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Turkey and Northern Iraq: An Overview

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Distribution of Kurdish Population

Executive Summary

In recent years, Turkish policy toward northern Iraq has been dominated by three factors:

- Recidivist Ottoman nostalgia and continued resentment at the loss of Mosul and the oil fields of Kirkuk;
- The use of northern Iraq by the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) as a platform for attacks into Turkey;
- Fears that the creation of a Kurdish political identity could further fuel separatist sentiments among its own already restive Kurdish minority.

In recent years, the Kurdistan Autonomous Region has developed many of the trappings of a fully-fledged state. It currently remains unclear whether it will be able to extend its de jure as well as de facto control over the oil-rich province of Kirkuk. It is also unclear whether the recent cooperation between the KDP and the PUK is likely to be long-lasting. However, regardless of its form, there is likely to continue to be some form of Kurdish political entity in northern Iraq with many of the features, if not the name, of a state.

The PKK is militarily considerably weaker than when it was at the height of its powers in the early 1990s. In the continued absence of a state sponsor, maintaining its presence in the mountains of northern Iraq is of critical importance to the PKK's ability to continue its insurgency.

However, in the longer term, the PKK is probably a distraction from other, more deep-rooted issues which are likely to remain on the agenda for the foreseeable future. At their heart lies the question of Kurdish identity and how to integrate Kurdish identity—or even multiple Kurdish identities—into the political map of the Middle East. Unfortunately, there do not currently appear to be any obvious answers. What is clear is that Turkey's Kurdish policies, whether applied to its own citizens or the Iraqi Kurds, have not been successful. Nor is there any indication that they will be any more successful in the future.

Demographics, Language and Religion

The Kurds

Population: No reliable figures are available for the total global population of Kurds, although they are thought to number in excess of 30 million. Around 27 million of them live in a swath of mostly mountainous terrain covering parts of Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria. In each country they account for a minority of the total population (see map on page 3).

The highest concentration of Kurds is in Turkey, where they are estimated to number around 15 million—approximately 20 percent of Turkey's total population of 75 million. Most live in eastern and southeastern Anatolia, which is also the most underdeveloped region of the country. In recent years, many have migrated to the metropolises of western Turkey. Around 3-4 million of Istanbul's total population of 14 million is estimated to be Kurdish in origin, the highest concentration of Kurds in any city in the world.

There are estimated to be approximately 5.5 million Kurds—around 8 percent of the total population—in Iran, mostly in the mountains in the northwest of the country.

The number of Kurds in Iraq is disputed, but is probably 5-5.5 million, or nearly 20 percent of the total population. Most live in the north of the country, where they constitute the majority in several provinces.

There are also believed to be over 1.5 million Kurds in Syria, where they account for at least 8 percent of the total population. However, unlike most of the other Kurds in the region, those in Syria are divided between a number of non-contiguous areas along the country's northern border.

Kurdish society has traditionally been organized according to clan. Although their influence is receding in the face of urbanization and modernization, clan identity—and loyalty to the clan chief—still plays an important role in Kurdish society throughout the region, often with significant political repercussions.

Language: The Kurdish language is composed of a number of different dialects. Most are mutually unintelligible and several are so different that linguists disagree on whether they should be regarded as different dialects or separate languages in their own right. The most common dialect is what is known as Kurmanji, which is spoken by the majority of Kurds in Turkey and Syria. Most Iraqi and Iranian Kurds speak forms of what is known as Sorani, although there are also large numbers who speak Kurmanji. In addition, in Turkey there are communities of ethnic Kurds who speak Zazaki, while some Iranian Kurds speak Gorani. There are also many Kurds who have a much better grasp

of the dominant language of the country in which they are living than they do of Kurdish. This is particularly the case in Turkey, where the state has long pursued a policy of enforced cultural homogenization and imposed often draconian restrictions on the use of Kurdish.

Religion: The majority of Kurds are Sunni Muslims, although they also include Shiite Muslims, most of whom live in Iran and Iraq. Other Kurds follow syncretic religions, such as the Alevis in Turkey and the Yazidis in northern Iraq.

The Turks

Population: The 2007 census put the population of Turkey at 70.6 million. However, it is unofficially estimated to be at least 75 million. No data are available on the ethnic composition of the population of modern Turkey. Nevertheless, Kurds are believed to be the largest minority at around 15 million. There are also substantial Laz and Arab communities.

Language: Although there are numerous local Turkish dialects, modern linguistic differences are relatively small and the various dialects are easily mutually intelligible. The process of enforced cultural homogenization pursued since the 1920s has been reinforced by the Turkish state's attempts to standardize the language and purge it of what are regarded as foreign borrowings.

Religion: Around 85-90 percent of Turks are believed to be Sunni Muslims. Almost all of the remaining 10-15 percent belong to the Alevi faith. There are also small communities of Christians and Jews.

The Turkmen

The size of the community of Turkish-speakers in Iraq known as Turkmen—also sometimes referred to as "Turcomans" or "Turkomans"—has been the subject of often heated debate. Both Turkey and Turkmen organizations have often claimed that they number more than 2 million—around 7.5 percent of the total population of Iraq [1]—and perhaps up to 3 million, or approximately 11 percent of the total [2]. However, most Western sources put the figure considerably lower at 2-3 percent of the population of Iraq, or 500,000-800,000. Perhaps more important than their overall number is their location, with a large—and again disputed—proportion of Turkmen living in northern Iraq, particularly in the predominantly Kurdish provinces of Dahuk, Ninawa, Arbil, Salah al-Din and, most critically, Kirkuk.

There is similarly no reliable information on the religious composition of the Turkmen population. However, in addition to Sunni Muslims, a large number—perhaps even close to half—are thought to be Shiite. As a result, for many Shiite Turkmen, religious identity and a sense of solidarity with other Iraqi Shiite has often taken precedence over linguistic and ethnic identification with Sunni

Turkmen and the predominantly Sunni Turkish Republic.

