

Kirkuk, Iraq's Next War: What Options Does Turkey Have?

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ABSTRACT *As the battle for Mosul is entering its final stage, observers of Iraq's political scene anticipate a more devastating and far reaching war in Kirkuk and its surroundings. Turkey has a lot at stake in Kirkuk and the region of northern Iraq under the control of the KRG. Therefore, it is in Turkey's interest to first prevent what seems to be an inevitable clash in Kirkuk: however it should also prepare itself for the scenarios which might unfold in the event of a war. A forward policy and active engagement on the part of Turkey with all Iraqi Kurdish and Turkmen groups will be very beneficial in defusing the tense situation in Kirkuk and reaching a settlement. It is also our conviction that the convening of an international conference on Kirkuk to determine its final status will serve Turkey's interests the most.*

The Building of Tension in Kirkuk

Tensions in the oil-rich Kirkuk region, where the political ambitions, historical claims and economic interests of the principal communities –Kurds, Arabs, Turkmen and Chaldo-Assyrians– clash, have been escalating since U.S. forces toppled the Baathist regime in April 2003. Since the formation of the modern Iraqi state in 1921, Kirkuk has been an essential part of the constant and endemic crisis between Baghdad and the Kurdish movement. Before the 1970s, Kirkuk had only two principal communities: the Kurds and Turkmen. The contestant claims of Kurds and Turkmen on the

city were manipulated by consecutive governments in Baghdad. The conservative and nationalist forces who were in a power struggle with the Qasim regime, which had a leftist tendency, manipulated the ethnic tension in 1959 to destabilize the Qasim regime. This culminated in the July massacre of 1959 in Kirkuk in which tens of Turkmen notables were killed and houses and shops were looted by the Kurdish communist paramilitary units.¹ After the implementation of the Arabization policy during the last decades of the 20th century, by the regime of Saddam Hussein, the Arabs became an important ingredient of the city's cultural identity too. Therefore, the crisis in Kirkuk is complex

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and it has multi-ethnic and multi-regional dimensions.

On the occasion of the Nawruz holiday in Iraq on March 21, 2017, the Iraqi Kurdistan Regional Government's (KRG) flag was officially raised, alongside the Iraqi flag, by the provincial government of Kirkuk. In justifying his action, Najmaldin Karim, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK)-appointed governor, stated that the "KRG flag is not only the flag of the Kurds. It is the flag of all the ethnic components of Kirkuk. We tell those who want to instigate chaos: this flag is that of the Arabs and Turkmen, as well as the Kurds. It is the flag of Kurdistan which is a place for everyone." The governor also warned against any attempt to defy his orders.² This incident has given rise to great controversy among the various communities in the Kirkuk province and it added a new deteriorating factor to the already strained relations between the central government and KRG. United Nation's Assistance Mission to Iraq (UNAMI) felt the necessity to make a statement about the issue. It

would be valid to argue that the reasons behind this *fait accompli* for the controversy are: the non-implementation and complex nature of Article 140 of the Iraqi constitution which addresses the question of Kirkuk, the Kirkuk governor's souring relations with Baghdad and the Kurds' desire to achieve their historical ambitions in Kirkuk. Unless the status of Kirkuk is politically and legally addressed in the post-Mosul operation era, it has the potential to turn into a full scale and intensive conflict where the Turkmen community may suffer the most. This will consequently enhance the power of the pro-Iranian Shia militia and the central government may move to re-install its control in Kirkuk.

