacks in 1984 and is labeled a terrorist group by the West. As many as 40,000 people have died in a war that reached its peak in the 1990s.

Turkish law pardons rebels not involved in attacks, but the PKK wants a broader amnesty that would include leaders who operate in northern Iraq, and Ocalan, a reviled figure for most Turks. The group backed

the surrender of the rebels on Monday, apparently to test the goodwill of a government that is seeking reconciliation with its Kurdish citizens. The government also keeps a list of wanted PKK insurgents, which would probably bar them from being pardoned.

But the jubilant welcoming of the rebels in guerrilla outfits across Kurdish-dominated southeast triggered angry protests elsewhere in the country. Television showed a veteran soldier smashing his framed medal to the ground and removing and waving his prosthetic limb in protest.

A retired teacher, Hulya Saglam, petitioned military authorities in the northwestern town of Edremit not to send her two sons for obligatory military service in protest, saying "wel-

coming those who fired bullets at the state with drum beating and music has hurt me," Haber-Turk television reported.

"Giving them a hero's welcome is so wrong," Arinc said.

Atalay said Turkey was expecting the arrival of more rebels from PKK camps in northern Iraq as well as refugees from the Makhmur refugee camp in Iraq, which houses an estimated 10,000-11,000 Turkish Kurds who fled to Iraq in the early 1990s during fighting between Turkish troops and Kurdish rebels. Turkish authorities accuse Kurdish guerrillas of indoctrinating children in the camp to become rebels.

The rebels traveled from PKK headquarters in Iraq's Qandil mountains, which have often been bombed by Turkish warplanes in the past.

FIRST PERSON BY ROBERTO SAVIO

Men, conflicts, societies and common sense

Iraq triggered massive demonstrations across the globe, but the ratcheting up of the number of troops in Afghanistan has generated no more than brief debates in parliaments. Obviously the intervention in Afghanistan is far more "legitimate" than the invasion of Iraq, based as it was on false assumptions about the existence of weapons of mass destruction or the false argumentation of Saddam Hussein's involvement in the 9/11 attacks. Nonetheless, it is still significant that the Afghan war, with its high human costs, is accepted as inevitable and that even the world peace movement seems resigned to it.

Man tends to resort to conflict as something natural and spontaneous. Only a society of law and order can control this tendency with any effectiveness. Over the centuries, the values and principles adopted by societies have grown more refined, although we are still far way from what could be considered acceptable. For example, there is growing acceptance of the use of humanitarian intervention in conflicts that affect high numbers of civilians. In other words, it is now thought that wars are not supposed to exceed a certain level of barbarity.

It is worth asking whether or not the destruction of Dresden or Hiroshima could happen again without arousing universal moral condemnation, which the annihilation of civilian as opposed to military targets did not arouse in that epoch. Conflicts are characterized by the level of civilization of the period in which they take place. The more primitive a society, the more frequent its conflicts and the more killing of defenseless civilians, women and children.

Imagine a creature from another planet landing on earth and asking where he was. He is told that on earth societies are divided into nations and peoples. The visitor asks how these nations relate to one another, and is told that there is an institution in charge of global governance called the United Nations that represents all countries and is charged with preventing wars between them, and that it is composed of the General Assembly, the Secretariat, the Security Council as well as different agencies, funds and programs. The extraterrestrial asks what wars are, how do they work? They are conflicts fought with weapons, the traveller is informed, although the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council have veto power and also happen to be responsible for 82 percent of world arms sales, with the United States the leader by far. At this point the extraterrestrial gets back into his ship and leaves in search of a planet with more logical inhabitants and better suited for peace tourism.

It may be because of this lack of logic that major historical events usually awaken people's hope for a better future with a substantive reduction of conflicts and arms trade. The end of the Cold War aroused the expectation of a significant reduction in military spending and thus of a giant "peace dividend" that could be invested in the development of the two-thirds of humanity in the South of the planet. But this dividend never materialized, and today the US is spending as much on weapons as the next 20 arms-buying countries.

The change in power and the inauguration of President Barack Obama has been generally perceived as a crucial time for hope, especially after eight years of a "War President" that was in an open-ended God-driven fight against the evil. But in what refers to military expenditure, legal affairs, or the Afghan conflict, few have changed apart from the important efforts by Obama's administration to reduce nuclear weapons. On the contrary, today's issue is how to increment the troops in Afghanistan. Curiously, in modern US history the only president under whom Washington was not involved in major conflicts was the very unpopular Jimmy Carter.