Kurdish Nationalism in Turkey and Iraq

With the exception of a strip of land along Iran's northwestern border, all of the territory with a substantial Kurdish population today was once part of the Ottoman Empire. Identity in the Ottoman Empire was based on religion. Although there are references in 19th century diplomatic correspondence by both Ottoman and foreign officials to "Kurdistan," they are to a geographical region—namely the area predominantly inhabited by Kurdish-speaking tribes—rather than an actual or nascent political entity. Throughout the Ottoman period, central control over the Kurdish tribes was very loose. Provided that they continued to pledge their nominal allegiance to the sultan, the tribal chieftains enjoyed a considerable degree of de facto autonomy in what were, in most cases, inaccessible mountains.

The concept of Turkish nationalism did not appear until the late 19th century, and then mainly in response to the centrifugal nationalism of the sultan's non-Muslim subjects. Kurdish nationalism did not arise until even later and, in turn, was largely a reaction to Turkish nationalism [3]. However, in both cases, nationalism was the almost exclusive preserve of the tiny Ottoman intelligentsia. Even when the Ottoman Empire collapsed following its defeat in World War I, the vast majority of both Turks and Kurds still identified themselves primarily through religion, clan, family and locale rather than any concept of "nation."

In 1920 the victorious Allies and the Ottoman government signed the Treaty of Sèvres, which not only stripped the Ottoman Empire of its Arab provinces—which were to become neo-colonial Allied mandates—but partitioned Anatolia [4]. By the time the treaty was signed, the Muslims of Anatolia had already risen in revolt under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk (1881-1938). Even though Sèvres had envisaged the creation of an independent Kurdish state in Anatolia, Kurds fought alongside Turks in Ataturk's resistance forces. Indeed, although modern official Turkish historiography portrays what it describes as the "War of Liberation" in nationalistic terms, the main motivation of the members of the resistance appears to have been religious. However, once the resistance had triumphed and Sèvres had been replaced by the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne [5], Ataturk reinvented the uprising as a nationalist struggle and set about transforming Anatolia into a secular Turkish nation state.

Initially, Ataturk had hoped to incorporate the Ottoman governorate of Mosul, which included the oil-rich fields around the city of Kirkuk—in what is now northern Iraq—into his new Turkish Republic. However, the area had been included in the British mandate of Iraq and Britain refused to relinquish control of it. It was only in 1926, three years after the proclamation of the Turkish Republic, that Ataturk admitted defeat and agreed to the border between Turkey and Iraq, which

remains unchanged today. But the loss of Mosul and Kirkuk has rankled with Turkish nationalists ever since.

The Treaty of Lausanne thus resulted in the former Kurdish subjects of the Ottoman Empire becoming minorities in what were to become three nation states: namely Turkey, Syria and Iraq [6]. Although there were already a handful of Kurdish nationalist intellectuals, it was only at this point that Kurdish nationalism gradually began to become a political force; in most cases, loyalty to tribe and family still took precedence over any concept of "national consciousness."

Inevitably, the fact that it only really emerged after the Kurds had been divided between four states, meant that Kurdish nationalism was localized from the outset. Even if some ultimately aspired to a pan-Kurdish state, in practice Kurdish nationalists initially focused on opposition to the government in the state in which they lived. The result was the development of what were effectively multiple Kurdish nationalisms rather than a single nationalist movement. The fragmentation was further exacerbated by differences of language, religion and, above all, tribal allegiance. Indeed, rival Kurdish nationalist groups within the same country often appeared more of a threat to each other than to the central government. Until relatively recently, practical difficulties meant that it was frequently very hard for groups in different countries even to communicate with each other, much less cooperate.

The Kurdish tribes had always been restive. During the 20th century, Kurds in Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran all rebelled against the central government. In a large number of cases, the rebellions were primarily local in origin, such as resistance to a central government's attempts to impose its control over a particular region or tribe. Sometimes religion was also a major factor, particularly in Turkey where Ataturk had abolished the caliphate and replaced the Islamic state of the Ottomans with a secular republic [7]. However, even if it was rarely the sole cause, Kurdish opposition to the central government was increasingly at least colored by a sense of Kurdish nationalism; not least through resistance to attempts by the central governments in Syria and Iraq to suppress minority cultures as part of campaigns of Arabization and the Turkish government's attempt not only to eradicate Kurdish language and culture but even to deny that either had ever existed [8].

Although Kurdish nationalist groups in Syria and Iran enjoyed a measure of short-lived success [9], in each case they were suppressed by their respective central governments; relatively easily in the case of Syria, less so in the case of Iran. By the late 20th century, the main focus of Kurdish nationalism had shifted to the Kurds of northern Iraq and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in Turkey. Improvements in telecommunications, transportation and access to the media meant that not only was it now easier for Kurdish rebel groups to communicate with each other, but a much larger number of Kurds were becoming exposed to nationalistic ideas and news of the exploits of Kurdish nationalist groups in neighboring countries. For the groups themselves, the practical benefits of cooperation were offset by an awareness that—regardless of any sense of ethnic solidarity—they

were also rivals. Even if their initial territorial goals were restricted to the countries in which they were active, both the Iraqi Kurds and the PKK were also anxious to be able to present themselves to the region's Kurds and the wider international community as the primary focus of Kurdish nationalism. To make matters more complicated, at one time or another, Turkey, Syria, Iran and Iraq all provided assistance to Kurdish nationalist groups in neighboring states while suppressing other Kurdish nationalists within their own borders.

The Creation of the Kurdish Autonomous Region in Northern Iraq

Although there were several rebellions under the British mandate and during the early years of independence, the emergence of what is now the Kurdish Autonomous Region (KAR) in northern Iraq has its roots in the movement launched in the 1940s by a Kurdish tribal chieftain called Mullah Mustafa Barzani (1903-1979).

