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The situation of Ethnic Minorities and  
Religious Groups in Iraq

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## **The present situation of the Turkmen in Iraq**

### **Introduction**

To understand the unusual situation in Iraq and the miserable condition of the ethnic and religious minorities, different geopolitical factors should be clarified.

No doubt that the absence of the democratic culture is an additional factor which further deteriorates the intolerance of the nationalism and sectarianism in the today's Iraq.

The long period of the Ba'ath regime during which almost all the Iraqi people, particularly the non-ruling communities (minorities), were exposed to the regime's suppression, wars unfavorable influences and a semi-famine period had shaken up the psycho-social status of the Iraqi community.

Destruction of the state's structure after the fall of Ba'ath regime, which removed the rule of law and deteriorated the security, had left the anger, revenge and greed to follow. Then the unqualified inexperienced authorities, the illegal ideological groups and the outlaws started to judge the streets and invade the ruling system.

The Turkmen of Iraq had suffered from all the aforementioned actors. The central government failed to protect them from the attacks and exposure to other human rights violations. It also failed to return the Turkmen rights, which were usurped by the Ba'ath regime. The confiscation of Turkmen land is one of the most relevant examples of this.

The Kurdish authorities seized almost all the Turkmen regions, claiming ownership. The Turkmen are exposed to all types of aggression under the administration of the Kurdish regional government. Being that almost half of the Turkmen are of Shiite sect, their regions are exposed to unceasing terrorist attacks under the watch of the Kurdish regional government.

### **Population**

The absence of reliable data about the population size of non-ruling communities (minorities) is well known. Moreover, due to the multi-ethnic nature and the nationalistic atmosphere of Iraq, the population of the Iraqi Turkmen has been extremely underestimated to two percent of the general Iraqi population. The relatively reliable outcomes of the census 1957, which was announced in 1958, presented the population of the Turkmen of Iraq as 567,000, which made nine percent, of the total Iraqi population, while the same census showed that the Kurds constitute thirteen percent of the total Iraqi population.<sup>1,2</sup>

## **Geography**

The Turkmen of Iraq live mainly in the north and center of the country. They are found principally in the provinces of Kerkuk, Mosul, Erbil, Salah al-Din, Diyala, Baghdad and Kut. (Map 1) Kerkuk is considered their capital city. Districts, sub-districts and tens of villages in the Kerkuk province are Turkmen. Erbil city was ninety percent Turkmen in the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Telafer district is one of the largest regions of Turkmen in the Ninewa province. Other Turkmen regions in Ninewa province are the sub-districts of Iyadhiyya and Mahallabiyya with dozens of villages. Turkmen are also live inside Mosul city and Sinjar. The heavily inhabited Bayat districts in Salah al-Din province are Turkmen. The largest Turkmen regions are found in the Diyala province. For example: Kifri District, Kara Tepe, Kizil Rabat, Shahraban, Mandali, Kazaniya and Khanaqin. There are also tens of thousands of Turkmen families in the capital Baghdad and other Iraqi provinces.<sup>3</sup>

## **Natural resources**

Geopolitically, the Turkmen regions located between the Arabic and Kurdish regions contain a huge wealth. (Map 1) It is an agriculturally productive plain plateau with arable lands. Turkmen regions contain huge oil and gas deposits. Kerkuk oil constituted about seventy percent of the Iraqi oil production until the 1970s and now about thirty percent. One hundred and fifty million cubic feet of gas is flared daily in Kerkuk.

Telafer is located in the Iraq-Turkey-Syria triangle which separates the Kurdish regions of Iraq from that of the Syria. This constitutes an obstacle to the unification of the two Kurdish regions. A new frontier gate between Iraq and Turkey in Telafer district, which is discussed in the later years, will severely diminish the huge incomes which the Kurdish regional government gets from the Khabur Gate.

## **Exposure to attacks**

There are several facts that should be emphasized. Firstly, the terrorized Turkmen regions are administered by the Kurds and the Kurdish Peshmergas, police and security services are maintaining the security. Secondly, the Kurdish authorities refuse the Iraqi army to enter to these regions. Thirdly, the Kurds consider Kirkuk as their Jerusalem and the Turkmen as newcomers claiming the ownership of almost all these regions.

Since April 2003, the Turkmen regions are exposed to thousands of terrorist attacks, such as bombings, kidnappings, assassinations and intimidations.

