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## TURKOMANS

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**Updated October 2014**

### Profile

The Iraqi Turkomans claim to be the third largest ethnic group in Iraq, residing almost exclusively in the north, in an arc of towns and villages stretching from Tel Afar, west of Mosul, through Mosul, Erbil, Altun Kopru, Kirkuk, Tuz Khurmatu, Kifri and Khaniqin. Before the war that began in March 2003, there were anything between 600,000 and 2 million Turkomans, the former figure being the conservative estimate of outside observers and the latter a Turkoman claim. They are probably descended from Turkic garrisons or, in the Shi'a case, fugitives from early Ottoman control, although they claim to be descendents of the earlier Seljuq Turks. Approximately 60 per cent are Sunni, while the balance are Ithna'ashari or other Shi'a. Shi'as tend to live at the southern end of Turkoman settlement, and also tend to be more rural. Tiny extreme Shi'a communities (for example, Sarliyya and Ibrahimiyah) exist in Tuz Khurmatu, Ta'uq, Qara Tapa, Taza Khurmatu, Bashir and Tisin, and Tel Afar. The Turkomans, speak a Turkish dialect, and have preserved their language (despite a strong linguistic Arabization policy by Saddam Hussein) but are no longer tribally organized.

### Historical context

Turkoman historical origins in Iraq are tied, at least in part, to the role of protectors of the Ottoman empire from tribal raids. Early Turkomans were settled at the entrances of the valleys that gave access to the Kurdish areas, and this historic pacification role has led to strained relations with the Kurds.

Under Saddam Hussein the Turkomans were denied cultural, linguistic or political rights. The Ba'athists replaced thousands of Turkoman (and Kurdish) inhabitants of Kirkuk and its environs with Arabs. In the past, no Turkoman had ever held ministerial office since the foundation of the state. They have been subject to purges, including the systematic removal of all Turkomans holding senior posts in the Kirkuk oil fields and in the army, and the assassination of many. They suffered particularly in Kirkuk and Tuz Khurmatu when the 1991 Kurdish uprising was crushed.

However, although the Iraqi National Turkoman Party (established in 1988) cooperated with the Kurdish authorities in the de facto autonomous area, Turkoman relations with the Kurds were uneasy. It was the burgeoning oil industry which drew thousands of Kurdish workers into Kirkuk at the same time

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that some Turkomans were moving to Baghdad, thereby ending historic Turkoman preponderance in the 1950s. A similar process happened in Erbil. In 1959 Kurds and communists rioted, killing Turkomans in Kirkuk, an event which left a permanent scepticism about Kurdish political intentions. During Hussein's Anfal campaign in 1988, Turkomans suffered alongside Kurds. It was only the fact that the regime in Baghdad was unquestionably worse that persuaded Turkomans to cooperate with the Kurdish national movement.

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### Current issues

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Although some have been able to preserve their language, the Iraqi Turkomans today are being rapidly assimilated into the general population and are no longer tribally organized. Tensions between Kurds and Turkomans mounted following the toppling of Saddam Hussein, with such clashes becoming manifest in Kirkuk, especially ahead of the referendum on the city's future set for late 2007. Turkomans view Kirkuk as historically theirs and, with Turkish assistance, have formed the Iraqi Turkman Front (ITF) to prevent Kurdish control of Kirkuk. UN reports in 2006 indicated that Kurdish government and Peshmerga militia forces were policing illegally in Kirkuk and other disputed areas. These militias have abducted Turkomans and Arabs, subjecting them to torture. Car bombs and shootings have claimed the lives of many Turkoman civilians, as well as targeting ITF members.

Turkmen in Iraq have been the victims of violence and intimidation from all sides, whether from the central government, the Kurdish government, or Sunni and Shia militias. In particular, many Turkmen civilians have become victims of the conflict over Kirkuk, an oil-rich city disputed between Kurds, Arabs and Turkmen. A referendum was originally scheduled for 2007 to decide whether the city would remain under the control of the federal government or be incorporated into the KRG, but it has been repeatedly postponed and the status of the city is still undetermined.