Initially, Barzani appears to have been motivated not so much by Kurdish nationalism as a desire to extend his personal authority and that of his tribe in northern Iraq. However, his Kurdishness and opposition to the central government attracted the support of Kurdish nationalists. In 1946, Barzani established the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP). In 1961, a combination of tribalism, Kurdish nationalism and personal ambition resulted in him launching an armed uprising against the central state. In 1965, the government officially recognized Kurdish nationality within Iraq and promised a degree of political decentralization [10]. However, the agreement was never implemented and Barzani resumed his insurrection. He was opposed not only by the central government but also by two former members of the KDP, the writer Ibrahim Ahmad (1914-2000) and another tribal leader, Jalal Talabani (born 1933). The result was a Kurdish civil war, with the Iraqi government supporting Ahmad and Talabani, and Iran providing weapons to Barzani. In 1974, the Iraqi government offered Barzani autonomy for the Kurdish north of the country. But the autonomous region did not include the oil-rich province of Kirkuk and Barzani continued his insurrection.

In March 1975, Iran and Iraq signed what has become known as the Algiers Accord, under which Iraq resolved its border disputes with Iran in return for Tehran withdrawing its support for Barzani. In June 1975, Talabani formed the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). Backed by Syria, the PUK now launched an armed campaign against both the Iraqi government and Barzani's KDP. In March 1979, Mustafa Barzani died and was replaced as the head of the KDP by his son Massoud Barzani (born 1946). Four months later, in July 1979, Saddam Hussein (1937-2006) became president of Iraq.

Following the outbreak of the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq war, the KDP cooperated with Iran. Initially, the PUK was hostile to both sides. In 1983 it agreed to a ceasefire with the Iraqi government, but the ceasefire broke down in 1985. In 1986, the PUK joined with the KDP in calling for all Iraqi opposition parties to unite against the central government in Baghdad. Both the KDP and PUK then

fought alongside Iranian forces against the Iraqi army.

Starting in spring 1988, Saddam took his revenge on the Kurds by launching what came to be known as the Anfal campaigns. An estimated 150,000-200,000 people were killed, the majority of them Kurdish civilians. Many more were driven from their homes. In March 1988, over 5,000 Kurds are believed to have died in a chemical weapons attack on the town of Halabja.

In early March 1991, a few days after the final defeat of the Iraqi military in the 1991 Gulf War, the Kurds—led by the PUK and KDP—rose in revolt in the expectation that they would be supported by the victorious U.S.-led Allies. No such support was forthcoming. When the Iraqi army began to move into Kurdish areas to suppress the rebellion, up to 1.5 million people fled into the mountains along Iraq's borders with Turkey and Iran [11]. Media coverage of the resultant humanitarian disaster finally forced the Allies' hand. In mid-April 1991, the Allies announced that they were establishing a "safe haven" in northern Iraq, which would be protected by a ban on Iraqi planes flying above the 36th parallel. At the end of April 1991, the Kurds began to return to their homes in northern Iraq.

However, there was no guarantee that the Allies would intervene if the Iraqi central government launched a ground operation into northern Iraq. The Iraqi Kurdish leadership entered into negotiations with Saddam. In July 1991, as talks continued in Baghdad, Kurdish militia, known as peshmerga, seized control of the cities of Arbil and Sulaymaniyah. In October 1991, amid continuing tensions, Saddam imposed an economic blockade on the territory controlled by the KDP and PUK. The result was the creation of a de facto autonomous Kurdish region in the provinces of Dahuk, Arbil and Sulaymaniyah.

In May 1992, elections were held for a regional parliament. The KDP received 45 percent of the vote and the PUK 43.6 percent. Each party received 50 of the 105 seats in the assembly, with the remaining five being allocated to the Assyrian minority. The assembly formally convened in June 1992, to be followed in July by the first Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), which was composed of an equal number of KDP and PUK members, without the participation of either Barzani or Talabani.

The power-sharing agreement was short-lived. By May 1994, the KDP and PUK were at war, and the de facto autonomous region became divided between the KDP-controlled west and the PUK-administered east. In September 1996, supported by the Iraqi army, the KDP seized control of Arbil and the PUK stronghold of Sulaymaniyah. A new KDP government was proclaimed in Arbil. In October 1996, the PUK recaptured Sulaymaniyah. In January 1997, the PUK set up its own government in Sulaymaniyah. Both of the rival administrations claimed jurisdiction over all of the Kurdish-controlled territory. It was not until September 1998 that the KDP and the PUK formally signed a peace agreement in Washington. However, the Kurdish provinces remained divided between the rival KDP and PUK administrations.

In June 2002, amid growing signs that the United States was preparing to invade Iraq to topple Saddam, the KDP and PUK began to hold joint meetings with other opposition groups to discuss a possible coordinated response to a U.S. military campaign. In October 2002, at a joint session of the Kurdish parliament in Arbil, the KDP and PUK agreed to work together until new elections could be held. In March 2003, as U.S. troops massed on Iraq's southern border, Barzani and Talabani formed a "joint supreme leadership" to administer the territory under their control.

Following the overthrow of Saddam, Iraq officially became a federal state for the first time. The KDP and the PUK ran on a joint ticket in the January 2005 elections to the local parliament in the KAR [12], winning 104 of the assembly's 111 seats. Concerns about a repeat of the rivalry between Barzani and Talabani were partially allayed by the election in April 2005 of Talabani as the president of all of Iraq; a post in which he was confirmed in April 2006 following the approval of a new Iraqi constitution. When the Kurdish assembly convened for the first time in June 2005, Barzani was appointed the KAR's first president.

The Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK)

The PKK was founded in 1978 by a group of Kurdish Marxists, led by Abdullah Ocalan (born 1948). Its original aim was the creation of a Kurdish Marxist state in southeastern Turkey, which would serve as a platform for the spread of communism throughout the region. Ocalan fled Turkey in the wake of the 1980 military coup. He spent the next 18 years in the Syrian-controlled Bekaa Valley and, particularly latterly, the Syrian capital of Damascus. The PKK launched its insurgency in August 1984 with two attacks on police stations in southeastern Turkey.