It has already been 10 years since the UN General Assembly approved the Declaration and its recommendations for a Plan of Action for a Culture of Peace, which is one of the most modern and ethical documents ever generated by the international community. Very little came of it since. Nonetheless, this effort raised the level of the civilisation we live in and makes war all the more detestable. Each wave of peace that breaks against the wall of violence brings its collapse a little closer.

Roberto Savio is founder and president emeritus of Inter Press Service news agency (IPS), as well as DEVNET and others. He wrote this article in collaboration with the Foundation Culture of Peace and IPS, in the framework of the 10th anniversary of the Declaration and Plan of Action for a Culture of Peace 1999-2009.

Iraqi cleric's aide warns of chaos if vote postponed

Barbara Surk

Associated Press

BAGHDAD: A delay in the January parliamentary elections could lead to chaos, a top aide to Iraq's Shiite spiritual leader warned Friday, as lawmakers remained deadlocked over legislation that would regulate the crucial national vote.

Sheikh Abdel-Mehdi al-Karbalaie, the representative of Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani in the holy city of Kerbala, said the revered cleric wants elections - set for January 16 - to be held on time.

A delay in the balloting "will lead to political and constitutional vacuum and security chaos," Karbalaie said during his regular Friday sermon in Karbala's Imam Hussein Mosque.

Iraqi lawmakers missed a deadline last week to approve new election guidelines for the January vote. The delay has worried many observers, including the United States, who fear that lack of political compromise could undermine Iraq's fragile stability and possibly affect the American troop withdrawal.

A representative of the Shiite movement led by the anti-American cleric Moqtada al-Sadr on Friday demanded a speedy withdrawal of the US forces from Iraq, warning that the continued American presence could destabilize the country that has yet to recover from years of horrific

sectarian violence.

Sadr and his Mehdi Army militia bitterly fought the American and Iraqi forces in the aftermath of the US invasion in 2003. In the past years, thousands of his followers and fighters have been detained during the Iraqi government's crackdown on militias.

Sadr himself moved to Iran over two years ago, leaving the once fearsome militia riveted with divisions and his popular political movement with weakened leadership.

In a message Friday, Sadr

Delay worries US, which fears it can undermine the fragile stability

demanding "an immediate departure of the American forces in order to preserve Iraq's safety, security and stability." His message was delivered by his aide, Sheikh Harith al-Idhari, during Friday's sermon in Baghdad's Shiite district of Sadr City.

Thousands gathered in Sadr's largest Baghdad stronghold and in other southern Iraqi cities Friday to commemorate the death of Sadr's father Grand Ayatollah Mohammad Sadeq Sadr. He was gunned down by suspected Saddam Hussein agents in 1998.



Followers of Sadr attend Friday prayers.

US DEACTIVATES ARMY ENGINEERING ARM IN IRAQ

BAGHDAD: The US military on Friday closed its command center for the corps responsible for pouring billions of dollars into major construction and engineering projects across Iraq since the invasion.

In a ceremony at Al-Faw Palace in Camp Victory on Baghdad's outskirts, General Ray Odierno, the top US commander in Iraq, led tributes to the joint civilian-military effort. Underneath a three-storey-high American flag, the US Army Corps of Engineers' Gulf Region Division (GRD) flag was rolled up as around 100 soldiers, civilian consultants and contractors looked on in the palace rotunda.

"For nearly six years now, the Gulf Region Division's mission ... has constantly returned dividends not only to our mission and achieving our objectives but to the people of Iraq,"

Odierno said at the ceremony.

"So congratulations on a job well done - be proud of what you've all accomplished, but understand that we still have work to do."

Since its inception in January 2004, the GRD has completed more than 5,000 civilian and military projects across Iraq at a cost of around \$9 billion, according to US Army information. More than six years after the invasion of Iraq, US forces are gradually reducing their presence in the country as part of a security agreement signed nearly one year ago between Baghdad and Washington.

Under the terms of the agreement, all US combat troops must leave Iraq by the middle of next year while all American forces must withdraw from the country by the end of 2011. - AFP