Governor Karim thinks Kirkuk falls within the jurisdiction of Article 140 of the Iraqi constitution. Therefore, the province should be run jointly between Baghdad and Erbil. Consequently, Karim speculated, KRG is entitled to use its authority to raise the Kurdish flag on governmental buildings. Kurdish parties were unanimous in defending Karim's action and accused the central government of deliberate procrastination in the implementation of Article 140. In addition, the governor accused the central government of denying Kirkuk its due share from petrodollars and using Kirkuk's oil revenues to finance the Shia militia and spend on other provinces of Iraq.³

However, the Iraqi Prime Minister's office is of the opinion that the Kirkuk governor does not have the authority to raise the Kurdish flag. Saad Hadisi,

Spokesperson for the Prime Minister's office, told *Rudaw* on March 19, 2017 "The constitution has clearly stipulated the powers of provincial governments and those of the federal government in Baghdad. Kirkuk is one of these governorates; hence, in places outside the Kurdistan Region, no other flag should be raised on institutions other than the Iraqi flag. This is vested with the federal government alone. Kirkuk is within the framework of these governorates and it should commit to raising the Iraqi flag only." Zaineb al-Khazriji, a law-maker from the powerful Iraqi National Shiite Alliance, on her part regarded the raising of KRG flag as a violation of the Iraqi constitution. She added that "Kirkuk is an Arab city" and called upon the government to take action against it.⁴

On April 1, 2017, Kurdish members of the Iraqi parliament left a parliamentary session while it was discussing a decision against raising the Kurdistan flag on state buildings in Kirkuk province. The Iraqi parliament approved the decision on the same day to ban the Kurdistan flag in Kirkuk, stating that only the Iraqi flag should be raised over the government institutions across the city. The parliament has also decided that only the central government in Baghdad is authorized to deal with Kirkuk's oil. Kurdish factions threatened to boycott Iraqi Parliament sessions as long as this decision is in existence. The Spokesperson for the boycotting Kurdish groups stated that the decision of the parliament is unconstitutional because it violates the princi-

ple of consensus which post-Saddam Iraq was built upon.⁵ On the same day, the KRG Presidency office also issued a strongly worded response to the Parliament's decision which said "KRG is not bound by the decision and call upon Baghdad officials to accept it as reality on the ground."⁶

In a further clear sign of defiance to the central government, the Kurdish dominated Kirkuk Provincial Council issued an announcement rejecting the Parliament's decision on Kirkuk. This rejection was based on the grounds that the Parliament's decision was unconstitutional because it violated Article 115 of the Iraqi constitution which prohibits federal authorities, especially the parliament, to legislate on matters which fall within the jurisdiction of provincial authorities. "The issue of which flag to be raised in Kirkuk is fully within the provincial authority," stated Rebwar Talabani, the acting head of Kirkuk Provincial Council. Furthermore, the decision violated the principle of consensus which has been clearly stated in the preamble of the constitution and all Iraqi groups have agreed in the past to adhere to it. The Kirkuk Council called upon Fuad Masoum, the Kurdish President of Iraq, not to sign the decision of the Iraqi parliament.⁷ According to the constitution, laws passed by the Iraqi parliament will automatically become a law after 15 days. The President's signature is not technically mandatory. But the President may resort to the use of his powers granted to him in Articles 60, 67, and 68 to delay the implementation of any law passed



Kirkuk Provincial Governor Najim al-Din Karim raises the Iraqi flag to fly next to the Kurdish flag over a government building in the northern Iraqi city of Kirkuk on March 28, 2017.

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by the parliament. It is expected that President Masoum will try to help parties to find a compromise. He will be under a tremendous amount of pressure to defend Kurdish interests. Should Baghdad politicians exert pressure on him or refuse his request to address Kurdish concerns, he will probably resign and this will put Iraq in a serious political and legal crisis. The Turkmen and Arab population of Kirkuk were equally disgruntled and infuriated by the Kirkuk governor's action to raise the KRG flag in Kirkuk. In an announcement issued by all Turkmen parties, they stated that they considered the action in violation of the Iraqi constitution and called upon UNAMI to convey their serious concern to the UN. Hasan Turan, Deputy Head of Turkmen Front of Iraq (TFI), pointed out that the provincial

administration "committed a constitutional mistake," stressing that the boundaries of the Kurdish region was set in a law and "Kirkuk is not part of it." The Turkmen groups described the action as unilateral on the part of the Kurds and underlined that it would harm national reconciliation, harmony and peace in Kirkuk, a goal towards which all parties in the past had worked to achieve.⁸

