

Who Owns Kirkuk?

The Turkoman Case

by Yücel Güçlü

The question of Kirkuk's final status remains among the touchiest issues concerning Iraq's future. The Iraqi Kurdish political parties seek to include Kirkuk in a federal Kurdish state, an outcome at odds with Iraqi Turkoman sensitivities. The Turkomans consider Kirkuk to be their own ancestral capital and cultural center. Understanding the Turkoman claim to Kirkuk is essential to defuse a potentially explosive problem.

Policymakers and commentators outside Turkey often ignore the Turkomans. Literature about them is scarce in Western languages; the little that exists is limited in academic rigor and utility.¹ Furthermore, in terms of enunciating their concerns and interacting with Western officials, the Turkomans themselves have not always been effective spokesmen for their cause.

For centuries, the Turkomans have been part of the urban elite in cities such as Baghdad, Mosul, and Kirkuk. They remain an integral part of Iraq although their population is debated. It is hard to come by adequate population numbers in Iraq. After the 1958 revolution and the Baath Party coup ten years later, successive Iraqi governments embraced Arab nationalism² and worked to subvert the rights of the Kurdish and Turkoman communities. The last reliable census in Iraq—and the only one in which participants could declare their mother tongue—was in 1957. It found that Turkomans were the third largest ethnicity in Iraq, after Arabs and Kurds. The Turkomans numbered 567,000 out of a total population of 6,300,000. Later polls dropped “Turkoman” as a category. Basing his estimate on the 1957 census data and a growth rate of 2.5 percent annually, Erşat Hürmüzlü, a Kirkuk-born Turkoman scholar, estimated Iraq's Turkoman population today at no less than two million Turkomans, out of a total population of 25 million.³

THE CITY OF KIRKUK

The status of Kirkuk remains one of Iraq's major flash points. A city of more than 750,000⁴ in the center of northern Iraq, it sits adjacent to oil fields holding 40 percent of Iraq's reserves⁵

and is surrounded by some of Iraq's richest agricultural land. Kirkuk's history is complex, replete with competing claims to suzerainty.

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1 Perhaps the best Western-language treatment of the Turkomans is Scott Taylor, *Among the "Others": Encounters with the Forgotten Turkmen of Iraq* (Ottawa: Esprit De Corps Books, 2004).

2 Eric Davis, *Memories of State* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

3 Erşat Hürmüzlü, *Türkmenler ve Irak* (Istanbul: Kerkük Vakfı, 2003), pp. 81-4.

4 *Ibid.*, p. 81.

5 *Middle East Economic Survey*, Apr. 4, 2005.

Kirkuk's history dates back thousands of years.⁶ The Ottoman Empire incorporated Kirkuk—and much of what is now Iraq—into its domains in 1534. Kirkuk grew in importance in the eighteenth century when it became the capital of the Ottoman *sanjak* (county or sub-district) of Şehrizar, comprising the areas of Kirkuk, Arbil, and Sulaimaniya. With the reforms of Midhat Pasha, Baghdad's governor between

1869 and 1872, the name Şehrizar was given to the *sanjak* of Kirkuk (corresponding to the present areas of Kirkuk and Arbil). In 1879, the Ottoman government in Istanbul created the Mosul vilayet, which incorporated most of what is now northern

**In July 1959,
a Kurdish mob
rampaged through
Kirkuk targeting
Turkomans.**

Iraq. Kirkuk remained an important garrison town and, for reasons of language and the composition of the population, a valuable Ottoman recruiting center for civil servants and gendarmes. Ottoman culture thrived in the city.⁷ The Turkomans dominated the merchant class and provided economic stability to the city.