Turkmen organizations have accused the Kurdish authorities, which exercise de facto authority over many of their areas, of failing to protect Turkmen civilians and encouraging their displacement. Moreover, the federal government appears unable to protect Turkmen communities from attack yet refuses to allow Turkmen to form their own security forces. In particular, the town of Tuz Khurmatu, home to a majority-Turkmen population, has suffered repeated and continuing attacks, most likely perpetrated by Sunni militants.

In early 2013, over a period of only four months, Turkmen reported 556 attacks in Kirkuk, Salahuddin and Mosul alone. Eighteen Turkmen were assassinated and 11 kidnapped, and other attacks left 54 killed, 77 wounded and 87 properties damaged, including a significant number of political representatives, judges, lawyers, policemen and teachers among those targeted. On 25 June 2013, suicide bombers targeted a Turkmen protest camp, killing 27 and injuring 80. On 12 July 2013, an attack on a coffee shop in Kirkuk left 30 people dead. On 6 October, a Turkmen school in the village of Qabak was bombed, killing at least a dozen children and the school principal. On 21 October, a bomb was detonated in a mosque in Kirkuk after Eid prayers, killing nine people and injuring 19. On 23

November, twin suicide bombings in Tuz Khurmatu killed 12 people and wounded 75. On 20 December, a suicide bomber targeted a group of Turkmen pilgrims returning from Kirkuk, leading to nine deaths and 25 injuries.

Violence has continued to intensify in 2014. In January 2014, a series of 14 explosions in the cities of Kirkuk and Tuz Khurmatu left 20 dead and over 163 injured. On 28 May, a number of Turkmen houses were bombed in Salahuddin governorate, killing four and injuring six. The following day, five Turkmen farmers were killed near Mosul.

Following the gains made by ISIS in northern Iraq, members of the group have been carrying out campaigns of terror on Shia Turkmen villages. On 15 June, ISIS took control of the Turkmen-majority district of Tal Afar in Ninewa Governorate, where they burnt down numerous Turkmen homes. An estimated 200,000 people fled the area, the majority heading to Sinjar. On 16 June, the villages of Chardaghli, Brawchi, Karanaz and Beshir were attacked. At least 40 residents were killed and several thousand displaced. Insurgents reportedly also burnt down homes, set fire to crops, stole livestock and blew up Shia mosques. Human Rights Watch also reported that ISIS militants kidnapped 40 Shia Turkmen and expelled 950 families from the villages of Guba and Shireekhan. On 21 June, militants attacked the village of Al-Shamsiyat, abducting 26 Shia Turkmen, and prompting the displacement of many families.

Whereas Shia Turkmen have been the particular targets of attack by ISIS, Sunni Turkmen have been killed in apparent extra-judicial executions by Iraqi security forces. According to reports collected by Human Rights Watch, 15 Sunni Turkmen prisoners from Tal Afar were taken by government guards from the counter-terrorism prison in Mosul on 9 June on the eve of the ISIS attack and their bodies were later found in a ravine next to al-Karama industrial district.

When ISIS forces entered Sinjar between 2 and 3 August, hundreds of Turkmen families who had taken refuge there were displaced for the second time. Upon reaching the Hazer checkpoint at the border between Ninewa and Erbil, many refugee families were kept waiting for days in the heat by the Peshmerga forces controlling the checkpoint, with fatalities reported among children and the elderly. On 7 August, militants bombed a Shia mosque in Kirkuk where many displaced Turkmen families from Tel Afar had taken refuge, killing nine.

A humanitarian emergency of particular intensity took place in the Turkmen town of Amerli in Salahuddin Governorate. The only remaining Shia town in the area not taken over by ISIS, the town was under siege from 15 June until 31 August. Water and electricity services were cut off, leaving the town's 20,000 residents to rely on well water. With food, cooking gas, and medical supplies running out, the young, the sick and the elderly were particularly vulnerable. ISIS subjected the residents to frequent rocket attacks and periodic attempts to take over the town. Dozens were reported to have died, including babies and pregnant women, before sufficient humanitarian aid was eventually delivered.