As a sign of growing tension between Turkmen and Kurds, on March 25, 2017, the Information Bureau of TFI called upon all Turkmen to resist raising the Kurdish flag on their offices and to raise the Turkmen national flag in their places of work and houses.⁹ This creates a potentially dangerous situation since the Turkmen and Kurds live in intermixed

neighborhoods. In fact the bloody encounter of 1959 between Kurds and Turkmen took place in a highly charged atmosphere which was very similar to what has been taking place since March 14, 2017. Kirkuk Arabs were not less vocal in expressing their outright opposition to raising the Kurdish flag in Kirkuk. Ahmed al-Ubaidi, the Coordinator of the Arab-Congress of Kirkuk, told *al-Mada Press* on March 19 that “the process of raising the Kurdish flag is a death knell to the Arab presence in Kirkuk.” However, the Arabs of Kirkuk stated their activities will be peaceful and within the law. Both Arab and Turkmen lawmakers in Baghdad have unanimously voted for the parliamentary decision to ban the KRG flag in Kirkuk.¹⁰

Being aware of the unfolding critical situation in Kirkuk, on March 20, 2017, Turkey’s Foreign Ministry Spokesperson, Hüseyin Müftüoğlu, said that raising the Kurdish flag in Kirkuk is a unilateral action and it “will harm reconciliation efforts and destabilize and endanger Iraq... Such attempts run the risk of eroding the multicultural identity of Kirkuk, which embodies the social, cultural and economic wealth of Iraq.”¹¹ Commenting on the same issue, Presidential Spokesperson İbrahim Kalın, in a press conference, conducted on March 31, stated “We say this is wrong, too. We have conveyed our messages to the relevant officials. This move could spark new sources of ethnic-based tension not only around Kirkuk but in all of Iraq. Our expectations are that officials in Kirkuk will abandon such

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moves.”¹² However, a Spokesperson for the Iraqi Prime Minister’s office considered the Turkish government’s statement on Kirkuk “as an unwarranted intervention in Iraq’s internal affairs.” On March 21, 2017, UNAMI issued an announcement which cautioned “against any unilateral steps that might jeopardize harmony and peaceful coexistence among many ethnic and religious groups that rightly call Kirkuk theirs.” The statement of UNAMI added “the raising of the flag is within the jurisdiction of federal authorities in Baghdad.”¹³

Background to the Crisis

For these reasons, the situation in Kirkuk is highly charged, critical and needs the urgent attention of regional and international powers and organizations. The unsettled situation in Kirkuk has been going on for no less than a decade and many analysts have termed it as the time bomb of Iraq. On March 3, 2008, Joost Hiltermann of the Brussels-based think tank, the International Crisis Group, wrote “after the US-led invasion of Iraq in March 2003, Kirkuk was seen as a ticking time-bomb as many ...Kurds and other non-Arabs –streamed back

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to find their houses that had either been sold or given to Arabs from the south. Kurds are trying to reverse this reality with their newly gained power in Kirkuk.¹⁴ This has been the case since then and Kirkuk in many ways resembles a barrel of explosives which is waiting for an ignition to blow up. From 2003 until now, on several occasions, the situation was on the brink of going out of control.¹⁵ On one occasion in 2007, it was the former ailing President Jalal Talabani who managed to set up a kind of regime, giving an equal share to the three competing communities: Kurds, Turkmen, and Arabs to run the province.¹⁶ This delayed a full flare up which had been building for several months. On several other occasions, it was the intervention of a third party such as the U.S., Turkey or UNAMI which prevented bloodshed. In 2008, the U.S. pressured the Kurds and Baghdad to postpone the implementation of Article 140, because it did not want further instability in Iraq. Turkmen were also worried about Iraqi Kurdistan getting Kirkuk's oil revenues and they were afraid that they would be treated as second-class citizens in the Kurdish controlled Kirkuk.¹⁷ UNAMI has also

managed to delay what many consider as the inevitable clash between the various communities. However, the issues which cause tension among the competing communities have not yet been seriously addressed.

