

**An evaluation of Turkey's 'Turkmen policy' (Part II):
The Turkmen of Iraq are victims of subordination
and deteriorated national politics**

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The large size of Turkmen population in Iraq can easily be estimated by examining the vastness of the Turkmen regions. This large population's constant exposure to all types of violations of human rights is well documented. Their political system and civil society organizations have not been able to develop under the non-democratic systems of successive nationalistic Iraqi governments.

The Turkmen political structure can principally be divided into two major groups; the religious Shiite group and the nationalist conservative group within which the Sunnis constitute the majority. A third group of Turkmen organizations have been instituted by the Kurdish authorities who have limited activities in favor of the Kurdish interests.

The first regular Turkmen party was founded in secret in Ankara in the late 1980s and began its open activities in the early 1990s in Turkey and the north of Iraq (Safe Haven). The establishment of other Turkmen political parties followed and in 1995 an umbrella organization, the Iraqi Turkmen front (ITF) that included the national conservative parties and organizations, was founded. The political activities of the Shiite Turkmen who constitute about half of the Turkmen population began in 1980s abroad and were developed in close contact with major Iraqi Shiite coalitions.

By the time of occupation of Iraq in April 2003 there were several Turkmen political parties with about ten years of political experience. While the conservative nationalists have been supported by Turkey, the Shiite Turkmen group got powerful positions in the Iraqi Shiite coalitions and the Iraqi governments.

After twenty years of open political activities of Turkmen organizations and 7 years of practical experiences in the present multi-party Iraqi political system, the situation of the Iraqi Turkmen has further deteriorated: They are almost completely absent in the Iraqi political arena, they are exposed to all types of violation of human rights, they are marginalized in the administration in many of their regions and in the Iraqi government, their lands continued to be confiscated and arrests, assassinations and kidnappings take place frequently in Turkmen regions.

Accordingly the following question should be asked, "Why does a large community with several politicians, political organizations and logistical support remain suffering?" Which are the factors that influence the Turkmen politics so negatively? Which are the reasons worsening and contributing to the further deterioration of the Turkmen situation? Possible factors which should be analyzed in such equations are the people, the politicians, the organizations of the community and the external factors.

The people

Are the Turkmen people aware of the deterioration of Turkmen political situation? Certainly, yes, this is well known among the Turkmen people, particularly, among the intellectuals and the politicians.

Participation in the political process and observation of the performance of politicians and evaluation of their activities are basic responsibilities of peoples. The question here is thus: do the Turkmen people fulfill these responsibilities?

Two characteristics of the Iraqi Turkmen politics present clear answers to the preceding question: First, the Turkmen candidates received a small number of votes in the Iraqi

elections. In the last Iraqi general election the Turkmen candidates received approximately 200,000 votes, while the Turkmen sources including the political organizations estimate the number of the Turkmen in Iraq at more than two million people. Second, the public support for the Turkmen political parties is very small in regard of membership and finance.

If the Turkmen people are aware of the deterioration of Turkmen political system, why don't interfere? The answer to this question will be left to the Turkmen intellectuals, noting that under such circumstances the intellectuals and particularly the writers of a community will have to take the responsibility.

The Turkmen intellectuals and youth could not confront the challenges avoided searching the causes in the Turkmen political system and remained silent about the deterioration of Turkmen politics, particularly in regard of harmful Turkmen policy of Turkey. They isolated themselves when they could not find a position in the official political system which has been represented in the ITF. Inattentiveness and passiveness of the Turkmen political system, exposure to suppression and difficulties in fulfilling the needs to make a livelihood have made large numbers of the Turkmen people surrender to the reality and co-operate with the suppressor instead of challenging the deterioration of the Turkmen politics.

Whilst writers and media play a pivotal role in the development of the political culture and directs the dynamics to improve the national politics, the Turkmen writers could not touch the real political problems; keep peace with strictly conservative policies. The ITF front built its own media. The independent Turkmen media could not be instituted.

The politicians and organizations

Second factor to be considered when analyzing the effectiveness of a political system is the role played by the politicians and the organizations. It could be said that its power is proportional to the degree of development and welfare in a community. Furthermore, the general (national) political system is considered the major authority which manages the national affairs of an ethnic component, particularly in a multi-ethnic culture.

Powerful National political systems serve to preserve the entity, culture and literature of the people. It studies the economy and coordinates national strategies. Such systems respond to violations of human rights and also defend these rights when violated.

Despite the fact that the Turkmen community advocates for unity and solidarity, the Turkmen politicians failed to institute the National (Turkmen) Political System, due to two main factors: the external interference and subordination and adherence of the Turkmen politicians to chair of leadership.

The Turkmen political institutions have not been able to organize the Turkmen people. They suffer from a lack of members, which is considered the mainstay of political organizations, and a failure to secure basic popular support. Their administrative structures are miserable and are severely lacking of professional units and cadre. Consequently, these organizations were deprived of self-financing and suffer greatly from the financial shortage which is considered from the major disabilities of the national institutions.