Following its defeat in World War I, the Ottoman Empire forfeited much of its territory in the Middle East. But, because the majority of the area of Kirkuk was Turkish, the Ottoman government refused to renounce its claim. The Sublime Porte based its claim on President Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points, Article XII of which stipulated that the Turkish portions of the Ottoman Empire should be assured sovereignty. The Ottoman delegation to the Paris Peace Conference of 1919 argued that in "Asia the Turkish lands are bounded on the south by the provinces of Mosul and Diyarbekir, as well as a part

of Aleppo as far as the Mediterranean."⁸

At this time, Kirkuk's leading families were Turkoman: the Neftçiler—whose name in Turkish means oil producer—had owned and exploited the oil seepages since a 1693 imperial decree; the Yakuboğulları were landowners; and the Kirdars were both landowners and merchants. In addition, the city was home to scores of soldiers and civil servants who had reached high office in the Ottoman service but retired to their home province after the Allies dismembered the empire. The Turkomans retained the position of social influence they had enjoyed under Ottoman rule.⁹ Indeed, Turkish remained the language of communication not only within the *sanjak* but also in Baghdad. The only local newspaper was the Turkish *Necme*, and there was an association of Turkoman writers. A.F. Miller, the resident British assistant administrative inspector, could only speak Turkish; he had little need for Arabic or Kurdish. And the British vice consul in Mosul, H.E. Wilkie Young, wrote, "There are 7,000 houses in the town of Kirkuk, and the population is not less than 40,000, of whom about 2,500 are Jews and only 630 Christians. The rest are Moslems of Turkoman origin. The language of the place is consequently Turkish."¹⁰ W.R. Hay, another British political officer in northern Iraq, likewise described a Turkoman crescent stretching from Mosul through Kirkuk and southward to Mandali. He described how "Kirkuk is the main centre of this Turkish population ... Several villages in its vicinity are also Turkish-speaking, whereas the other towns are isolated communities surrounded by Kurds and Arabs. Large numbers of the middle-class Turks

6 Suphi Saatçi, *Tarihten Günümüze Irak Türkmenleri* (Istanbul: Ötüken Neşriyat, 2003), pp. 15-79.

7 For the political history of northern Iraq, see Sinan Marufoğlu, *Osmanlı Döneminde Kuzey Irak* (Istanbul: Eren Yayıncılık, 1998), pp. 31-40; for Kirkuk's civic and administrative lives at the turn of the twentieth century, see Ebubekir Hazım Tepeyran, *Havralar*, 2nd ed. (Istanbul: Pera Turizm ve Ticaret, 1998), pp. 505-12. Ebubekir Hazım Tepeyran, a professional administrator, served as governor of the Mosul vilayet, 1899-1902.

8 "Memorandum Concerning the New Organisation of the Ottoman Empire, 23 June 1919," in E.L. Woodward and Rohan Butler, eds., *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1960), pp. 647-51. For the full text of the Fourteen Points see *Papers Relating to the Foreign Affairs of the United States. The Paris Peace Conference, 1919*, vol. 4 (Washington D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1943), pp. 12-7.

9 Tepeyran, *Havralar*, pp. 358-62, 521-7.

10 "Notes by Vice-Consul Wilkie Young on the Mosul district," paragraphs 16 and 80; "Sir Gerald Lowther (Istanbul) to Sir Edward Grey (London) with enclosures and annexes, Apr. 5, 1910, notes on Mosul district," enclosure 2 in no. 1, FO 371/1008.

of Kirkuk and Arbil who possess some land, but wish to augment their incomes, learn to read and write, wear European clothes and undertake appointments in the government service. Kirkuk and Arbil, especially the former, provided large numbers of officials to the Ottoman government."¹¹ That the British government drew up its proclamations to the city's residents in the same Turkish language used at the time in Istanbul¹² was a testament to Kirkuk's Turkish character.

Britain, as the occupying power, sought to legitimize its imposition of the Hashemite monarchy on the country through popular vote. During the July 1921 referendum, the people of Kirkuk rejected both inclusion in the new kingdom of Iraq and Faisal, the British choice for king. Kirkuk officials

did not take part in the August 23, 1921 proclamation ceremony for Faisal. Rather than turn toward Baghdad, Kirkuk's population continued to identify with Turkey.¹³ Sir Arnold Wilson, the first British high commissioner of Iraq (1917-20) observed, "Kirkuk had always been a stronghold of Turkish officialdom, and pro-Turkish views here were a disturbing element for the occupation forces."¹⁴ Gertrude Bell, who would serve as Oriental secretary to the British civil administrator and later to the high commissioner of Iraq, acknowledged Kirkuk's Turkish character: "The inhabitants of Kirkuk are largely of



Deputy undersecretary of the Turkish Foreign Ministry, Ali Tuygan (1st L), U.S. special envoy to the Iraqi opposition, Zalmay Khalilzad (2nd L), leader of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, Jalal Talabani (C), and leader of the Iraqi Turkoman Front, Sanan Ahmad Aga (R) address the media in Ankara, March 19, 2003. The Iraqi Kurdish political parties are seeking to include Kirkuk in a federal Kurdish state, an outcome which raises Iraqi Turkoman concerns.

