

The Turkmen Reality in Iraq: Kerkuk is not Kurdish City

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Abstract

One of the unfair aspects of the Iraqi dilemma, which is attracting the attention of the international community in the last few decades, is neglect of the Iraqi non-Arabic non-Kurdish components, particularly the Turkmen who are considered the third largest ethnic section of the Iraqi community and numbered not less than two million, this lead to the systematic violation of their human rights and application of the wildest method to assimilate and deport them by the successive Iraqi governments reaching to the zenith in the last 2 decades. After the occupation of 2003, the Kurdish authorities replaced Ba'ath regime and started to violate the Turkmen human rights. Simultaneously, the Kurdish writers underestimate and marginalize the Turkmen considering them newcomers while the Turkmen presence in Iraq dates back to more than thousand year. The large Turkmen areas are described as a Kurdish lands, particularly the oil rich province of Kerkuk.

Discussion

Article of Habib Hurmuzlu: "Conversation between the seriousness and the fun The Turkmen of Iraq and the hungers after the Black Yogurt", which was published in Arabic in Kardashlik Journal¹ presents important data over Kerkuk city and the Turkmen of Iraq. Hurmuzlu used an imaginary conversation approach to discuss indirectly the attempts of the Kurdish writers and politicians to minimize the importance of Turkmen.

Many articles and tens of books which have been published in different languages by the Kurds containing forged data over the population size and the cities of the Turkmen. They could benefit from the compassion, which the Western powers grant to them from the beginning of the latter century, to mislead the international community over the Turkmen reality and to exaggerate the sufferings of the Kurds in Iraq. Western media, international reports and many encyclopedias, depending on the unreliable official Iraqi statistics and the Kurdish claims without questioning, are showing the Turkmen of Iraq as a small community and new-comers. This exposed the Turkmen of Iraq to the brutalities inside Iraq and to unfair handlings internationally. As a result, the Turkmen is considered as a minute minority' (1%) by the USA State Secretary reports and banned to take part in the Iraqi opposition conferences.

The conversation takes place between a Turkmen called Yavuz and his Kurdish friend Abdullah. Hurmuzlu makes use of the demographic, historical, social and administrative features of Kerkuk to reply to the Kurdish writers, particularly N. Talabani who twisted all the facts to give a deceptive Kurdish image to Kerkuk city in his book "Iraq's Policy of Ethnic Cleansing: Onslaught to change national / demographic characteristics of the Kirkuk Region".²

The article starts with a description of the relation between Yavuz and Abdullah or between the Turkmen and the Kurds. Hurmuzlu considers them as two close neighbor friends who make now and then jokes with each other. Sometimes, the discussions too hard which look like a quarrel. He concentrates over this close friendship in many occasions and considers that they value each other.

After description of the birthplaces of each of them, Yavuz asks Abdullah: "why do you claim that the Turkmen lands are your heart and the heart of your people".

Abdullah replies: "These lands are really my heart and the heart of my people. All my neighbors and my relatives lived here since thousands of years, while you and your people are temporally passengers. My roots are strongly fixed in these lands, but you and your associates are small groups came to these lands at a time when we had no choice and had to accept you".

"These are not your own words, dear Abdullah. You make use of the speech of Haulage of Baghdad!" Hurmuzlu means here that the successive Iraqi governments, particularly the former Iraqi regime made up formerly these calumnies.

He continues to ask Abdullah: "Did you read, dear Abdullah, a little bit over the recent and the old history of the region to be so sure of your knowledge? If you did, you had surely read the empires and sovereignties, which my ancestors established in our country³ and ruled hundreds of years. My dear friend, do you want me to talk about these empires and sovereignties?"

Hurmuzlu refers to the Turkmen states which were founded in Iraq before the region was conquered by Ottoman Empire in the first half of the 16th century:

- Seljuk Empire (1118 - 1194)
- Dynasty of Mosul Atabekians (1127 - 1233)
- Dynasty of Erbil Atabekians (1144 - 1209)
- Turkmen Dynasty in Kerkuk (1230)
- State of Qara Qoyunlu (1411 - 1470)
- State of Aq Qoyunlu (1470 - 1508).

Then he asks Abdullah to mention the names of Kurdish neighborhoods in Kerkuk city.

