

Guest Column

The Religious Doctrines of the Iraqi Turkmen: a Focus on the Shia Turkmen

Sheth Jerjis

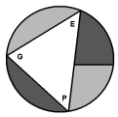
Introduction

Practically all the Iraqi Turkmen people embrace Islam. Very few of them are Christian; they are called Christians of the Citadel, referring to the Kerkuk citadel, their mother language is Turkmen and they use Turkmen language in their religious ceremonies (Al-Hirmizi 2005a and 2005b, and Samanchi 1999). With time and particularly after evacuation and demolition of the Kerkuk citadel during 1997-1998, they had migrated mainly to Baghdad and out of the country. The history of their presence in Kerkuk extends by some sources to the time of the Mongols of Genghis Khan in the 13th century.

Regarding the doctrinal (sectorial) components of the Iraqi Turkmen Muslim majority, they are Sunnis, Shias and a considerable percentage of the extremist Shias (*Al-Gulat*), such as Shabaks, Kakayis and Ahli Haq, are of Turkmen ethnicity (Moosa 1988).

Historical dimension

The settlement of the Turkmen in Iraq continued throughout multiple centuries, from the reign of the Umayyad dynasty (661–750 CE) to the



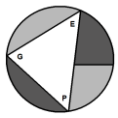
Abbasids (750–1258 CE), the Seljuk Empire (1118-1194 CE), Zengid (1127–1233 CE), the two Mongol periods of Genghis Khan and Tamerlane (1258-1411 CE), and the Black Sheep (*Qara Qoyunlu*) (1374-1468 CE) and White Sheep (*Aq Qoyunlu*) (1470-1508 CE) Turkmen monarchies. Ismail Shah of Safavids (1508-1534 CE) followed Qoyunlu dynasties, and then came the Ottomans (1638-1917 CE) to rule the region (Samanchi 1999).

Most of the sources support the idea that after defeat of Ismail Shah by Salim I of the Ottomans in the battle of Chaldiran in 1514, the Turkmen soldiers of Ismail Shah with their families spread and took root in the north of Iraq. They constituted the only Shia Turkmen who settled in Iraq. Despite that, many sources consider it doubtful; there are sources which support the idea that there were Shia sects in between the Black Sheep Turkmen tribes (Shahmoradi 2013 and Moosa 1988).

Population statistics

The Turkmen are the third largest component of the Iraqi population after the Arab and the Kurd. In addition to being a minority, which *per se* is a vulnerable community, whose human rights can be easily violated, their presence in a non-democratic nationalist community (Iraqi community) has led to:

- Failure of reflection of their population size in the official Iraqi statistical reports i.e. census statistics
- Deprivation of cultural and political rights
- Severe demographical changes of their regions
- Exposure to systematic violation of human rights

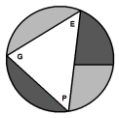


Therefore, one cannot depend on the Iraq government statistics to learn the true size and traits of the Iraqi Turkmen population. One should note that the initial estimations of the population number of the Iraqi Turkmen occurred in a very unfavourable geopolitical environment during dismember of the Ottoman Empire and British occupation of Iraq and after the First World War.

At the time when the Iraqi state was established, the discussions to determine the owner of the Vilayet (province) of Mosul in the former Ottoman Empire reached its climax in the League of Nations and in Lausanne. The large size of the Turkmen population was considered in favor of annexing the province to the Republic of Turkey (Al-Hirmizi 2003).

During the discussions of the Mosul problem, which continued from the end of the First World War until the Ankara treaty in June 1926, the number of the Iraqi Turkmen population was fixed by the new Iraqi State and the British mandate to 2% of the total Iraqi population. Then all the subsequent Iraq governments repeated the same percentage of the population of the Iraqi Turkmen until the fall of Baath regime in 2003.

Iraqi Turkmen politicians and intellectuals estimate the percentage of the Iraqi Turkmen to be at least 10% of the total Iraqi population. Estimation or counting of the population size of particular sects within the Iraqi Turkmen population has never been achieved. Turkmen sources consider the population size of the Shia Turkmen to be between 40% and 50% of the total Iraqi Turkmen population (Samanchi 1999 and JamesBowman.net 2003).