The tanks and airplane attacks on Telafer city in 2004 and 2005 deported tens of thousands of Turkmen families, of which a considerable number have still not returned. Many prisoners are still not released, while many others have disappeared.

The total amount of the ransom paid by Turkmen to release the Kidnaped is estimated to be about fifty million USD.

The followings are some of the high-ranking Turkmen authorities which were assassinated:

- Assassination of Dr. Amir Selbi, academic staff in Mosul University on 8<sup>th</sup> March 2011
- Assassination of Neurosurgeon Dr. Yıldıırım Demirci on 5<sup>th</sup> September 2011.<sup>4</sup>
- Kidnaping of Turkmen academic staff Sami Riza and Musa Weyis on 5<sup>th</sup> November 2011
- Bombing of the house of member of the Kerkuk province council Ali Mehdi on 28<sup>th</sup> November 2011 which killed a neighbor and injured fifteen others.

- Assassination of Maj. Gen. Adnan al-Bayyati on 4<sup>th</sup> September 2012.
- Assassination of Dr. Reza al-Bayati on 19<sup>th</sup> September 2012
- Two Turkmen teachers were abducted, tortured and burnt alive on 16<sup>th</sup> December 2012

The most recent event took place before three days on 17<sup>th</sup> June 2013. A Turkmen and a Kurdish engineer were kidnaped. The Kurdish engineer was released while the Turkmen engineer was killed after torture and thrown on the road where they were kidnaped.

The followings are the statistics of the terrorist attacks to which the Turkmen were subjected in only three Turkmen regions and in only the later five months, from 1st January - until 8<sup>th</sup> May of this year.

- Two hundred ninety events took place in the province of Kerkuk
- Two hundred fifty seven events were in the Salah al-Din province.
- Nine events took place in the Mosul province.

Eighteen were assassinated, six attempts failed; fifty four were killed; eleven were subjected to kidnaping, two were failed; three hundred seventy seven were wounded; the properties of eighty seven were damaged. The details of the events were as follows:

- Six judges were subjected to assassinations, one of them was seriously injured and others unharmed.
- Seven police officers were attacked, six were killed: two held the rank of major, two captains. One colonel and one Brigadier. One police major was injured.
- An automobile was transferring a football team was attacked, two players were killed and two were injured.
- Three teachers were killed and ten were injured.
- Three lawyers were killed and one injured.
- Seven engineers were attacked, three were killed and three injured.
- One Mukhtar was killed and other injured.
- A specialist physician was subjected to an assassination attempt, another veterinarian was injured.
- A member of sub-district of Yengice and A member of the Board of district of Telafer were assassinated.
- The speakers of Kerkuk city and Yengice sub-district councils were injured.
- A provincial council member and the deputy of the governor of the Salah al-Din province were injured.
- Houses of the speaker of Kerkuk city council and a council member of sub-district of Kizil Rabat were attacked without casualties. The auto of chauffeur of a member of the Kerkuk city council was burned.
- A member of the Independent election commission survived assassination.
- Two candidates for the upcoming elections were assassinated in the Mosul city.
- A university student was killed and a pharmacist was injured.

### **Demographical changes**

Turkmen regions were exposed to serious Kurdification processes after the fall of Ba'ath regime in 2003 after which the Kurdish parties controlled the Turkmen regions.

Changing the administrative boundaries and seizing the lands by resettling Kurds are but some of the policies enacted by the Kurdish authorities.

Over a period of only a several years, the Kurds have changed the demography of the Kerkuk region more than the Ba'ath regime did in thirty five years. Hundreds of thousands of Kurds were brought to, and established in, Kerkuk province. Several neighborhoods appeared in Kerkuk city, the population of the Kurdish villages and sub-districts increased several-fold. For example, the population of Kara Injir and Shiwan sub-districts grew from several thousand to about 70,000 in the late 2000s.

The population of Kerkuk province was around 870,000 on the day of occupation, but in 2007 it was estimated to be 1,368,860.<sup>5</sup> Noting that about 150,000 Arabs have fled or left the city since that point. The Kurds dominate the administration, the police and security forces in almost all the Turkmen regions.

The same took place in Khanaqin district in the Diyala province, in Kifri district in Sulaymaniya province and in Tuz khurmatu and Kara Tepe of the Salah al-Din province. New neighborhoods were constructed on the municipality and Turkmen lands. The higher administrations became completely Kurdified, so thousands of acres of Turkmen land were confiscated without compensation. Deteriorating security has forced large numbers of Turkmen families, particularly in Tuz Khurmatu to leave their homes. Paying large sums of money, the Kurds bought Turkmen houses, complexes and business in the city and dominated the trade and city market.