The predominantly Kurdish areas of Turkey have traditionally also been the most conservative. Nevertheless, poor socioeconomic conditions and the continuing suppression of Kurdish rights—which had intensified still further in the wake of the 1980 coup—meant that the Marxist PKK had no difficulty in recruiting from the local population. By the early 1990s, it had an estimated 8,000 militants under arms and its still mainly rural insurgency had escalated to the point where it controlled large swaths of the countryside after dark. Even though a ban on speaking Kurdish was lifted in April 1991, other restrictions remained in place; the often brutal methods of the Turkish security forces, including widespread human rights abuses and the use of death squads to kill suspected Kurdish nationalists, ensured that the PKK retained a strong following among Turkey's Kurds.

However, through the mid-1990s, more aggressive battlefield tactics and a scorched earth policy—which included the razing of an estimated 3,500 villages—enabled the Turkish military to regain control of the countryside. Turkey's border with Syria runs mostly through fairly flat terrain and is relatively easy to secure. As a result, PKK militants infiltrating into Turkey would travel through

Syria to northern Iraq and the considerably more porous mountains that straddle the Turkish-Iraqi border. Throughout the insurgency, Turkey staged intermittent military incursions into northern Iraq to strike at PKK camps and forward bases. In 1998, with the PKK in retreat inside Turkey, Ankara shifted its attention to Syria, the organization's main sponsor. In the fall of 1998, Turkey massed 10,000 troops on its border with Syria and threatened to invade unless Syria withdrew its support for Ocalan. After initially prevaricating, Syria expelled Ocalan and began to close down the PKK facilities in the territory under its control. In February 1999, Ocalan was captured after attempting to take refuge in the Greek Embassy in Kenya. He was brought to Turkey, tried and incarcerated. In August 1999, Ocalan announced a cessation of hostilities and ordered all PKK units inside Turkey to withdraw from the country.

No independent figures are available, but the Turkish authorities estimate that the 15 years of fighting resulted in around 35,000 deaths, including 25,000 PKK militants, 5,000 members of the security forces and 5,000 civilians.

Despite Ocalan's announcement of an end to hostilities, the PKK maintained around 5,000 militants under arms in the mountains of northern Iraq, who were able to communicate with Ocalan in his prison cell through messages conveyed by his lawyers. In May 2004, frustrated by the Turkish state's reluctance to ease the conditions of his imprisonment, Ocalan ordered the PKK to resume its insurgency from June 2004. Most of the PKK leadership opposed a resumption of hostilities, arguing that the organization was too weak militarily [13]. Their objections, however, were overruled.

The PKK duly resumed its insurgency in June 2004, after which it has pursued a two-front strategy combining a rural insurgency in southeastern Turkey with an urban bombing campaign. However, the PKK remains considerably weaker militarily than during the first stage of its insurgency in 1984-99. It is also much more isolated internationally. Since the two countries almost went to war in fall 1998, relations between Syria and Turkey have undergone a transformation, resulting in a rapid increase in bilateral trade and warm political ties. The PKK is now included on both the State Department and the EU's lists of proscribed terrorist organizations. In recent years, even Iran, which tolerated rather than actively supported the PKK during the 1990s [14], has cracked down on its activities in the country; not least because Tehran is now facing its own Kurdish insurgency, led by the Kurdistan Free Life Party (PJAK), which was founded in 2004 and is ideologically affiliated with the PKK. As a result, the PKK's presence—and, until relatively recently, apparent immunity—in the mountains of northern Iraq is of critical importance to the organization's ability to continue its insurgency.

Turkey and Northern Iraq: 1990 to Present

Turkey's policy toward northern Iraq has traditionally been shaped by three factors:

- Recidivist Ottoman nostalgia and continued resentment at the loss of Mosul and the oil fields of Kirkuk;
- The use of northern Iraq by the PKK as a platform for attacks into Turkey;
- Fears that the creation of a Kurdish political identity could further fuel separatist sentiments among its own already restive Kurdish minority.

During the 1980s, several Turkish politicians publicly expressed their regret that Ataturk had been unable to include Mosul and Kirkuk in his new republic. In late 1990, as the U.S.-led Allies prepared to launch the First Gulf War to drive Saddam Hussein's army out of Kuwait, Turkish President Turgut Ozal (1927-1993) ordered the country's military to draw up plans to invade and occupy Mosul and Kirkuk. Ozal appears to have calculated that, after his seemingly inevitable defeat by the Allies, Saddam would be unable to oppose any incursion and that Turkey's support for the Allied operation would ensure that they did not object [15]. But Ozal failed to convince his own military. Turkish Chief of Staff General Necip Torumtay (born 1926)—who was already becoming increasingly exasperated by Ozal's disregard for the traditions of statecraft—resigned in protest at what he regarded as Ozal's adventurism. Even though the military subsequently drew up plans for an invasion, Torumtay's successor, General Dogan Gures (born 1926) bluntly told Ozal that they would never be implemented [16].

When upward of half a million Kurdish refugees fled into the mountains in spring 1991, Turkey initially refused to allow them to cross the border [17] and descend into the lowlands where it would be easier for international relief organizations to provide them with aid. It was only when the Allies had formulated a plan to establish a safe haven in northern Iraq that it finally relented.

Turkey appears to have been concerned that, once allowed to cross the border, the refugees would be reluctant to return to Iraq and that the international community would quickly tire of providing them with aid. It also suspected that, once the border began to hemorrhage, the PKK would take the opportunity to infiltrate large numbers of militants into Turkey [18].

However, once the refugees had returned to their homes, Turkey pursued a policy of engagement with the nascent autonomous region in northern Iraq. Turkey served as the main conduit for the flow of international aid into the enclave, the Iraqi Kurdish leadership paid several visits to Ankara and Turkey even provided them with passports to enable them to travel abroad, apparently calculating engagement would allow it to exercise influence and rein in the Iraqi Kurds' separatist aspirations. Some Turkish officials even suggested that the Iraqi Kurdish enclave should adopt the Turkish lira as its currency [19].

When civil war broke out in 1994, Turkey allied itself with Barzani's KDP; not least because Talabani was allowing the PKK to move relatively freely in the territory under the PUK's control. When Turkey staged military incursions into northern Iraq to strike at PKK camps and forward bases, Barzani's peshmerga served as guides, and sometimes fought and died alongside Turkish soldiers in firefights with the PKK. In return, Turkey donated captured PKK stores and arms caches to the KDP [20].