The Turkmen politicians and politics enclosed within the perimeter of the Turkmen narrow policy, which is based on conservative, not transparent, lacking self-criticism and influenced significantly by ethnical and religious subordination, which made the Turkmen politics remain out of the Iraqi political arena.

As an inevitable consequence, Turkmen politicians and organizations fail in fulfilling a professional political mission. Their activities have been limited to the distribution of Aid-gifts and meats in offer feast and publication of press releases. Another known activity of the Turkmen organizations is the arrangement of friendly visits to each other, but they remain unable to organize a joint conference to discuss one of the large numbers of critical problems facing of the Iraqi Turkmen.

External factors

Several major external factors have negatively influenced the Turkmen political system since the foundation of the Iraqi state, for instance, their remains between the two major ethnic groups in a non-democratic nationalistically intolerant culture, aloneness and helplessness from which the Turkmen of Iraq suffered until the early 1990s, and marginalization by the occupation in the first years after the fall of Ba'ath regime..

The religious and ethnical subordination of Turkmen politicians and organizations have played the foremost role in the failure of contemporary Turkmen political system, which has been exhausted due to the decades of aloneness in the complex political and ethnical environment of Iraq where the Arabs have the governmental power and the Kurds enjoy international support.

Turkmen Shiite parties approached the large Iraqi Shiite parties and educated about the religious culture they became a part of these parties while maintaining their own ethnic culture. These parties have been confined to activities within the religious area and therefore remained unable to extend their ethnic popular base to ensure self-financing and the development of professional political, cultural and social activities. When the large Iraqi Shiite parties dominated the political arena, these Turkmen parties thus became invisible, despite the fact that several Turkmen politicians held important positions.

The Turkmen nationalist conservative group remains captive of Turkish financing. Ever since the start in the early 1990s, these parties have also largely been subjected to the orders issued by the ruling powers in Turkey. To facilitate easier control over the large number of nationalist Turkmen conservative political parties and civil society organizations, the ITF was founded by Turkey in 1995 and was made an umbrella organization including almost all Turkmen organizations in this group.

Noting that the Special Intelligence (Özel Kuvvetler), a higher military intelligence department of Turkish army, has handled alone the Turkmen dossier since the foundation of the ITF in 1995 until the fifth Turkmen congress in 2008, when all the Turkmen parties were expelled by fake elections and the attempts to convert the ITF to a political party started. Later on, the Turkish ministry for foreign affairs started to manage only the dossier of the expelled parties. Administration of the ITF by Turkey was relatively overt until before the fourth Turkmen Congress in 2005, after which Ankara started to administer ITF only confidentially through some of the front's leaderships.

Contradiction between Turkish and Turkmen interests in some important areas, the selection of staffs depending on the interests of the financier as well as the use of uncommon salary and work policy made the ITF an ineffective organization lacking both of professional departments and popular bases to defend the Turkmen people in a difficult historical period in a time where they have been exposed to the most brutal violation of the human rights.

The Turkmen failure in the 2005 elections resulted in a Turkish loss of confidence in the ability of the Turkmen. The ITF started to be ruled inflexibly by its new chief, Turkmen parties started to be expelled from the ITF, with funding thereby being cut off from the expelled parties. Attempts started to turn the ITF into a political organization supported by several Turkmen civil society organizations, all financed by the same source. The Turkmen Assembly has subsequently been subordinated to the ITF, both organizations being administered by Ankara through their respective chiefs.

The ITF played an important role in the dispersion of the Turkmen political system. In addition that it dispersed its components due to the futile administration, the ITF has refused or ignored all calls from Turkmen Shiite parties that still do hold important positions in the higher Iraqi administration to build a Turkmen National Political System. The leaders of the Iraqi Shiite Coalitions that form the Iraqi government have continuously advised the Turkmen Shiite leaders that the building of a Turkmen national system is mandatory to defend the interests of the Iraqi Turkmen community.

Political setbacks followed, the Turkmen disappeared from the political arena in Iraq and the Turkmen community has been exposed to all types of violations of human rights. This has created a state of despair and frustration among the Turkmen people who lost their trust in politicians and in political organizations, particularly in the ITF and its financier who are now openly criticized by Turkmen intellectuals and by the Turkmen people.

After years of political weakness and with Turkmen political organizations working each in their own limited surroundings, the chief of the Turkmen Assembly of the ITF, Yunis Bayraktar, declared in the middle of 2010 that “the time had come for the Turkmen political parties to cooperate and to work jointly”. Accordingly Bayraktar started to invite the Turkmen political parties from both groups: the religious Shiite and the conservative nationalist, to discuss institution of the General (national) Iraqi Turkmen Assembly or the Iraqi Turkmen Parliament. Noting that some of these parties had previously been expelled and others have never been dealt with by the ITF and its Turkmen assembly. The parties have been asked by Bayraktar to present their ideas and projects on a future Iraqi Turkmen parliament.

A number of meetings have been organized this far. However, the weakness of Turkmen media, the lack of an independent Turkmen press, the weakness and conservatism of the Turkmen political milieu and the absence of links between the people and the political parties have hindered the access to information about these meetings.