"Of course, I am going to mention some of them: Imam Kasim, Shorja, Rahim Awa, Azadi, Kirmizi Kilse and Iskan." Abdullah says.

"It is not right to be said "some of them" dear Abdullah, This will mislead the readers. You cannot add any other name to the names, which you already mentioned. The neighborhoods, which you talked about, are founded recently due to the extensive Kurdish emigration, which took place mainly after the huge growth of the Kerkuk economy in 1927 and after the Kurdish uprising in the 1960s. I can mention for you the neighborhoods of my relatives and ancestors who lived there hundreds of years. And you will see that number of the Turkmen in each of these neighborhoods is equal to the number of the Kurds who live in all the neighborhoods, which you have mentioned. Here are the neighborhoods of my relatives and ancestors: Begler, Sari Kahya, Shaturlu, Cirit Maydani, Imam Abbas, Gawur Bagi, Musalla, Chukur, Egir Huseein, Piryadi, Chay, Kasab Hane, Yedi Kizlar, Hamam, Agalik, Maydan, Altuncilar, Neftchiler, Avci, Yeni Tisin, Hamzaliler, Hassa, Mahatta Yolu, Baghdad Yolu, Chiniciler, Almaz, Bulak ve Halvaciler".

Yavuz continues "Do you observe that all these neighborhoods called in my language of my ancestors? The Shorja and Kirmizi Kilse are also the words of my language. The Shorja means salty and Kirmizi Kilse means the Red Church".

Then Hurmuzlu challenges him over the large families of Kerkuk City, which inhabited each neighborhood of Kerkuk for hundreds of years. He reports the following Turkmen family names and expects that Abdullah should know or hear about these families: "Neftchi, Yakubi, Gedik, Hurmuzlu, Awchi, Salihi, Celali, Kirdar, Kasablar, Bayrakdar, Alemdar, Paswan, Kulemen, Terzi Bashi, Bayatli, Kocak, Tikretli, Bezirgan, Saatci, Kuzeci, Naib, Kazi, Sari Kahya, Sabunci, Kayaci, Ak Koyunlu, Kopurli, Odushli, Demirci, Samanci, Ketene, Chelebi, Bal Yemez, Dizdar and Yuzulmez".

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Hurmuzlu presents another demographic character of the area, which can clearly explain nature of the population of any city. He talks over the graveyards of Kerkuk City. He says that there are two large graveyards in Kerkuk city; each of them is located in one of the two sides of the city. They are well known Turkmen graveyards and hosts hundreds of thousands of Turkmen bodies for hundreds of years. The Musalla Graveyard is located in the Musalla (Citadel) side of the city and the Ahmet Aga Graveyard, which later was called Martyrs Graveyard, is located in the side of Korya. Hurmuzlu talks over the origin of these two words. He says that Musalla took its name from the oldest and the largest neighborhoods of the city.

He continues; "Ahmet Aga was from the brave cognates who resisted the occupation of Iraq after the First World War, he was the owner of the well-known Café called by his name, which is located in the center of the Korya side of the city. Several hundred meters away from Ahmet Aga Graveyard, another small graveyard is present, which is called the graveyard of Abdi Beg. Toward the end of the 1940s, Ahmet Aga built this graveyard for his son who died in the early age. He opened streets and bordered it with different sorts of trees and built a masjid.

Hurmuzlu reminds Abdulla about the Kerkuk massacre in 1959, which was committed by the Kurds cooperating with the communists.⁴ The martyrs of that massacre were buried in Ahmet Aga Graveyard and therefore, this graveyard was renamed: 'Martyrs Graveyard'.

Hurmuzlu did not comment on the recently founded Kurdish graveyard in Imam Kasim neighborhood.

Talabani claims in his book² that almost all the mayors of Kerkuk city were Kurds, accordingly he concludes that the people of Kerkuk city should be Kurdish: by saying "the Ottomans did not expel the Kurds from Kerkuk city. They usually awarded the sensitive position of Mayor to a member of the majority group"..... "The Ottomans did not deny the ethnic make-up of Kerkuk city as being one in which a Kurdish majority co-existed with Turkmen and other ethnic groups. Therefore, they usually appointed a Kurd or a Turkmen on the sensitive position of Mayor". Talabani don't refer to independent sources, but to one of his former article, which was published in al-Manar Newspaper in 1994.⁵ As evidence to his claims, he points out the names of only two Kurdish and two Turkmen mayors of Kerkuk city.