Ankara also attempted to broker a ceasefire during the civil war between the KDP and the PUK. This included the establishment in 1997 of a Peace Monitoring Force (PMF) formed of Assyrians and Turkmens—supported by Turkish special forces—to monitor ceasefire violations. In 1997 Turkey also established what has become a semi-permanent military presence in northern Iraq through the deployment of a brigade, including armor, in the province of Dahuk. The bases have served a dual purpose, providing both a platform for intelligence gathering against the PKK and providing a reminder of Turkey's military might should the Iraqi Kurds ever decide to proclaim full independence.

These concerns intensified through 2002 as it became increasingly clear that the United States was preparing to invade Iraq to topple the Saddam regime. Many in Turkey had long been worried that the overthrow of Saddam would lead to the disintegration of Iraq and the creation of an independent Kurdish state in the north. Their fears were hardly allayed by the joint adoption in 2002 by the KDP and PUK of a draft constitution which foresaw the establishment of a very loosely federated Iraqi state. The document envisaged the expansion of the area under Kurdish control to include the northern oil fields around Kirkuk, with the city itself serving as the Kurdish capital. Security would be the responsibility of the peshmerga. Perhaps most worryingly for Ankara, the document insisted on the right of the Kurdish region to secede from the proposed Iraqi federation and become an independent state.

Turkey and the Turkmen

Unlike in several other countries with a Turkish-speaking minority [21], Turkey had traditionally ignored the Iraqi Turkmen community. It had made no attempt to create overt or covert organizations amongst the Turkmen, much less to establish intelligence-gathering networks or provide them with arms. This changed with the realization that the Iraqi Kurds were moving toward statehood as Turkey suddenly began to discover its previously forgotten ethnic kin in Iraq.

In 1995, elements in the Turkish security apparatus had established the Iraqi Turkmen Front (ITF). Based in Ankara, the ITF was intended to be an umbrella for the disparate Turkmen organizations and associations in Iraq. In reality, it was largely controlled and financed by Turkey. The Turkish rediscovery of the Turkmen accelerated as the U.S. invasion of Iraq—and thus the probable end of the Saddam regime—moved closer. A growing number of academic studies and newspaper articles began to appear which stressed not only that the Turkmen were an inseparable part of the

Turkish nation but that they formed what appeared to be an ever increasing proportion of the Iraqi population.

In fact, the Turkmen appear to have suffered at least as much as the Kurds from the Arabization programs applied in Iraq. Hundreds of thousands were probably relocated from their traditional homelands in northern Iraq and replaced by Arabs. But not only was there little sign of "national consciousness," but a substantial proportion—perhaps as much as half—of the Turkmen were Shiite and tended to identify more strongly with their coreligionists that Sunni Turkish-speakers. As a result, many became rapidly assimilated into the Arab population.

After Saddam

Through 2002, discussions inside Turkey as to whether or not it would participate in the forthcoming U.S.-led coalition to oust Saddam revolved almost exclusively around the possibility of a U.S. victory being followed by the breakup of Iraq and the emergence of an independent state. At the time, the PKK had yet to re-launch its insurgency. But there were nevertheless concerns that—particularly at a time when Turkey was coming under pressure from the EU to ease some of the restrictions on Kurdish cultural rights—the creation of an independent Kurdish state in northern Iraq would inspire Turkey's own Kurds to attempt to follow suit.

In a sign that Ottoman recidivism had far from disappeared, some nationalists even saw the coming war as another opportunity to annex Mosul and Kirkuk. In August 2002, Defense Minister Sabahattin Cakmakoglu publicly declared that northern Iraq had been "forcibly separated" from Turkey in 1923 and noted that Turkey retained a protective interest in the region [22]. A few months later, Foreign Minister Yasar Yakis sought legal clarification of the status of Mosul and Kirkuk to determine whether Turkey had a claim to them [23].

Turkish public opinion and the vast majority of the country's policy community were, in principle, rigorously opposed both to Washington's plans to invade and to any Turkish participation. However, there was also an awareness that, unless it participated in the military campaign, Turkey would have little leverage if, in the wake of Saddam's overthrow, the United States contemplated acceding to Iraqi Kurdish aspirations to statehood. By summer 2002, the Turkish General Staff (TGS) had already decided that it would have to participate in the U.S.-led military campaign to oust Saddam. Although it carefully avoided giving Washington an explicit commitment, the TGS nevertheless began to enter into detailed discussions about Turkey's possible involvement.

Turkey's priority was post-Saddam Iraq, not the war to oust him. As a result, it wanted to deploy troops into northern Iraq to provide security behind the U.S. frontline forces as they fought southward toward Baghdad. Its hope was that, with a strong military presence in the north, and

with the support of the Turkmen minority, it would be able to suppress any Kurdish attempts at independence after the fall of Saddam. The TGS also drew up a number of contingency plans to ensure that Kurdish aspirations remained suppressed long after the campaign to topple Saddam was over. These included insisting that any rights granted to the other minorities in Iraq—by which it meant the Kurds—would also be given to the Turkmen on equal terms. For example, it formulated plans for the creation of a Turkmen militia, armed by Turkey and trained by Turkish officers, which would serve as a counterweight to the peshmerga. Turkish military advisors were expected to continue to serve the Turkmen militia on an almost permanent basis, thus considerably building on the long-term Turkish military presence in Iraq through the deployment of the brigade in Dahuk province.

Perhaps understandably, the Iraqi Kurds were less than enthusiastic about the Turkish proposals. They insisted that, if Turkish troops were to be deployed in Iraq, they should be located to the south of the Kurdish-controlled areas. This would still have meant that the Turkish supply lines ran through the areas under Kurdish control. The TGS was infuriated when the United States suggested that it should either consider allowing others to provide security for its supply lines or resupply its troops by air as the Kurds did not want Turkish troops in their territory. In any case, while contributing troops to the U.S.-led campaign might have given Turkey some leverage with Washington, the deployment of Turkish troops outside the Kurdish-controlled areas would have severely weakened Turkey's ability to implement the primary purpose of its participation in the war: namely to prevent the Kurds from establishing an independent state.