Turkish blood, descendants of Turkish settlers dating from the time of Seljuks."¹⁵

In order to persuade Kirkuk's notables to participate in elections for Iraq's new Constituent Assembly, the British high commissioner appointed a Turkoman sub-governor (*mutasarrıf*) and other Turkoman officials to top administrative posts in Kirkuk. London wanted Kirkuk to accede to 1923 elections organized by the British to bestow legitimacy upon the new rulers in Baghdad. The Kirkuk residents made their participation in the electoral process conditional on four provisions: (1) non-interference of the government in local electoral procedures; (2) the preservation of the district administration's Turkish character; (3) recognition of Turkish as the district's official language; and (4) the appointment of Kirkukis in all sub-

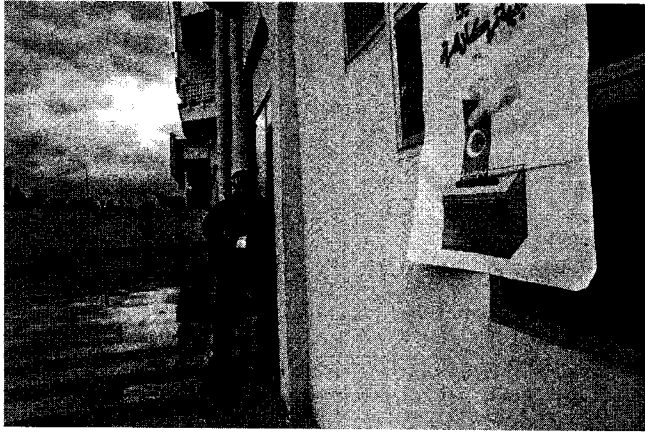
11 W.R. Hay, *Two Years in Kurdistan: Experiences of a Political Officer, 1918-1920* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1921), pp. 81, 85-6.

12 "Command Papers 1814," *Lausanne Conference on Near Eastern Affairs, 1922-1923, Records of Proceedings and Draft Terms of Peace* (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1923), p. 342.

13 Liora Lukitz, *Iraq: The Search for National Identity* (London: Frank Cass, 1995), p. 40.

14 Arnold Wilson, *Mesopotamia 1917-1920: A Clash of Loyalties* (London: Oxford University Press, 1931), pp. 259-60.

15 Extract from report prepared by Gertrude Bell under direction of civil commissioner, "Baghdad, Mesopotamia: Review of Civil Administration, 1914-1918," FO 371/5081, 1920.



An Iraqi Turkoman stands guard in front of one of the main Turkoman headquarters, Kirkuk, January 24, 2005. In the days following Saddam's fall, Kurdish militiamen sacked Turkoman neighborhoods in the towns of Altın Köprü, Kirkuk, Daquq, Tuzkhurmatu, and Mandali.

sequent Baghdad cabinets.¹⁶ When Sayyid Abd al-Rahman al-Gaylani formed his first Iraqi cabinet on October 25, 1920, his minister of education and health was İzzet Pasha, a retired Turkoman general from Kirkuk.¹⁷

In July 1923, Prime Minister 'Abd al-Muhsin al-Sa'dun sent a telegram in Turkish to the sub-governor confirming that the Council of Ministers in Baghdad had accepted conditions two and three. While this did not go far enough for Kirkuk's local notables, it nevertheless constituted Baghdad's de facto recognition of their authority.¹⁸

On September 30, 1924, the League of Nations set up a commission to decide on the future of the Mosul vilayet. The commission spent some two months in the disputed area visiting

the principal localities, speaking to local notables and other residents. It did not equate language with loyalty and, indeed, found that many Arabic speakers considered themselves loyal more to Turkey than Iraq. Nor did the commission find any merit to British claims that there was a distinction between Turks and Turkomans.¹⁹ It was not until Turkish, British, and Iraqi representatives in Ankara signed a tripartite treaty on June 5, 1926, that the three countries finalized the status of the Mosul vilayet, assigning the region—including Kirkuk—to Iraq.