Hurmuzlu ratifies the first paragraph of Talabani, but opposes the second and considers it contradictive to the historical records.

Hurmuzlu asserts that Abdulla cannot add any other name to the Kurdish mayors, which he mentioned. He may consider the third Kurdish mayor of Kerkuk city Maruf al-Barzanci, who remained only for a period of 6 months as a mayor, illegal. Al-Barzanci was appointed as a mayor of Kerkuk City by the coupe of July 1958, who was considered from the head planners of the notorious Kerkuk massacre in 1959⁴ and ruled to death and hanged in 1963.

In the above mentioned massacre, many active Turkmen politicians and intellectuals were killed with very wild and savage methods. Several of them have been pulled behind autos until death in the major streets of Kerkuk City. The others were hanged alive over the electric cables beside the streets.

Hurmuzlu starts to report the names of all Kerkuk city mayors from 1875 until 1980s:

- 1875 – 1900: Omer Sait Aga
- 1900 – 1910: Ali Kirdar
- 1910 – 1920: Baha al-Din Hurmuzi
- 1920s: Fattah Aga, Majeed Yakubi and Sadik Sarraf.
- 1930s: Abd al-Rrahman Bakir and Baki Aga Gedik.
- 1940s: Habib Talabani.
- 1950s: Shamil Yakubi, Nur al-Ddin al-Waidh, Fadhil Talabani and Maruf Al-Barzanci.

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- 1960s and 1970s: Hisam al-ddin Salihi, Mazhar Tikriti, Nazim Salihi, Ibrahim Ahmet, Kaysar Fatih, Abd al-Rahman Arslan and Mehmet Huseein Taqi.

It is worth noting to be mentioned here that the position of mayor in Kerkuk city was acquired by election until the second half of the 1930s. Habib Talabani, who was the first Kurdish mayor of Kerkuk City, was appointed in the late 1930s centrally without election and for more than 10 years. The other two Kurdish mayors of Kerkuk City were Fadhil Talabani, who remained in the post for few years until the coupe of 1958, and the above-mentioned Maruf al-Barzanci. From the aforesaid data, it can be said that Nouri Talabani had wrenched the historical facts.

To distort the Turkmen concentration and to change the demography of these regions, the forced settlement of Southern Arabs in the Turkmen areas and the forced expulsion of the Turkmen started openly and intensively in the late 1970s.⁶ After this period, the Iraqi government did not allow Turkmen or Kurd to have been appointed as mayor of Kerkuk city.

In the next paragraph Hurmuzlu challenges the Kurdish writers by the press in Kerkuk city. He considers the publications as a mirror of the nature of the population of any region. He asserts that the publications have to be written by the language of populace.

The only first edition of the newspaper al-Najma, which was published after the First World War directly by British mandate, was written in Arabic. From the second edition it started to be published in Turkmen language. The name of this newspaper changed to Kerkuk and the municipality get the ownership of this newspaper. It was published until the 1970s.

If Kerkuk is Kurdish city as the Kurdish politicians and writers claim, then how could the official newspaper of the municipality to have been published in Turkmen even during the long period in which the Kurdish mayor Habib Talabani was the mayor of the City? The other Turkmen publications were: Hawadis (1913), Maarif (1913), Kewkeb Al-Maarif (1916), Najma (1918), Tacaddud (1920), Kerkuk (1926), Ileri (1935), al-Afak (1954) and al-Beshir (1958).

Yavuz asks Abdullah: "Do you remember any publication which was published in your language in my city?" Actually, there have been no any Kurdish journal or newspaper published in Kerkuk city.