The surface area and the population of the Erbil city have increased more than two-fold. The number of the new neighborhoods which appeared after 1991 is about fifty-two neighborhoods, all of which are mainly inhabited by the Kurds. Historical Turkmen neighborhoods are evacuated by the Kurdish authorities and launched as Kurdish heritage.

### **Confiscated Turkmen lands**

Alteration of demography of the Turkmen regions started early after establishment of the Iraqi Kingdom in 1921. Confiscation of lands became one of the major features of the systematic assimilation policies of the Ba'ath regime and the Kurdish authorities.

The lands of Turkmen owners, municipality and government in Kerkuk province were seized by the Kurdish parties, militias and families.

The buildings of the Second Army Corps and Khalid Army center inside Kerkuk city, a piece of land in between Musalla and al-Shorja neighborhoods, and another piece of land in the Arasa region, making about four and half million square meters in total, were occupied by the Kurdish families and Kurdish Peshmerga militias. Hundreds of luxury houses were built. More than two thousands of house and 215 government buildings were occupied. Thousands of houses were built on sporadic regions on Turkmen and government lands. Several new neighborhoods were appeared in Kerkuk city.<sup>6, 7</sup> (satellite Map 1 - 5) The surface area of the Kerkuk city increased about 20 sqkm. (Satellite Map No. 5) The building areas of the Kurdish villages and sub-districts of Kerkuk province increased several folds.

Almost all the Turkmen regions in the so-called disputed areas were exposed to the same processes. The surface area of the Erbil city has hugely enlarged in the last two decades. Large portion of the lands of the new neighborhoods have been confiscated from the Turkmen.

In the later few years, the Kurdish authorities force the owners of the houses of the three oldest neighborhoods of Erbil city, which are mainly inhabited by Turkmen, to sell their houses to the government. In this context, the Khanaqa neighborhood is almost completely evacuated, as is half of the Tajil neighborhood, and recently they have started with the Arab neighborhood.

Several buildings of the Iraqi Turkmen front, which included also Turkmen radio and television station, were seized by Abd al-Qadir Bezirgan supported by the Kurdish authorities. These buildings have yet to be returned.

In Tuz Khurmatu city, the Kurds built more than one thousand houses on the Turkmen lands in the neighborhoods of Aksu, Yengi Damlar, al-Jumhuriya and Saylo region. In the al-Jumhuriya neighborhood, the Kurds controlled the youth center, which included four stadiums on which they built houses for Kurdish families. In the Syalo neighborhood, the Kurdish families seized large municipality lands. Along several kilometers of the both sides of the Baghdad road, the Kurds established businesses and companies on the Turkmen lands.

In the Khanaqin district, the Kurdish authorities built several residential complexes for the incoming Kurds on the municipality and Turkmen lands. The Turkmen agricultural lands, which were confiscated by the Ba'ath regime, were not returned to the owners. Almost the same took place in the Kefri city.

During the thirty-five years of Ba'ath regime from 1968 to 2003, the sum of the lands which were confiscated in different provinces was estimated to be more than a half million acres, of which the most were belonged to Turkmen. The number of complaint cases which is presented to the Property Claim Commission for all Iraq is about 145,000 cases, of which 45,000 are in the Kerkuk province. The majority of these complaint cases are from the Turkmen people. In the December 2007, the number of cases which were decided was only several thousands.<sup>7</sup>

### **Marginalization in administration**

The elections in most of the Turkmen regions were organized by the Kurdish authorities. Peshmergas, police and security forces, were maintaining the security. The Kurds won overwhelming majority in almost all the Turkmen regions in the Iraqi general elections of 2005. For example, sixty three percent in Kerkuk province, eighty percent in the council of Khanaqin district, hundred percent in the council of Kifri district. There were no Turkmen members elected to the council of the Erbil province.

This has further disproportionally reflected on the administration in the governmental offices. Fifty percent of the higher and sixty six percent of the intermediate governmental staff in Kerkuk province are Kurds. The Kurds dominate the police and security forces in Kerkuk province.<sup>8</sup> The chiefs of eighteen governmental offices in Khanaqin were Kurds, while another three were pro-Kurdish Turkmen. In the Kifri, one of the seventeen directors was Turkmen. Despite that forty percent of the members of council in the Kara Tepe region were Kurds and thirty three percent in Tuz Khurmatu, the higher governmental staff consists almost entirely of Kurds. Regarding the sub-staff in the governmental offices, these percentages are further deviated towards the Kurds. The Kurds, disproportional to their number, won seats in different Turkmen regions. For example, in Kizil Rabat they won forty seven percent and in Jalawla forty percent.