In the end, not only did the Turkish troops not participate in the military campaign to oust Saddam but, on March 1, 2003, a backbench rebellion in the moderate Islamist Justice and Development Party (AKP), which had come to power in November 2002, even prevented a planned 62,000 U.S. troops from transiting Turkey to open a second front in northern Iraq. When a much smaller number of U.S. troops were subsequently deployed into northern Iraq, they fought against Saddam's forces alongside not the Turkish army but the Iraqi Kurds.

The Sulaymaniyah Debacle

From the Turkish perspective, worse was to follow on July 4, 2003, when U.S. troops detained Turkish special forces in Sulaymaniyah on suspicion of plotting to assassinate the governor of Kirkuk, who was an ethnic Kurd. The Turkish forces had been assigned to Sulaymaniyah under the ceasefire monitoring agreement between the KDP and PUK and were operating out of the local headquarters of the ITF. Whether or not there really was such a plot remains hotly disputed. At the time, the United States insisted that the intelligence was sound. The TGS insists that it was a fabrication, probably by the Iraqi Kurds. What is undoubted is that the incident not only deepened the mutual suspicions between Turkey and the Iraqi Kurds, but also dealt a devastating blow to U.S.-Turkish relations in general and those between the two countries' militaries in particular. When

they detained the Turkish forces, the U.S. troops had followed standard procedures by cuffing and hooding them, holding them for three days of interrogations before they were finally released. For the proudest institution in an acutely proud nation, it was an unprecedented humiliation [24].

Although U.S.-Turkish relations slowly improved, for many in Turkey, the incident in Sulaymaniyah drove home how much influence in Washington it had lost as a result of its failure to participate in the campaign to oust Saddam. Few expected the United States now to listen to Turkey's concerns about an independent Kurdish state.

Through 2003 and 2004, a string of articles appeared in the Turkish nationalist press alleging discrimination and atrocities of the Turkmen in northern Iraq by the Kurds. Some were true, others exaggerations and yet others pure fabrications, usually by sources affiliated with the ITF. But in early 2005, Turkey finally had to accept that it overestimated both the size and the homogeneity of the Turkmen minority in Iraq. In the Iraqi elections of January 30, 2005 to elect a Transitional National Assembly, which would draw up a new constitution, the ITF won just 1.1 percent of the total vote. In Kirkuk, which Ankara had long maintained was a predominantly Turkmen city, the ITF took only 18.4 percent of the vote. In the months that followed, Ankara finally abandoned the idea of forming a Turkmen block as a counterweight to the Kurds and began to instruct its Turkmen interlocutors to cooperate with other parties in Iraq, particularly the Shiite, in order to try to block Kurdish aspirations.

The Question of Kirkuk

However, the Iraqi Kurds continued to press for the territory of KAR to be extended to include the region around Kirkuk, which they frequently referred to as "the Jerusalem of Kurdistan" [25]. They succeeded in having a pledge to put the future status of Kirkuk and other disputed territories to a referendum included in the new constitution which was drawn up by the Transitional National Assembly. Article 140 of the constitution foresaw a three-stage process, leading a referendum in the disputed territories on their future status by December 31, 2007. On October 15, 2005, the new Iraqi constitution was approved by referendum, winning the support of 78.6 percent of those who voted.

The outcome of such a referendum in Kirkuk was generally regarded as a foregone conclusion. Not only were Kurds believed to account for a majority of the population but, even though it lay outside its territory, the government of the KAR already controlled both education and law enforcement in Kirkuk and was vigorously encouraging Kurds displaced by Saddam to return to the region. However, in addition to Turkey and the Turkmen, many Arabs in Iraq were also reluctant to see Kirkuk officially transferred to Kurdish control. The deadline passed without the referendum being implemented. At the end of 2007, a UN-brokered agreement gave the various sides a further six

months to find a solution to the impasse, with the Iraqi Kurds still pushing for a referendum while the Arabs and Turkmen favor a negotiated settlement.

Cross-Border Trade

Despite the political tensions between Turkey and the Iraqi Kurds, in the wake of Saddam's overthrow economic ties boomed on the ground in northern Iraq. There had been some illicit trade even at the height of the UN sanctions regime, much of it using centuries-old smuggling routes through the mountains along the border. It had increased under the oil-for-food program which was launched in December 1996 under UN Security Council Resolution No. 986 of April 14, 1995. However, along with the legal trade through Turkey's sole border gate with Iraq at Habur had come an increasing volume of semi-licit and illicit trade. The economy of southeastern Turkey had been hard hit by the abrupt decline in trade following the imposition of the UN sanctions regime. By the late 1990s, the Turkish authorities were increasingly reluctant to clamp down on the growing illicit trade through Habur, not least because high levels of poverty and unemployment in southeastern Turkey were acknowledged to be one of the main factors fuelling recruitment to the PKK. Much of the illicit trade through Habur involved the export of Iraqi petroleum products, particularly diesel fuel, and the import of foodstuffs and consumer goods. The trade was also a lucrative source of income for Massoud Barzani, whose KDP controlled the area through which the trade passed on the Iraqi side of the border and was able to levy an informal tax on the goods transported.

However, it was not until the lifting of UN sanctions in 2003 that the cross-border trade through Habur really took off. By early 2007, the volume of bilateral trade between Turkey and northern Iraq had grown to an estimated $5 billion a year. In addition, Turkish contractors had secured an estimated $2 billion worth of construction contracts, including large infrastructure projects such as airports, highways, universities, housing complexes and even the new KDP headquarters. By early 2007 there were estimated to be 1,200 Turkish companies in northern Iraq, creating 14,000 jobs for Turkish citizens in northern Iraq and employment for several hundred thousand more back in Turkey [26]. The KAR even received around 10 percent of its electricity from Turkey. Much of the trade was conducted between Iraqi and Turkish Kurds. Several Iraqi Kurds, including relatives of KDP President Massoud Barzani, had also established companies inside Turkey which exported food and consumer goods to northern Iraq. However, the Turkish contractors in northern Iraq also included several businessmen who were known to have strong Turkish ultranationalist sympathies or links to the AKP government.