Hurmuzlu touches another important field of the community and starts to comment on the music of the Kerkuk City. He says that the song and music express the feelings of the people and it should be singed by the language of the populace. He says that there are tens of Turkmen singer: Osman Tabla Bash, Reshid Kule Riza, Mustafa Kalayi, Mulla Weli, Shiitag, Michala, Mal Allalah, Molla Taha, Sherif Mahhaw, Salih Hawala, Mehmet Gulboy, Ali Mardan, Sidik Bende Gafur, Abd al-Wahid Kuzeci, Abd al-Rrahman Kizilay, Iz al-ddin Nimet, Kerim Kolemen, Kerkuk Kizi, Fahr al-Ddin Ergec, Ekrem Tuzlu, Faik Neccar, Sima Berber, Ali Kalali, Tahsin Kerkukoglu and Sami Celali and many others. He wonders if there are a Kurdish singer who born, settled and presented a concerts in Kerkuk city, particularly before the 1960s.

According to C. J. Rich who visited the area in 1820, the Southern boundary of the imaginary Kurdistan district was determined to the area above Derbent town, which is located at the Southern part of the present Sulaymaniyya Province. He described the Kara Hasan district comprehensively, to the West of the Sulaymaniyya Province, as a Turkmen lands⁷. W. R. Hay mentioned that Kurdish tribes colonized the plains between the two Zab Rivers in the 19th century. Rich wondered whether the Kurds are the original inhabitants of the pretended Iraqi Kurdistan.⁸ This view has still its adherents today according H. Batatu.⁹ This explains the massive Kurdish immigration to the Turkmen lands in the not too distant past, as Batatu acknowledged.

The other field, which Hurmuzlu mentions, is the literature of Kerkuk city. He starts with the almost only Kurdish poet of Kerkuk City, Shayh Riza (Hijra. 1254 - 1328). He says that this great poet has written poem in Turkmen more than in Kurdish. And he doubts if there is another

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Kurdish literary man who wrote during the 20th century. The Poet Shayh Riza has a collection of 236 poems in Persian, Turkmen and Kurdish. Sixty of these poems were written in Turkmen¹⁰. Hurmuzlu reports some of the tens of important Turkmen poets and literary men of Kerkuk Province: Dede Hicri, Mehmet Sadik, Ahmet Medeni, Osman Mazlum, Reshid Akif, Mehmet Rasikh, Hasan Gorem, Reshid Ali Tawukli, Saad Allah Muftu, Esad Naiboglu, Celal Riza Tisinli, Omer Aga Tercilli, Hidir Lutfi, Ali Marufoglu, Izzeddin Abdi Beyatli, Nazim Refik Kocak, Mehmet Izzet Hattat, Mustafa Gokkaya, Nasih Bezirgan and Salah Nevres.

After pointing out the following old features of Kerkuk City, Hurmuzlu asks why these monuments were named in Turkmen and not in Kurdish:

- The Stony Bridge over the Hassa Su River, which was destroyed in the 1950s
- 'Cinema Gazi', which was from the first cinemas in Iraq.
- Tomb of Prophet Daniel, Top Kapi and thousands of historical houses in the Historical Kerkuk Citadel
- Gardens of Aslan Kaplan
- Babagurgur, which is a huge flame of burning natural gas of Kerkuk petroleum and existed for thousands of years.

The mills were considered from the vital sectors of the human community in the past. With the industrialization and instrumentation of the human community, mills are now regarded from the historical aspects of the countries. Some countries have taken it as a national symbol, such as the Netherlands. Hurmuzlu states that all the mills of Kerkuk city were built by Turkmen and named in Turkmen words and not Kurdish. He presents the Mills of Kerkuk City: Buyuk Karabash, Kucuk Karabash, Kirmizi Degirman, Cinler Degirman, Cennet, Chukur, Sebil Suyu, Kiravli, Tukat, Almaz, Eshkili, Zeytunli, Shishci, Shihoglu, Ulular, Begler, Neftchi Zade, Buyuk Molla Kasim, Silaw, Orta, Tendurlu, and Mikailoglu.

The next fields, which Hurmuzlu refers, are the historical documents which were presented by the independent sources. He points to the speech of Mr. Curzen, who was representing the United Kingdom in the Lausanne negotiations: "The Turkmen are populating particularly the cities of Erbil, Altun Kopru, Kerkuk and Kifri. They cannot be considered as Ottomans Turks. They are the generations of the Turkic tribes, who settled in Iraq before the Ottomans and the Seljuk's. They have special Turkic dialects".¹¹

Although the Iraqi Turkmen dialect of the Turkic language is similar to the Turkish dialect,¹² the British mandate made great efforts to show the Turkmen as a separate nation than the Turks, and considered it from the important factors in favor of Iraq during the discussions of Mosul problem in Lozano negotiations and in the league of nations.

