

Avoid widened conflict

by The Milwaukee Journal Sentinel

Turkey - Islamic, a democracy and a NATO member - is likely a lot like the country President Bush hoped would emerge from the Iraq war.

But this ally appears poised to intercede militarily in a country that the United States has "liberated." This, if nothing else, is a lesson in the value of thinking things through when invading a region riven with age-old animosities and territorial claims.

Certainly, Turkey, provoked by attacks from Kurdish separatists taking refuge in Iraqi Kurdistan, should not encroach on Iraqi sovereignty. The Turkish parliament last week authorized just such actions.

On Tuesday, Iraq's prime minister ordered the Kurdistan Workers' Party offices closed. Another official said the separatists - labeled as terrorists by the U.S. - would announce a cease-fire (of the kind the Turks have ignored in the past), and the administration seemed to be pressuring Iraq to do more to rein in the separatists, admittedly not an easy task.

No party's interest - Turkey's, the Kurds', the U.S.' or Iraq's - is served by a widened conflict that jeopardizes gains in Iraqi Kurdistan, about the only part of the country on a semi-solid economic footing. Turkey's European Union candidacy might also be a casualty.

The war in Iraq already is sapping and dividing the U.S. Any widening would simply heap burden upon burden - weights, by the way, that this administration should have been able to foresee.

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