But economic relations began to sour through late 2007. One of the main reasons was the high level of corruption in the KAR. Several Turkish businessmen complained that, despite paying huge bribes to prominent figures to secure contracts, they still faced severe difficulties in collecting what they were owed [27]. By fall 2007, many Turkish companies had begun to wind up their operations against a background of increasing political tensions between the Iraqi Kurds and Turkey; this

time, not so much over Kirkuk as the PKK.

Even though it was aware of the importance of the cross-border trade to the local economy in southeastern Turkey, the Turkey government had made no attempt to take advantage of the lifting of sanctions by strengthening economic ties with the KAR. The boom in bilateral trade from 2003 onward was all the product of the initiative of private businesspeople. At a time of political tension, the Turkish authorities often either delayed the truck traffic through Habur or closed the gate completely. The government refused to heed calls from companies which were trading with northern Iraq to open a second border gate so that they did not have to funnel all of their goods through Habur. The only proposal the government made was to open a new gate at Ovakoy, which was just 10 miles from Habur. A new gate at Ovakoy made no sense in economic terms. But the area around it was predominantly inhabited by Turkmen. The AKP government appears to have calculated that the local Turkmen would thus be able to levy their own taxes on trade. Not surprisingly, the proposal to open a new gate at Ovakoy was resolutely opposed by the Iraqi Kurds.

Losing Patience with the KAR

Through 2007, both the Turkish government and the TGS were becoming increasingly frustrated by the Iraqi Kurds' failure to prevent the PKK infiltrating into Turkey from its bases in northern Iraq. With Talabani now the Iraqi president, most of Turkey's anger was directed at Barzani.

The PKK's headquarters and main training camps are situated in the inaccessible Qandil Mountains, around 40 miles south of the Turkish border. But it also has temporary camps and forward bases much closer to the border. Although it no longer has a state sponsor, the PKK has been able to use its still considerable financial resources to buy weapons on the black market—particularly from stocks which formerly belonged to units of Saddam's army—while it secures most of its non-lethal supplies from northern Iraq.

In response to Turkish pressure to clamp down on the PKK presence in northern Iraq, the Iraqi Kurds have long maintained that they lack the military capabilities to be able to hunt down and destroy the organization in what is extremely difficult terrain. However, Turkey continually points out that PKK militants are able to move around with relative impunity in northern Iraq and has told the Iraqi Kurds that, if they cannot go into the Qandil Mountains to eradicate the PKK, they should at least restrict its movements and ability to source non-lethal supplies from areas which are under Iraqi Kurdish control.

The first indication that Turkey was losing patience with the KAR came on April 12, 2007, when Turkish Chief of Staff General Yasar Buyukanit held a press conference to announce that the Turkish military was merely awaiting the order from the AKP government to launch a cross-border military

operation against PKK bases in northern Iraq. The United States had long warned Turkey against any incursion into northern Iraq for fear of destabilizing what was the most peaceful region of the country. As a result, neither the Iraqi Kurds nor the PKK leadership expected Buyukanit to be able to deliver on his threat. Nevertheless, in the run-up to the Turkish general election in July 2007, the PKK scaled back its operations inside Turkey, apparently for fear that, in a campaign dominated by ultranationalist rhetoric, an increase in Turkish casualties could put the AKP under pressure to stage a cross-border operation.

The PKK Changes Tactics

However, in early fall 2007, the PKK abruptly changed tactics. During the early 1990s, Ocalan had briefly staged a series of mass attacks with as many as 500 militants in order either to seize territory or to inflict a high number of casualties. But the larger units had also been highly vulnerable to hot pursuit operations by the Turkish military, particularly through the use of Cobra helicopters, and the practice had rapidly been abandoned. However, in September 2007, the PKK began to launch operations using over 100 militants. The intention appears to have been to inflict high casualties and then secure a propaganda victory by demonstrating Turkey's inability to respond, confident that Washington would prevent it from launching a military incursion against the organization's bases in northern Iraq.

The change in tactics backfired. By mid-October 2007, after nearly 40 Turkish soldiers had been killed in PKK attacks in less than a month, the public pressure on the Turkish government became unsustainable. At the beginning of November 2007, at a meeting in Washington between Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan and President George W. Bush, the United States agreed to provide Turkey with actionable intelligence on PKK bases in northern Iraq in return for a Turkish undertaking that any military action would be limited. In early December 2007, Turkish F-16s staged the first of what was to be a series of air raids against PKK bases in the Qandil Mountains. On February 21, 2008, in the first substantial ground operation in more than a decade, Turkish commandos crossed into Iraq to strike at PKK forward bases close to the Turkish-Iraqi border. Although the Iraqi Kurds protested, they made no attempt to oppose the Turkish operation.

The Road Ahead

Turkey's policy toward the Kurds of northern Iraq has been based on a mixture of residual Ottoman nostalgia and fears about the possible repercussions of their aspirations to some form of political independence for Turkey's own still restive Kurdish minority. To a large extent, the PKK is not only a symptom of the failure of Turkey's attempts to assimilate its Kurds but also serves as a pretext for its failure to confront the issue of Kurdish identity, enabling successive governments to attempt to equate any advocacy of Kurdish rights with support for terrorism.

For their part, the two main Iraqi Kurdish factions have been notoriously pragmatic in their relations with other political actors in the region. The Kurdish nationalist rhetoric has often been used to mask tribalism and the personal ambition of their leaders, even at the cost of the lives of their fellow Kurds. It is still too early to say whether the last decade of relatively harmonious cooperation between the KDP and the PUK will be permanent; it is also unclear whether 16 years of de facto independence in the KAR has resulted in a truly national consciousness that supersedes tribal loyalty, and whether it has really taken root among the Iraqi Kurds.