Prior to granting Iraq independence, the British-supervised Iraqi government sought to compel the Arab majority to respect minority rights. The Iraqi parliament enacted Local Languages Law No. 74, 1931, to make Kurdish and Turkish official languages in various northern districts including Kirkuk. The law also stipulated that the language of instruction should be that of the majority of pupils. The law acknowledged both Kirkuk and Kifri to be majority Turkoman.²⁰

As condition of acceptance into the League of Nations, the Iraqi government on May 30, 1932, specified areas where minority languages, local administration, law courts, and primary education were to function. This declaration was incorporated into the constitution of 1925 with the reaffirmation of Iraq's undertakings toward minorities.²¹

16 Lukitz, *Iraq*, p. 41.

17 Cecil John Edmonds, *Kurds, Turks and Arabs: Politics, Travel and Research in North-Eastern Iraq, 1919-1925* (London: Oxford University Press, 1957), pp. 266, 283, 342-3; Stephen Hemsley Longrigg, *Iraq, 1900 to 1950: A Political, Social, and Economic History* (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), p. 127.

18 Lukitz, *Iraq*, pp. 41-2.

19 Report submitted to the council by the commission instituted by the Council Resolution of Sept. 30, 1924, document C. 400, M-147, 1925, VII, League of Nations, pp. 38, 46-7.

20 Cecil John Edmonds, "The Kurds of Iraq," *Middle East Journal*, Winter 1957, p. 59; idem, "The Kurds and Revolution in Iraq," *Middle East Journal*, Winter 1959, p. 10.

21 "Declaration of the Kingdom of Iraq, Made at Baghdad on 30 May 1932, on the Occasion of the Termination of the Mandatory Regime in Iraq, and Containing the Guarantees Given to

Article 1 of the declaration stipulated that no law, regulation, or official action could interfere with the rights outlined for the minorities. Although Arabic became the official language of Iraq, Kurdish became a corollary official language in Sulaimaniya, and both Kurdish and Turkish became official languages in Kirkuk and Kifri. It stipulated that Iraqi officials assigned to Kirkuk should not only speak Arabic but also have competency in Kurdish and/or Turkish. The same article stipulated that Iraqi courts should accept testimony in Kurdish and Turkish. Article 10 placed these rights under the League of Nations' guarantee. When the league dissolved in 1946, the U.N. assumed responsibility for its guarantees.²² These U.N. obligations remain in effect.

KIRKUK IN THE POST-INDEPENDENCE PERIOD

Soon after Iraqi independence, and especially with the growth of the oil industry, the demography of Kirkuk began to shift. The late historian Hanna Batatu explains: "Kirkuk had been Turkish through and through in the not too distant past ... [but] by degrees, Kurds moved into the city from the surrounding villages ... By 1959, they had swollen to more than one-third of the population, and the Turkomans had declined to just over half." While the Kurds "Kurdified"



An Iraqi Turkoman child stands with a Turkoman flag draped over her, Kirkuk, January 27, 2005. For centuries, the Turkomans have been part of the urban elite in cities such as Baghdad, Mosul, and Kirkuk.

Irbil, Kirkuk retained a greater sense of "cultural links with Turkey... [and] ethnic identity."²³

This influx of Kurds into heavily Turkoman-populated areas upset the fragile demographic balance and laid the groundwork for decades of ethnic tension. On July 14-16, 1959, at the instigation of the Iraqi Communist Party, a disproportionately Kurdish mob supported by a Kurdish military unit rampaged through the city, targeting and killing prosperous Turkomans and Turkoman leaders. President Abdul Karim Qasim estimated the total death toll in the area at 120, with many executed and dumped in mass graves. The pogrom ended only with Baghdad's military intervention.²⁴ Still, the Turkoman identity remained intact. Reader Bullard, military governor of Baghdad in 1920, wrote in 1961 that "the

the Council by the Iraqi Government," *League of Nations Official Journal* (Geneva: League of Nations, July 1932), Annex 1373, pp. 1347-50.