Most of the main Turkmen parties refused the supervision of the Chief of Turkmen Assembly, Yunis Bayraktar, and questioned its legitimacy and considered Bayraktar as not a neutral authority, and asked instead to form a committee with members from the official Turkmen parties to study all aspects of the project. Ignoring this proposal, Bayraktar continued to organize the meetings previously mentioned.

Despite the fact that about seventeen meetings have been convened, some of the party leaders deny the existence of such meetings, others attended only the first meeting, and others question the seriousness of the meetings.

The information that has leaked from these meetings indicates that there are no projects on which an assembly or a parliament for a community more than two million people can be built. The projects presented by Turkmen organizations are not enough to create a general assembly for a community which suffers from the collapse of the administrative and political system and that is furthermore exposed to all types of human rights violations.

Most of the discussions in these meetings said to be revolved around the distribution of seats, and the ITF that gets substantial funding from Turkey appears not to pay attention to the project per se and rarely participates in the meetings, while still insisting on getting the largest possible number of seats to dominate the Assembly.

Some of the Turkmen politicians and activists describe this attempt to build a General (National) Turkmen Assembly as a policy of procrastination pursued by the powers ruling the ITF, and others believe that the Chief of the ITF's Assembly, Bayraktar, is not serious in his attempt aiming to re-enter some of Turkmen political parties under the umbrella of the ITF from which these parties were expelled only a few years ago.

The ITF has about 65 branches inside and outside Iraq and a staff of hundreds. The monthly income is estimated at hundreds of thousands of dollars. The ITF does not have any particular administrative and political approach, and there is no oversight of staff performance or follow-up, with no general work plans given to the branches of the ITF in- or outside Iraq.

Most of the offices of the ITF can be considered a center where the supporters of the ITF gather, rather often come from certain families and receive different salaries. The meetings of the higher commissions of the ITF-Assembly, such as the Advisory Committee, the Executive Committee and even that of the Assembly itself are randomly held and subjected to the will of the ITF chief or to publish press releases on events and to solve other problems.

Relating to the ITF branches out of the country, after deciding the country in which an office of the ITF will be instituted, a representative will be appointed by Ankara a specific budget will be allotted. These branches are, too, given no strategy to follow and are limited to one or two person. The representatives from the different ITF offices out of country have no regular work contact with each other and with head office in Ankara. They meet, only when they for some reason, maybe once or twice per year, come to Ankara or Iraq.

The fact that the power to appoint and dismiss staff is in Ankara, has a negative influence on the work of the ITF. It can frequently be seen that staff has serious problems with each other or with managers but remain working together in the same office. The staff that is appropriate for the interests of Ankara, remains in his position despite that he lost the trust and confidence of his colleagues and of Turkmen people. For instance, the current chief of the ITF, who lost the support of most of the members of the Executive committee and of the Turkmen people, remained in his position by a fake election organized by Ankara in 2008.

The funding process of the ITF and Turkmen assembly remained completely in the hands of Ankara from the early 1990s and onwards, which enabled Ankara to control the activities of the ITF and its related organizations.

The Ankara administration of Turkmen issues is characterized by military inflexibility and retaliatory measures, two out of many examples are:

- In 2008, seven of the nine members of the Executive Committee (the largest body in the ITF) revolted against the chief of the ITF. Soon after that revolt all seven members were expelled or otherwise silenced by a false election organized by Ankara. The chief re-elected by fake election.
- In 2010 a leading member of the Executive Committee and likewise the chief of an important ITF office argued with the ITF chief about the identification of the candidates for different posts in the Iraqi government. He was dismissed together with his whole working team.

Conclusion

The suppressive Iraqi environment and decades of aloneness and exposure to heavy assimilation polices have dispersed the administrative and political abilities of the Turkmen community.

The selfish Turkmen policy of Turkey since the institution of the Safe Haven in 1991 has further dispersed the Turkmen political and civil society community, whilst Turkey had almost never involved in Turkmen issues before that date, even at the time when the Turkmen were exposed to the fiercest repression and assimilation polices.

The Religious and ethnical subordination made the Turkmen politicians and organizations fail to institute the necessary co-operation to build the Turkmen National Political System. This led to the absence of professional national political and strategic organizations and to the absence of Turkmen from the Iraqi political arena and failure to stop the numerous violations of Turkmen human rights.

Turkmen politicians and organizations should achieve a comprehensive self-assessment; start restructuring their organizations on professional bases and planning for professional political activities.

In order to have an effective role in the difficult and complicated Iraqi political arena, to stop continuous violation of Turkmen human rights, to regain Turkmen rights, to find solutions for many Turkmen social and economical problems and to revive the Turkmen culture, the establishment of **independent** Turkmen National Political system is urgent. It should own its independent decision-making mechanisms and be characterized by real credibility, possess its own administrative organs and political tools and control its budget. The Turkmen people, particularly, intellectuals and writers are primarily responsible of realization of such a reform to preserve the national existence of the Turkmen in Iraq.