The other referee, which Hurmuzlu presents, is the notification of the prime minister of the Iraqi government Nouri al-Said. This notification was given to members of the League of Nations at 30th May 1932. Copies can be founded by secretariat of League of the Nations and the archives of the State's Secretary of the United Kingdom under reference number "127 Middle East". The notification states: "The official language in the district Kifri of the Kerkuk Province and central district Kerkuk, which are populated with Turkmen majority, should be in Turkmen in addition to the official country language Arabic"¹³. "The personnel of the governmental related offices should be selected from the inhabitants who can talk Turkmen". It is worth noting that the teaching language in the primary schools in Kirkuk City and Kifri district was officially in Turkmen until 1937.^{14, 15} Although the government annulations, the class presentation remained for many decades in Turkmen. Professor EY Odisho, who is from the Christians community of Kerkuk City mentions in his article titled "City of Kerkuk: No historical authenticity without multiethnicity": "on different occasions in the elementary school, class presentations were conducted in Turkmen". Odisho mentions: "The Turkmen as a large native community in Kerkuk City", "the largest Turkmen population concentration is in the city of Kirkuk whose linguistics, cultural and ethnic identity is distinctly colored by their presence".¹⁶ M. Farouk affirmed, when he described Kerkuk

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Massacre of July 1959; "The original population of Kerkuk City were Turkmen and the Kurds were more recent incomers. The Turkmen had always dominated the socio-economic and political life of Kerkuk city."¹⁷ C. J. Edmonds, who lived in Iraq for few decades and studied the Sulaymaniya and Kerkuk region in depth, reports in his book titled "Kurds, Turks and Arabs", chapter XVIII under the title "Kirkuk": "The population at the time which I am writing numbered perhaps about 25,000 of whom the great majority were Turkmen and about one-quarter Kurds, with smaller colonies of Arab, Christians and Jews".

Other subject which Hurmuzlu presents is in the field of the cultural rights, which were given to the Turkmen at 24th January 1970. According to this legislation; the Turkmen intellectuals founded many official Turkmen directorates and civil society organizations in Kerkuk. For example: Directorate for the Turkmen education, Directorate of Turkmen Culture, Union of Turkmen literary men, National Turkmen artistic team, Great Voice music team and different cultural and sportive sections of the Revolutionary Club. Hundred and two of 110 primary schools in Kerkuk Province were started to educate in Turkmen and given Turkmen names. For example: Yildiz, Baba Gurgur, Aydinlik, Chalishgan, Barish, Genclik, Oguz, Aktash, Tash Kopru, Yedi Kizlar, Almaz, Avchi, Sona Goli, Hassa Su, Agalik, Shaturlu, Kawur Bagi, Sari Kahya, Cirit Maydani, Talim Tepe and Top Kapi.

How can the Turkmen be a minority in Kerkuk city, the study in about more than 90% of the schools were in Turkmen?

Democratic regulations were applied partially in Iraq in two periods: Firstly, in the first decades after the First War World when the Iraq was under British mandate, Secondly, during the first few years of foundation of the Republic in 1958. The Turkmen had won overwhelmingly in all the voting processes of the civil society organizations in Kerkuk Province which took place at the interval between 1958 and 1959. Furthermore, the Kurds, according to Hanna Batatu, held all the legal and political machinery in Kerkuk City in that period.¹⁸ The following are voting results from the different community sections:

- The Chamber of Lawyers in September 1958: Turkmen list won crushingly.
- The Student Union at 22 November 1958:¹⁹ Turkmen lists won crushingly in all the schools of the Province.
- The administrative committee of the Al-Thawra Club in November 1959: Turkmen won all votes.²⁰
- The Teachers Syndicate at 23 January 1959:²¹ Turkmen list won 604 out of 900 votes.
- The administrative committee of the Children protection Association in January 1959: Turkmen won 9 out of 11 votes. The other two were the chief of Health directorate of the Province and a Christian doctor.
- The administrative committee of the Teachers Club in January 1959: Turkmen won all 9 votes.
- The administrative committee of the Red Crescent at 13 February 1959: Turkmen won all votes.