22 For the assumption of the United Nations of the functions and powers belonging to the League of Nations under the international agreements, see *League of Nations Official Journal*, "Records of the Twentieth (Conclusion) and Twenty-first Ordinary Sessions of the Assembly, Texts of the Debates at the Plenary Meetings and Minutes of the First and Second Committees, Special Supplement No. 194," 1946, pp. 221-4. For the transfer to the United Nations of certain functions and activities of the League of Nations, see *Yearbook of the United Nations, 1946-1947* (Lake Success, N.Y.: Department of Public Information, 1947), pp. 110-3.

23 "Statistical Compilation Relating to the Population Census of 1957 (in Arabic), I, Part IV, 170," Iraq, Ministry of the Interior, in Hanna Batatu, *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), p. 913; David McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds* (London: I.B.Tauris, 1996), p. 3.

24 George Kirk, *Contemporary Arab Politics* (New York: Frederick Praeger, 1961), pp. 162-3; Amb. John Jernegan's dispatches in *Foreign Relations of the United States, Diplomatic Papers (1958-1960)*, vol. 12 (Washington D.C.: U.S. State Department, 1993), pp. 473-95; Majid Khadduri, *Republican Iraq: A Study in Iraqi Politics since the Revolution of 1958* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 124.

largest of the Turkish towns in Iraq is Kirkuk."²⁵

With the 1968 establishment of Baath Party control, the situation of the city's Turkomans grew more precarious as Kirkuk became a flash point in the struggle between the Iraqi central government and Kurdish rebel leaders. Disputes about whether Kirkuk should be included in an autonomous Kurdish-run zone led to the collapse of a proposed 1970 autonomy agreement between Iraqi Kurds and the central Iraqi government with whom they had been fighting. In 1974, the Baathist govern-

U.S. forces did little to prevent pogroms against Turkoman towns.

ment gerrymandered provincial boundaries so as to dilute the Turkoman and Kurdish population of the Kirkuk governorate and divided Turkoman concentrations between different Arab-led provinces, and in 1975, the Iraqi

army moved in to crush the Kurds.

The Baathist regime launched a new round of ethnic cleansing and oppression of minorities in the late 1980s and 1990s. A November 8, 1996 U.N. report detailed problems confronting the Turkomans. They faced arbitrary arrest, internal deportation or exile, and confiscation of personal property. Baghdad sought to change the demography of the city and its environs to scatter Kurds and Turkomans and replace them with Arabs. In addition, the central government forbade Kirkuk's Turkomans to purchase and sell real estate, unless to Arabs.²⁶ A subsequent U.N. report added detail to the ethnic cleansing campaign: it described "nationality correction" forms in which the Baathist regime compelled Turkomans to register themselves as Arabs prior to the 1997 census and the expropriation of Turkoman agricultural land.²⁷ A 1998 report filed by U.N. special rapporteur Max van der Stoel

reinforced the severity of Baghdad's campaign against the Turkomans and Kurds in Kirkuk.²⁸

**KIRKUK:
WHOSE JERUSALEM?**

Kurds have long claimed Kirkuk as their own. In a May 2001 interview with the *Middle East Quarterly*, Jalal Talabani, leader of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan who would later become Iraq's first postwar president, called Kirkuk "the Jerusalem of Kurdistan."²⁹ Masoud Barzani, president of the rival Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), has also claimed Kirkuk as an exclusively Kurdish city³⁰ and insisted that Kirkuk rather than Irbil should be capital of the Kurdistan Regional Government.³¹ Both Talabani and Barzani consider the Kirkuk oil fields to be theirs³² although Iraqi law defines the fields as part of the Iraqi national patrimony.³³

On the eve of war, many outside observers recognized the Turkoman nature of Kirkuk's population. "Kirkuk is mainly Turkoman," observed correspondent Julian Borger in *The Guardian*.³⁴ In the months preceding Operation Iraqi Freedom, the Turkish government raised concern about the potential for Kurdish militias to expand their area of control unilaterally.³⁵ The U.S. government guaranteed that Kurds would not enter Kirkuk or Mosul.³⁶ Soon after the start of

25 Reader Bullard, *The Camels Must Go* (London: Faber and Faber, 1961), p. 100.

26 "Situation of Human Rights in Iraq: Note by the Secretary-General," U.N. General Assembly, Fifty-first session agenda item 110 (c), A/51/496/Add.1, Nov. 8, 1996, p. 4.

