

BLOWBACK: US WITHDRAWAL FROM IRAQ AND THE IMPACT ON CYPRUS

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Unwanted, adverse and frequently unforeseen effects from their actions are so common that the diplomatic and intelligence communities have a word for them – blowback.

Among many significant actions affecting the Eastern Mediterranean, the gradual drawdown of American forces in Iraq is noteworthy. The recently completed Status of Forces agreement between Iraq and the U.S. has a timetable that includes limitations on what U.S. forces may do, who has to agree to their actions and when combat activities may end. Probably no part of the conversations between Iraqis and Americans prior to the conclusion of agreement conjectured about the impact on Cyprus. But the changing and diminishing role of the U.S. in Iraq may have implications for the country's negotiations about its future.

The course and conclusions of those negotiations are inextricably linked to Turkey. Its international positions are deeply affected by its domestic pressures, as is true of all countries. So it is not unreasonable to ask how its domestic affairs may be affected by the changing U.S. role in Iraq.

The answer may be in Kurdistan. The U.S. presence in Iraq has served to limit the assistance coming from its north to the minority Kurds in Turkey. Even with the U.S. present, Turkey thought it necessary to take military action in Iraq to stymie support for unrest within its Kurdish population. It is reasonable to expect that we will see more assistance to an active unrest in Turkey as the U.S. role in Iraq diminishes.

Traditionally, Turkey (like most countries) reacts to threats to the internal status quo by becoming more nationalistic, by using military means to contain or eliminate the threat, and by giving greater political power to advocates of confrontational policies.

Even now, Turkey's expressed desire to join the EU has not deterred it from international confrontational stances toward Cyprus. It has recently forcibly impeded mineral exploration at sea. It has recently forcefully objected to diplomatic openings with Russia. Neither of these suggest a domestic atmosphere in Turkey that would be supportive of an accommodation in Cyprus.

How much less supportive would that domestic atmosphere be if further manifestations of active unrest appeared in its Kurdish minority? How much more protective of perceived national interests in Cyprus would the leadership in Turkey become with national pride challenged at home? How likely is it that domestic politics would be supportive of anything less than maximalist positions in negotiations for a Cyprus settlement?

For all the positives that accompany the planned events in Iraq, they may further complicate the path of the present government in Cyprus.