However, there is little doubt that the sense of solidarity many Iraqi Kurds feel toward the Kurds of Turkey is a major impediment to the ability of the Kurdish authorities in northern Iraq to crack down on the PKK, particularly given the recent increase in public discontent with the Kurdish authorities at the high levels of corruption and their failure to provide basic services. But it is also difficult to argue with the logic of the Turkish case that, if no one else is prepared to do so, it has the right to take action against an organization which is killing its citizens. Although Turkey is able to communicate with the KRG through numerous "back channels," it has been unwilling to communicate with it officially for fear that it would be regarded as recognition of the KRG's political authority in northern Iraq, which could further fuel the Iraqi Kurds' separatist ambitions. Yet, unless Turkey engages with the KRG, military incursions into northern Iraq are likely to inflict only short-term damage on the PKK.

In many ways, the current standoff between Turkey and the Iraqi Kurds over the PKK is probably a distraction from other, more deep-rooted issues which are likely to remain on the agenda for the foreseeable future. At their heart lies the question of Kurdish identity and how to integrate Kurdish identity—or even multiple Kurdish identities—into the political map of the Middle East. Unfortunately, there do not currently appear to be any obvious answers. What is clear is that Turkey's Kurdish policies, whether applied to its own citizens or the Iraqi Kurds, have not been successful. Nor is there any indication that they will be any more successful in the future.

Notes

[1] Iraqi Turkmen Front. http://www.kerkuk.net/kurumsal/?dil=2057&metin=19
[2] Presentation of the Iraqi Turkmen Human Rights Research Foundation to the 11th session of the UN Working Group on Minorities in Geneva, May 27, 2005.
[3] Gareth Jenkins, Political Islam in Turkey: Running West, Heading East? (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 67.
[4] The full text of the Treaty of Sèvres can be found at http://wwi.lib.byu.edu/index.php/Peace_Treaty_of_Sèvres
[5] The full text of the Treaty of Lausanne can be found at http://wwi.lib.byu.edu/index.php/Treaty_of_Lausanne
[6] Iraq became a fully independent state in 1932, Syria in 1946.
[7] The most serious was the Shaykh Said Revolt of 1924. Although it has often been appropriated by later generations of Kurdish nationalists, the Shaykh Said Revolt was primarily, though not exclusively, religious in character. See Jenkins, Political Islam in Turkey, pp. 93-4.
[8] For example, when the author first arrived in Turkey in 1989, it was forbidden even to use the word "Kurd" or to speak Kurdish. Officially, the Kurds did not exist but were "mountain Turks" who, through their isolation in the mountains, had forgotten their Turkishness.
[9] In 1946, in the confusion following the end of World War II, Kurds around the city of Mahabad in Iran even succeeded in creating their own statelet. Known as the Republic of Mahabad, it survived less than one year before being defeated by the forces of the central government and re-absorbed into Iran.
[10] David McDowall, A Modern History of the Kurds (London: I. B. Tauris, 1996), p. 318.
[11] The exodus appears to have been largely spontaneous. However, at least some of the Kurdish leaders had calculated in advance that the resultant humanitarian crisis would force the international community to intervene. Author interviews with Iraqi Kurds, Turkish-Iraqi border, April 1991.
[12] The KAR currently remains the federal state's only clearly defined region with its own assembly. Even the KAR's eventual boundaries remain the subject of bitter dispute, not least in relation to the future status of Kirkuk.
[13] Author's interviews with PKK sources, September-October 2005. Some of the dissenters subsequently left the PKK.
[14] The Iranian authorities would allow PKK militants to operate from temporary camps on the Iranian side of the Turkish-Iranian border and take refuge in Iran when under attack from the Turkish military. Author's interview with Gen. Dogan Beyazit, Istanbul, March 1997.
[15] Turkey had closed the Kirkuk-Yumurtalik oil pipeline as part of the UN-imposed sanctions regime after Saddam's invasion of Kuwait and would later allow Allied warplanes to use the Turkish airbase at Incirlik for attacks on Iraq.
[16] Author's interview with former Land Forces Commander General Muhittin Fisunoglu, Istanbul, September 1999.
[17] Unlike Iran, which immediately opened its borders to a much larger number of refugees.

[18] Author's interviews with Turkish officials, southeastern Turkey, April 1991. Turkey's concerns were probably not without foundation. The author spoke with PKK militants amongst the refugees in the mountains. Turkish-Iraqi border, April 1991.
[19] Author's interviews with Turkish government officials, Ankara, 1992-93.
[20] Author's interviews with Turkish military officials, Diyarbakir, June 1997 and Sirnak, February 1998.
[21] Most significantly Cyprus prior to 1974 but also, albeit to a lesser extent, the Azeri minority in Iran.
[22] Bill Park, Turkey's Policy Towards Northern Iraq: Problems and Perspectives, Adelphi Paper No. 374 (Oxford: Oxford University Press for the International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2005)
[23] "Eyes on Turkey," Middle East International, no. 691, January 10, 2003, pp. 14-15.
[24] Most of the Turkish officer corps were infuriated that the Turkish special forces had not resisted and died fighting rather than meekly surrendering. All of the Turkish officers involved in the incident subsequently took early retirement.
[25] Massoud Barzani quoted in Turkish Daily News, December 31, 2004.
[26] Figures taken from a survey of economic ties between Turkey and Iraq conducted by Serpil Yilmaz and published in the daily Milliyet on April 5-11, 2007.
[27] Author interviews with businessmen active in northern Iraq, Turkey, September-November 2007.

About the Author

Gareth Jenkins has been based in Istanbul since 1989, working as journalist, author and analyst. He writes extensively on political, economic and security issues related to Turkey and the surrounding region. In 2001 he published a monograph on the political role of the Turkish military, entitled Context and Circumstance: The Turkish Military and Politics. *His book on political Islam in Turkey, entitled* Political Islam in Turkey: Running West, Heading East? *(Palgrave Macmillan), will be published in spring 2008. Mr. Jenkins is a regular contributor to Jamestown publications.*