

Fanning the flames

People have been so busy watching the dandy Terry and the Pirates drama in the Persian Gulf between the U.S. Navy and sneaky, mine-laying Iranians that hardly anyone noticed that Turkey was attacked yesterday by Iraqi aircraft.

Another accident, like the Iraqi attack on the USS *Stark*, to be sure, but also a sign that the fires of the seven-year-old Gulf War are fanning outward.

Until recently, Turkey has remained neutral in the war between Iran and Iraq and benefited greatly from the conflict. Turkey is now a prime supplier of food, manufactured goods and transit rights to both belligerents. But now the Turks are watching as the Gulf War draws closer to their troubled mountainous borders with Iran and Iraq. This is the region where many of Turkey's eight million Kurds live. An equal number of Kurds are found in northern Iraq, Iran and the Soviet Union.

The rebellious Kurds, an ancient Indo-European mountain people, are a serious problem to Turkey, Iran and Iraq. Lately, Iraq's Kurds have allied themselves to Iran and are fighting troops of the Baghdad government close to the Turkish border. The Turks, who have been battling some of their own restive Kurds, have watched events in neighboring Iraq with mounting unease.

Iran is said to have promised the Kurds an independent Kurdistan in northern Iraq. Turkey's eight million Kurds would be quick to want to join such an entity. Now come reports that Soviet agents are busy stirring up Turkish Kurds.

Turkey has another major concern. If Iraq should collapse, it would be occupied and dominated by Iran. Iraq's main oil fields are around Mosul and Kirkuk, less than 175 miles from the Turkish border. Would Turkey allow Iraq's vital oil fields to fall to a victorious Iran? Some Turkish generals have been heard to growl that such an

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event might not be allowed to happen.

When Turkish generals growl, neighbors should listen. Turkey, with 654,000 regulars under arms, has the second-largest armed forces in NATO and is, as well, a major Mideast military power. True, the Turkish army is ill-equipped and not very mobile, but its splendid troops are tough and ferocious. In fact, if Iraq collapsed, Turkey would be the only regional power strong enough militarily to stand up to — or even beat — Iran.

Turkey has almost no oil and spends most of its scarce hard currency on imported oil. The nearby oil fields at Mosul and Kirkuk are surely a tempting target. And, it should be noted, the Turks have a valid claim to them. Britain and France carved up the defeated Ottoman Empire at the end of World War I and fabricated many of today's unstable Arab states, including Iraq. Until 1918, Iraq had been part of Turkey for more than 400 years.

Small wonder, then, that some Turks are eyeing northern Iraq. Since the 1920s, Turkey has been introspective and quiescent, absorbed with its own economic problems and unsure whether it was a European or Mideastern nation. Turkey today still faces the same vexing questions, but it is now cautiously looking outward for the first time.

There is no question that Turkey will begin acting as a western gendarme in the fractious Mideast — as Eisenhower and Dulles had once hoped. Yet the proximity of the Gulf War seems to have awakened the Turks to the awareness that they may soon have to take a more active — perhaps even aggressive role in its own security.

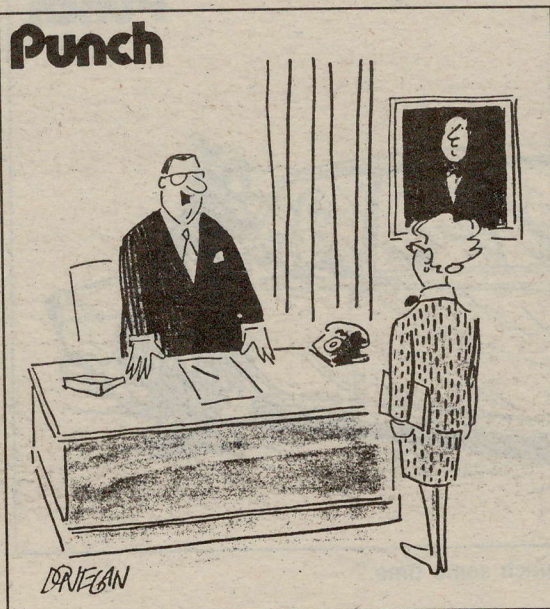
This trend bears watching. Turkey defends NATO's eastern flank and bars the Soviets from direct access to the Mideast. After West Germany, Turkey is NATO's most important frontline state.

Quite clearly, the Turks have no desire to get involved in the spreading Gulf War. Still, they cannot ignore its growing proximity. Nor should we forget history. The Turks and Iranians were bitter rivals for centuries and fought constantly for control of the region we now call Iraq and the Gulf states.

Any westward advance of Iranian power will likely reactivate this old enmity and force Turkey to begin asserting its power.

Which all goes to show just how dangerous the Gulf War is becoming. Right now, the greatest danger is that of a U.S.-Iranian clash; but we should not forget the less visible threat of involvement in an expanded war by such regional powers as Turkey, Egypt, Syria or even Israel.

The Turks are watching apprehensively — and perhaps with rising blood. After all, the thunder of battle from across the border has a way of stirring the passions of warrior peoples.



"You're a woman, Murchison.
I like that in an opportunist."