27 *Ibid.*, agenda item 110 (c), A/52/476/Add.1, Oct. 15, 1997, p. 2.

28 "Report on the Violations of Human Rights in Iraq Submitted by the Special Rapporteur Max van der Stoel in Accordance with Commission Resolution 1997/60," U.N. General Assembly, Commission on Human Rights, Fifty-first session agenda item (10), E/CN.4/1987/67, Mar. 10, 1998, p. 2.

29 Jalal Talabani, "No Grounds for Relations with Baghdad," *Middle East Quarterly*, Winter 2002, pp. 19-23.

30 *Turkish Daily News* (Ankara), July 17, 2002.

31 *International Herald Tribune*, June 21, 2004.

32 *Middle East Economic Survey*, June 14, 2004.

33 Article 108, Iraqi Constitution, in *The Washington Post*, Oct. 12, 2005.

34 *The Guardian* (London), Oct. 12, 2002.

35 Michael Rubin, "A Comedy of Errors: American-Turkish Diplomacy and the Iraq War," *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, Spring 2005.

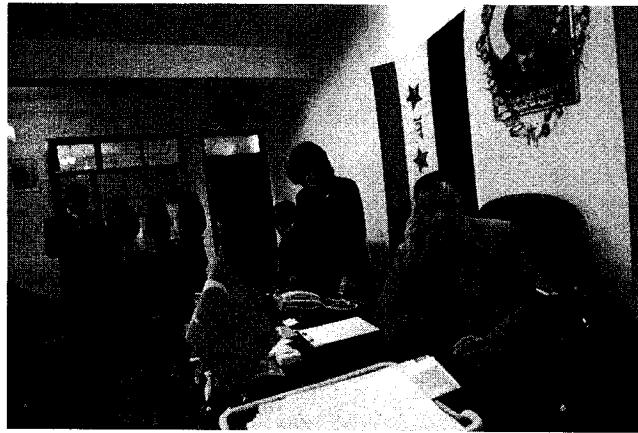
36 See "Final Statement of the Meeting of Representatives of Turkey and the United States with the Delegations of Assyrian Democratic Movement, Constitutional Monarchy Movement, Iraqi National Accord, Iraqi National Congress, Iraqi Turkoman

hostilities, however, 20,000 Kurds flooded into these cities; half stayed.³⁷ In the days following Saddam's fall, Kurdish militiamen sacked the Turkoman towns of Altın Köprü, Kirkuk, Daquq, Tuzkhurmatu, and Mandali. U.S. forces did little to prevent the pogroms and looting.³⁸ The *peshmerga* plundered abandoned government offices in Kirkuk. They burned land deeds and birth registries so as to remove evidence countering their claim that Kirkuk is a Kurdish city.³⁹

With U.S. red lines shown to be ephemeral, the Kurds continued their migration. In August 2004, journalists reported that as many as 500 Kurds a day streamed into Kirkuk, a move calculated to

skew a pre-election census. U.S. military authorities estimated that 72,000 Kurds settled in Kirkuk between April 2003 and August 2004.⁴⁰ The Kurdish political parties encouraged the flight with subsidies⁴¹ and in some cases, denial of livelihood for those who refused to move from Sulaimaniya, Irbil, and other majority Kurdish cities to Kirkuk.⁴²

U.S. authorities undercut the Turkoman response. Shortly after Iraq's liberation, Washington and London established the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) to act as an interim



Iraqi Turkoman Front official Yawaz Omar Adil (R) talks on the phone while supporters join him in his office, Kirkuk, January 25, 2005. When the Coalition Provisional Authority established a 25-member governing council to advise L. Paul Bremer, it excluded the Iraqi Turkoman Front, the most prominent Iraqi Turkoman organization.

administration of Iraq. L. Paul Bremer, its administrator, established a 25-member governing council to advise his rule. U.S. and British officials sought to make the council representative of Iraqi society. It filled these seats using often arbitrary calculations of Iraq's population. Because Bremer believed the Turkoman population to be less than 5 percent, the CPA allocated only one Turkoman representative. And, because of some U.S. diplomats' desires to fulfill gender quotas, they appointed Songul Chopuk, a young woman with no constituency, to represent this group.⁴³ The CPA excluded the Iraqi Turkoman Front, the most prominent Iraqi Turkoman organization. Iraqi Turkomans protested that this initial slight denied them proper input on their community's issues.⁴⁴ The Turkomans complained that their representative on the council did not adequately reflect their political views. Among those issues that most concern the

Front, Kurdistan Democratic Party, Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, and Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq," Ankara, Mar. 19, 2003.