Possible Means to Avoid the Clash

The mixed history of Kirkuk and the complex and contradictory nature of the goals of the competing communities dictate that an international intervention is the only way to achieve a permanent and lasting peace in the conflict. To the Kurds, Kirkuk was always a Kurdish-majority region –shared, they readily admit, with other communities– over which they fought and suffered, from Arabization to forced depopulation and genocide. The Kurdish leadership believes the fall of the Baathist regime created an opportunity to restore Kirkuk to its rightful owners. They have done much since the fall of the regime in 2003 to encourage the displaced Kurds to return, persuade Arab newcomers to depart and seize control of political and military levers of power. The ultimate objective of the Kurds is to incorporate the Kirkuk governorate into the Kurdish federal region and make the town its capital. To the other communities, the Kurdish claim to Kirkuk is baseless and counterfeit, inspired primarily by a greedy appetite for oil revenue and they consider the ongoing Kurdish takeover of Kirkuk as an outrage. To the Turkmen, in particular, the growing Kurdish presence has caused deep resentment, as they consider

Kirkuk town historically Turkmen (while conceding that the Kurds are a significant urban minority, as well as an outright majority in the surrounding countryside). Kurds' important role in drafting the constitution in 2005 enabled them to insert Article 140 which ordains a government-led de-Arabization program in Kirkuk, to be followed by a census and local referendum by the end of 2007. Regardless of this legally gained advantage, which the constitution granted the Kurds formally, none of Kirkuk's other communities, nor the central government, approves the implementation of Article 140. Many neighboring states also oppose the annexation of Kirkuk to KRG.¹⁸

The crisis over who owns Kirkuk is not very different from the Mosul crisis, also known as Mosul affairs, which took place during 1923-1925 between Turkey and Iraq. Then, as in the current crisis over Kirkuk, the parties had allocated undue security, historical, and psychological significance to the crisis which made it difficult to make any compromise.¹⁹ For the Turks, Mosul became a critical part of their national consciousness and a matter affecting the national security of the emerging Turkish Republic. Iraq gave an equally strategic and security significance to Mosul. King Faisal I of Iraq (1921-1933) on his part stated that "Mosul for Iraq is like the head for the body." For these reasons, the conflict turned into a zero-sum game and threatened a new war between Turkey and the British government in Iraq. The bilateral negotiations at London and Lausanne failed to settle the

crisis. In 1925, this crisis was settled through the arbitration of the League of Nations in favor of Iraq.²⁰ Similarly, today KRG, the Iraqi authorities in Baghdad and several regional countries attach security significance to Kirkuk and no party is willing to present a solution based on compromise. If the Kirkuk issue remains unsettled, the International Crisis Group believes "on the basis of two years of conversations with representatives of all Kirkuk's communities, as well as of the governments of Iraq, Turkey, the U.S. and the Kurdish federal region, (that)...Failure by the international community to act early and decisively could well lead to a rapid deterioration.... The result would be violent communal conflict, spreading civil war and, possibly, outside military intervention."²¹ This is a classical case in which an internal issue is threatening both regional and international peace and order and therefore warrants a UN intervention in the matter.