The Turkmen are also marginalized in the appointment of the high-ranking posts in the Iraqi government. The Turkmen general directorates in the ministries and the Turkmen ambassadors are seriously disproportional with their population size and with the Kurds and Arabs.

### **Others**

There is essentially no Turkmen integrated press. The Turkmen websites are ill-developed and administered by unspecialized activists. Türkmeneli Television is administered by Ankara, while the Türkmeneli newspaper was paid for by the same authority. The educational quality in the Turkmen schools is deliberately worsened by the Kurdish authorities. The suppressive Kurdish policies hinder the appearance of independent Turkmen civil society and political organizations in

Kurdish region. The Iraqi Turkmen Front (ITF) is continuously contested by the Kurdish authorities by the Kurdish authorities.

### **Helplessness of the Turkmen**

The support of the Iraqi government is inadequate to develop the Turkmen political system and Turkmen media. The Turkmen education suffers from serious financial difficulties, despite that their cultural rights were approved by the Iraqi constitution. The government's attempts to improve the security situation in Turkmen regions are hampered by the Kurdish regional government by preventing the Iraqi army to enter into the Turkmen regions.

The large Iraqi Sunni Arab bloc preserves the interests of the Arabs. For example, the dossiers of the confiscated Turkmen lands were completed by the Iraqi government and sent to the parliament a few years ago. Nevertheless, the speaker of the Iraqi parliament, Osama Al-Nujaifi, refuses to bring it to the agenda of the Iraqi parliament. The appeals which are presented by the Turkmen parliamentarians to the Iraqi parliament to investigate the violations of their rights are continuously ignored and unaccepted by the major Arabic and Kurdish political groups.

The Kurds are already claiming the ownership of and administering most of the Turkmen regions. Under Kurdish administration the Turkmen are exposed to the continuous attacks which deport large numbers of Turkmen families. Such a condition should raise the question: what is the role of the Kurdish regional government in these attacks on the Turkmen?

Turkey's Turkmen policy has never helped the Turkmen to stop the atrocities or to get back their rights. It is purely based on the Turkish national interests, which in several aspects contradict with the Turkmen national interests. Turkey played a major role in dispersion of the Turkmen political system. Turkey's intervention into the Turkmen political system still hampers construction of an independent general Turkmen political system.

Almost all the UNAMI's report turned a blind eye to the human rights situation of the Turkmen of Iraq.

### **Conclusion**

It can be easily concluded that the number of terrorist attacks on the Turkmen, particularly in Kerkuk province and Tuz Khurmatu district are much more than the number of terrorist attacks to which both the Kurds and the Arabs were subjected.

As well, the amount of the confiscated Turkmen lands by the Ba'ath regime in different districts and provinces were much more than that of the Kurds. Whilst the Kurdish lands were almost all returned, the majority of confiscated Turkmen lands are still not given back to the owners.

The miserable situation of the Iraqi ethnic and religious communities, particularly that of the Turkmen, necessitates careful study and palpable support from the regional and international communities, particularly, the United Nations, the United States of America and the European parliament.

Despite that the European Parliament Resolution and many other international human Rights institutions call on the Iraqi and Kurdish authorities to put measures into place that guarantee the safety and security of Iraqi Turkmen, yet no action have been taken by Iraqi and Kurdish authorities to protect Turkmen and they continue to be plagued by ethnic and sectarian violence and discrimination.

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Map 1, Ethnic distribution of the non-ruling communities (minorities) in the north of Iraq

## Satellite Maps



Yellow colour points to the lands which were built between 2002 and 2007



Part of the eastern border of Kerkuk city  
Satellite Map of Kerkuk province the Map of 2002 compared with the map of 2007



Kerkuk second Army complexes  
Surface Area = 4.085.000 sqm  
Satellite Map of Kerkuk province the Map of 2002 compared with the map of 2007



The region between Musalla and Shorja neighborhoods of Kerkuk city  
Surface Area = 237.500 sam

Satellite Map of Kerkuk province the Map of 2002 compared with the map of 2007



East of Shoria neighbourhood

Satellite Map of Kerkuk province the Map of 2002 compared with the map of 2007