37 *The New York Times*, Apr. 20, 2003.

38 Reuters, Mar. 2, 2004.

39 *The Washington Post*, Apr. 11, 2003; *Los Angeles Times*, Apr. 11, 2003; *Hürriyet* (Istanbul), Apr. 11, 2003; *Radikal* (Istanbul), Apr. 11, 2003.

40 Associated Press, Sept. 16, 2004.

41 Associated Press, Sept. 16, 2004.

42 U.N. Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN), Sept. 23, 2004.

43 Rubin, "A Comedy of Errors."

44 Anatolia News Agency, July 16, 2003.

Turkomans are recognition of Turkish as one of the official languages of Iraq, their acknowledgment as a component community within the country, and, most importantly, the status of Kirkuk. Washington's subsequent decision to appoint only one Turkoman minister—and only to the relatively minor portfolio of science and technology—in a 33-member cabinet compounded the problem.

Tensions rose as Kurds, Arabs, and Turkomans vied for control of the city. There have been riots⁴⁵ and assassinations.⁴⁶ The Kurdish

political parties sought to monopolize government offices and, by extension, government services in the city. Turkoman officials say that Kurdish bureaucrats mandate exclusive use of Kurdish in government offices, even though the majority of the city's population does not speak the language. The Kurdistan Democratic Party's minister

of *peshmerga* affairs declared, "We are ready to fight against all forces to control Kirkuk. Our share is very little. We will try to take a larger share."⁴⁷ Just as Saddam used his power to dispense patronage to a single ethnic and political group, so, too, do followers of Talabani and Barzani today. With fewer resources at their disposal, Iraqi Turkoman political parties have been unable to organize their constituency to the same extent.

It is incumbent upon both the international community and the new Iraqi government to protect the rights of the Turkomans now threatened

by both Kurdish expansionism and the intolerance by some factions of the central government.

CONCLUSIONS

The Kirkuk issue will not go away. Kurds may feel they have a real claim to Kirkuk, or they may be guided more by a desire to attain its oil wealth. Ethnic cleansing cannot be justified, whether ordered by Saddam Hussein or Masoud Barzani. Nor will Iraq's Turkoman community renounce their historical claim and legal rights. "Kirkuk is to Iraq what Kosovo is to the Balkans,"⁴⁸ a U.S. military official has said.

So what can be done? There will not be peace or stability in Kirkuk if the rights or identity of any of the city's communities are trampled. Local Kurdish authorities have sought to impose their will through force. They have shown themselves unwilling to move beyond communal interests to represent all citizens of Kirkuk. As the Kurdish parties exploit and exacerbate ethnic tensions, the risk of instability in Kirkuk grows. The international community might respond by sending human rights monitors in Kirkuk until the local population can elect a representative government in the city and region. This will require a fair and impartial census under the monitoring and supervision of the United Nations.

The U.S. government and other coalition partners should also pressure the Iraqi central government in Baghdad to maintain the unity of state, constrain local militias, and prevent local ethnic or sectarian cleansing. For Iraq to remain viable, the Iraqi law and constitutional interpretations should address the core concerns of Iraq's diverse communities. To do otherwise, and allow Kirkuk to fester, will undercut Iraq's stability, provoke ethnic strife, and perhaps even lead to civil war.

Just as Saddam used his power to dispense patronage to a single ethnic and political group, so, too, do Talabani and Barzani.

45 *The Washington Post*, Aug. 24, 2003.

46 Associated Press, Jan. 26, 2006.

47 *International Herald Tribune*, Jan. 3, 2005.

48 Associated Press, Sept. 16, 2004.