Yavuz reminds Abdullah the days of 1957 census, and says that tens of thousands of communiqués, which were distributed in Kerkuk state, to encourage the people to participate in the census, were written in Turkmen. Hurmuzlu presents the content of one of those communiqués:

"Sayın vatandaş. Tescil işlerine iştirak etmek yeni ve mesut bir hayatın tesisinde temel sayılır."

***Irak Devleti
Shuun Igtimaiyye Wizareti
Nufus Umum Mudurlugu
1957 yili umumi nufus sayimi***

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English translation is:

"Dear the Citizen, participation in registration is considered basis of building of a new and happy live."

Iraqi State
Ministry of social affairs
Directorate of population
Census 1957

Hurmuzlu addresses to the Kurdish politicians and writers: It is impossible that the government printed tens of thousands of communiqués, which were distributed by the hand and by the autos and dropped by airplanes, for a minute section of the community.

Hurmuzlu describes the present tragic situation of the Iraqi Turkmen as a person who sits on a carpet and two powers, both of them had the same aim, pull from the opposite sides to the opposite directions to throw the owner out and to have the carpet. He names one of these powers as a Haulage Baghdad and the other Abdullah and his relatives and describes both of them as the Greedy People of the Black Yogurt, which he means the economic wealth of the Turkmen regions.

The Kurdish Local Government in the Kurdish-controlled areas banned the participation of Turkmen parties in the general and municipal elections which took place in the 1990s. Thousands of Turkmen who are deported from Kerkuk City to Erbil by the Iraqi regime are treated as foreigners. The Turkmen, who were holding administrative posts at most of the government offices before 1991, are gradually dismissed and replaced by the Kurds. The appointments of Turkmen are hampered. The Turkmen population and organizations are constantly exposed to series of discomfort. Their political buildings were bombed in Erbil in 1998, 1999 and 2002. Turkmen neighborhoods are doing not benefit from municipal services. The education in all the Turkmen schools has been put under strict regulations and the teachers and family of the students are fought economically and threatened. In many occasions these schools are forced to teach Kurdish language. The municipal services in Turkmen neighbourhoods are poor. In many occasions these schools are forced to teach Kurdish language.

Hurmuzlu considers the aim of Abdulla associates not different from the aim of Haulage Baghdad who is irrationally sickly afraid to loss the oil rich Turkmen areas. Therefore he applies the wildest assimilation and exportation policies to the Turkmen. He forcedly brought tens of thousands of Arabs from the southern Iraq to settle in the Turkmen regions.

He explains the Kurdish polices to appropriate the Black Yogurt at the present time as tame and calmer than that of the Haulage Baghdad, but he doubts if they will not do what Haulage Baghdad have done when they rule independently the region.

Hurmuzlu replies to the logic offer of Abdulla to cooperate to fight the Haulage Baghdad by saying: "we should work together to resist the dictatorship, oppression and the assimilation policies. We should fight for the democratic rights for all the Iraqi people and lend a hand to any power that hopes the good for the Iraqi people. This will depend on the intentions of each of us, dear Abdullah. I would remember you that the Kurdish policy is started to be more hostile and endangered existence of the Turkmen after the development of the Safe Haven, unfortunately".

With the progressing of the discussion, Hurmuzlu presents Abdulla as he understands the situation of the Iraqi Turkmen and accepts the Turkmen reality in Iraq. In fact, this can be right if we talk over some sections of the Kurdish community.

By the Black Yogurt, Hurmuzlu means the oil wealth of Kerkuk region.²²

Conclusion

We concluded that at the time, in which the Turkmen of Iraq are intensively suffering from the assimilation campaigns which became the official policy of the Iraqi regime for the last few decades, the Kurds consider them as new comers and they try to usurp their cities. They benefit from the exaggerated empathy which the Western politics award them. The inattentiveness toward the Turkmen and the other non-Arabic and non-Kurdish Iraqi components have further encouraged the Kurds not hesitate to violate the Turkmen human rights.

The Iraqi peoples are really friends and brothers. They lived for thousands of years with each other. They should solve the disagreements and put down the hate. They should tolerate each other and have good instincts for each other and work out the problems by conservation.

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SOITM map, Population distribution of the Iraqi Turkmen and other Iraqi non-ruling communities

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