Iraq's constitution calls for a separate referendum on Kirkuk's future which was supposed to be held by the end of 2007. Both Turkmen and Arab groups have worked to put the referendum off. They maintain that Kurdish authorities in Kirkuk have been involved in settling Kurds from outside Kirkuk in the province to effect demographic change.²² Liam Anderson and Gareth Stansfield, drawing on extensive research and fieldwork, conclude that finding a compromise acceptable to all sides is vital to the future stability of Iraq and unilateral action in Kirkuk will destabilize all Iraq, consequently third party inter-

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vention is necessary.²³ Richard Hall from *Public Radio International* (PRI) wrote that “What happens in Kirkuk could determine the future of Iraq.” It is not easy for either the KRG or the Iraqi government to forsake the needed oil and gas revenues of Kirkuk because the economies of both are in a dire condition.²⁴ Besides, the Kurds are trying to avail themselves of their gains in the fight against ISIS to achieve their historical national claim to Kirkuk. On February 22, 2015, Massoud Barzani stated that “today’s reality has been achieved with precious blood and we will not tolerate any change to these borders.”²⁵

However, the governor of Kirkuk, who is more familiar with the hard reality of the facts on the ground, used to think Kirkuk should be, at least for a while, a region by its own. Currently, the governor has been frustrated by the central government’s constant reluctance to address Kirkuk’s needs and he seems to have opted for immediate integration of the province with KRG. Even though this writer concurs with the Kirkuk governor’s earlier stand, nevertheless it is proposed that, for a number of reasons, an international

intervention is still needed to achieve a reasonable and lasting solution on the ground. First of all, the “executive authorities,” which Article 140 of the Iraqi constitution refers to, is Iraq’s federal government which is responsible for the implementation of the article. Kurds argue that since 2003 consecutive Iraqi regimes have been unwilling to implement this article and they failed to meet the deadline which was December 31, 2007. These governments have also failed to take any tangible measures to implement provisions of the articles with regard to the normalization and rectifying the wrong done to the non-Arab population of Kirkuk. There is no indication either that the current government in Baghdad is capable or willing to implement the article. They also believe that Article 140 has replaced in letter and spirit Article 58 of Iraq Provisional law of 2003. The subsection 2 (B) of this law states:

In the event that the Presidency Council is unable to agree unanimously on a set of recommendations, it shall unanimously appoint a neutral arbitrator to examine the issue and make recommendations. In the event that the Presidency Council is unable to agree on an arbitrator, it shall request the Secretary General of the United Nations to appoint a distinguished international person to be the arbitrator.²⁶

In 2008, KRG Prime Minister Nurchivan Barzani did express a willingness to give Kirkuk special status within the Kurdistan region.²⁷ Former Iraqi President and PUK leader Jalal



Kirkuk Provincial Governor, Najm al-Din Karim, walks on October 22, 2016 alongside police and Kurdish security forces as he visits the damaged sites where fighting against ISIS took place in the center of Kirkuk.

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Talabani has appeared to go a step further, by suggesting that Kirkuk have a provisional administrative system similar to that of Brussels in Belgium and “in a later stage its future could be solved through mutual understanding and a national agreement under Article 140.” The Brussels capital region includes both French and Flemish communities. It is a distinct federal region of Belgium, alongside Flanders (Flemish-speaking) and Wallonia (French-speaking), and although it is geographically surrounded by Flanders, it is institutionally separate from it and specific measures are taken to protect the cultural and language rights of both communities within it.²⁸ In 2011, Iyad Allawi, an Iraqi politician and a leader of Iraqiya Bloc, also called for a “special situation” for Kirkuk that would keep it under Baghdad’s control, but gives extra powers to a lo-

cal government.²⁹ Finally, in its April 2009 final report to Iraqi authorities, UNAMI proposed a series of options for Kirkuk, including becoming a standalone region or a “dual nexus” model where both the federal government and the KRG would have some jurisdiction over Kirkuk and possibly play a role in administering it.³⁰

In reviewing all these schemes for the future status of Kirkuk it is not hard to discern that a special regime needs to be worked out for Kirkuk and this can only be attained with compromise and mutually agreed upon measures. Taking into consideration the dominant political and military powers that Kurdish groups yield in the province, the significance which they ascribe to the issue and the lack of willingness on the part of the Baghdad government to meet Kurdish

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concerns; it is reasonable to expect a military confrontation between Baghdad and Erbil. In such an eventuality, the Baghdad Shia-dominated government will have an upper hand and this will help to establish Iran's grip hold of an oil and gas rich city with a considerable Turkmen population. A Kurdish journalist expressed this concern last year "the possession of F-16s and building a functioning air force coupled with Iraq's access to international arms markets as a sovereign state will increasingly give Baghdad a superior military edge that the Kurds cannot match. The Iraqi government has reached out to other countries, such as Russia, to purchase more advanced arms."³¹ In addition to its well-equipped and battle-hardened army and militias in any future confrontation with Kurdish Peshmerga (armed units) Iraq will have the full support of the Iranian army and Pasdaran (Revolutionary Guards). As time passes Iran is rapidly establishing its full hegemony in Iraq.³² The fall of KRG to the Shia dominated Iraqi regime's control will mean the extension of Iran's control over the last part of Iraq which has remained so far outside Iranian control. Tim Arango of the *New York Times* illustrates this point

clearly. He wrote recently, "Across the country, Iranian-sponsored militias are hard at work establishing a corridor to move men and guns to proxy forces in Syria and Lebanon. And in the halls of power in Baghdad, even the most senior Iraqi cabinet officials have been blessed, or bounced out, by Iran's leadership."³³

Turkey's Policy Options in Kirkuk

For Turkey, the status of Kirkuk and the security of the Turkmen in northern Iraq are linked to its overall policy objectives in Iraq. Turkish leaders are worried that the instability and disintegration of Iraq would give PKK an opportunity to extend its influence in northern Iraq. Turkey has gained stakes in KRG too with Barzani being an important asset in the struggle against PKK. Furthermore, KRG and its strong leader is a significant ingredient of the newly emerging political equation in the Middle East. Besides, Turkey has acquired large business interests, especially energy, in KRG. Thus the Turkmen factor has to be balanced against other strategic policy objectives for Turkey.

Nevertheless, the Turkmen factor has its national aspects which could not be underestimated. This has been an important issue since the formation of the "Misak-i Milli" (National Oath) of 1920 and continues to be a part of Turkish national consciousness. According to Bülent Aras, "the idea of Kurds ruling Kirkuk and controlling its oil reserves touches a nerve with Turkish nationalist circles."³⁴ Consequently,

Turkey has raised concerns regarding recent developments in Kirkuk and the issue of raising the Kurdish flag there. Some Kurdish sources have underestimated this historical factor with regard to Kirkuk and attributed the Turkish government's strong disapproval of the unilateral action taken by Kurdish leaders to the need to win the votes of the Turkish nationalists during the referendum on the presidential system which was carried out in Turkey in April 2017. Turkey finds these developments extremely dangerous. According to a Turkish diplomat, "Kirkuk is Iraq's lynchpin; if the city is attached to a specific region of the country, it will be difficult to hold Iraq together."³⁵ However, given the internal complexities and regional dimensions of the Kirkuk issue, the Turkish Government has followed a policy which could be described, to a certain degree, as timid and non-interventionist.

Policymakers in Turkey believe that their interests in Iraq will be safeguarded by achieving the stability and preserving that country's unity. In order to help to extinguish the fire next door, Turkey has to insist on its impartiality. Commenting on the Kurdish leaders' latest unilateral action in Kirkuk, İbrahim Kalın, the Spokesperson of Turkey's Presidential office stated "We [Turkey] believe that such a move would be wrong especially during such a delicate period... We do not approve the mentioning of such a matter during times of high security risks [in the region]." He further drew attention to the importance of maintaining the territo-

rial integrity of Iraq and noted that "Iraq's possible separation according to ethnic and sectarian lines would not only be limited to within the territory of Iraq but rather be spread over the region and everyone will pay the price for such a move," Kalın said while stressing that the matter must be analyzed in this regard.³⁶

Turkey has a tremendous amount of leverage over both Turkmen and Kurdish groups. Engaging Kurdish and Turkmen leaders through policies of carrot and stick is one way to bring about hard compromises. Round table negotiations for all parties in Turkey which have stakes in Kirkuk, or a Turkish sponsored meeting among all contestants' leaders in Erbil, will help to reach the needed compromises.

It seems clear that the post-ISIS emerging power dynamics in Iraq and the regional and external influences would preclude preserving Iraq's territorial unity as a unitary state or to recreate the conditions of pre-2014 Iraq. Turkey should consider finding revolutionary methods which would keep Iraq intact but simultaneously empower Kurds, Turkmen, and Sunni Arabs.

Iran's on-going strong posture in "Iranifying" the political system in Iraq leaves Sunni Arabs, Kurds and Turkmen with very limited options. The prevailing trend among the Kurds and non-Shia Arabs is to search for a new arrangement in the power relation with the Shia-dominated regime in Baghdad. Barzani's insistence on a referendum in Kurdistan is a clear re-

President of the Iraqi Turkmen Front Arshad al-Salihi gives a speech in Kirkuk to supporters who are against the referendum on independence for Kurdistan Autonomous Region on the eve of voting on September 24, 2017.

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reflection of this reality and a considerable proportion of Sunni Arab leadership thinks likewise. It is in the interest of Turkey to enlist the support of the international community to sponsor an international conference on Iraq to discuss a possible power-sharing agreement which will bring about a lasting peace in Iraq. It is advisable to encourage Sunni Arabs and Kurds to form a federal regime which may coexist with the Shia regime in Baghdad on the basis of a confederation. This regime will empower Sunnis, Arabs, Kurds, and Turkmen *vis-a-vis* Baghdad and will be a buffer between Turkey and the Iranian dominated region of Iraq. This Sunni Arab-Kurdish regime will be dependent on Turkey in many ways.

In addition, such a regime will facilitate to alleviate a lot of suffering and the political marginalization of the Turkmen which has been on-go-

ing since the creation of modern Iraq. In return for Turkey's support and acceptance of the new Kurdish entity in Iraq, KRG will be asked to create some form of partnership with the Turkmen in northern Iraq. Some form of cultural autonomy for Turkmen in Kirkuk and other mixed districts will be desirable. Besides, Turkmen rights should be enshrined in the region's constitution. In Erbil, Turkmen coexist with Kurds in a peaceful way and Turkmen's cultural and political rights have been preserved to a considerable degree. This should be enhanced and extended to other Turkmen and mixed districts.

For Turkey to play a more constructive role in the peaceful solution in Kirkuk, it should help Kurds and Turkmen to find confidence-building measures. Giving some senior executive posts in Kirkuk and KRG to Turkmen personalities from the Turkmen Front

of Iraq, allocating funds in KRG for the preservation of Turkmen culture and making the Turkmen language the second official language in KRG will be beneficial to address some of the Turkmen's concerns. Turkey may coordinate efforts with the U.S. and UNAMI either to postpone the referendum –which seems to be difficult– or encourage Kurdish leaders to give the Turkmen some assurances that the referendum and its results will not be implemented in a way to prejudice their rights.

To sum up, the situation in Kirkuk is dangerously sliding towards an inevitable explosion which will harm the interests of Turkey's friends in the KRG and TFI, and Iran will be the only party to benefit from such an eventuality. Although Kurds and Turkmen have lived in peace for centuries, there is a possibility that the unfortunate and the bloody encounter of 1959 between Turkmen and Kurds could take place again. Such a development will present a very difficult situation for Turkey and timely efforts should be expanded to bring calm to this highly tense situation. Turkey may need, among other things, to initiate an international conference to address the Kirkuk issue. Finally, Turkey needs to take some bold initiatives in order to have its impact in the process of reshaping Iraq. ■

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