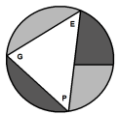
Regions

Regarding the regions of the Shia Turkmen in Iraq, they are found in different provinces. They live in considerable numbers in the city of Kerkuk and they inhabit large areas at the south and south-west of the city and province. For example, in Kerkuk province, they inhabit the district of Tawuk and sub-districts of Taze Khurmatua and Bashir. In the Salah al-Din province, there live Turkmen in the district of Tuz Khurmatu, where dozens of villages are populated by Shia Turkmen. They constitute the Turkmen of sub-district Kara Tepe and its villages in the Diyala province.

In the province of Nineveh, where there live more than half a million Turkmen, some sources estimates the percentage of Shia Turkmen at 30% of the Turkmen of the province. They are found inside Telafer city and in the Sallamiya and Rashiyya sub-districts. The Shabak and Kakayi Turkmen Shia sects are estimated to be several thousands in both Kerkuk and Nineveh provinces (Kayili 2008; Demirci 1991 and Saatci 1996).

Political Situation

As an ethnic minority community, all the Iraqi Turkmen have been exposed to discrimination and marginalisation by all the Iraqi governments since the establishment of the Iraqi state in 1921. This included systematic assimilation policies by the Baath regime, which came to power in 1968, and by the Kurdish authorities after the fall of

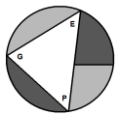


The Baath regime in 2003. The Shia Turkmen suffered additionally severely for their doctrinal beliefs.

The Islamic *Dawa* party, which was established inside Iraq in 1957, according to other sources in 1967, spread among the Iraqi Shiites in general in the 1970s, and the Shia Turkmen politicians took their share in this spread. The Baathist government started pursuing them since it grasped power in Iraq in 1968. Large numbers of Shia peoples were accused of affiliation with the *Dawa* party. Without fair trials, large numbers of them were imprisoned or sentenced to death including children, and many of them disappeared. Fleeing outside the country, particularly to Iran, started at that time.

The Iraqi government's chase of them reached a climax in 1980, during which the well-known Shia religious figure Mohammed Baqir al-Sadr was executed by the Baathist regime (Islamic Movements 2019). After which fleeing abroad, mainly to Iran, of the Shias further increased. Their fleeing reached a climax during the Iraq-Iran War between 1980 and 1988. In all the afore-mentioned events, the Shia Turkmen took flight too.

As a separate incident, the Baathist regime expelled (deported) large numbers of the Iraqi Shias (Faili Kurds) to Iran, claiming that they were of Iranian origin. According to Minority Rights Group International, the deportation took place in two episodes, firstly between 1969 and 1971, whereby the number of deported Shias was estimated to be about 70,000 people.

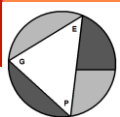


In the second episode the deportation was realised after the Revolutionary Command Council issued Decree No. 666 in 1980, which mandated to deport the foreign origin Iraqi peoples (noting that almost all were born in Iraq at least for two generations), whereby the number of deported people was between 150,000 and 500,000 (Minority Rights Group International 2017).

In the 1980s, there gathered large numbers of Iraqi Shias in Iran, almost all of them whom were strictly religious. At the beginning of the Iraq-Iran War, the major Iraqi Shiite parties started to be instituted under direct supervision and control of the Iranian government, such as the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq and the *Badr* organisation. One should note that the Islamic *Dawa* party was the only autonomous Shia party established inside Iraq before the fall of Baath regime in 2003. After this, the major Shia parties and armed Shia organisations were divided and several political and armed Shia groups were formed.

There are large number of Shia Turkmen at the highest levels of the major Iraqi Shiite parties. Several of them take important positions in the leaderships of those parties. For example, Mohammed Taqi Al-Mavla is among the founding party members of the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq, Mohammed Mehdi al-Bayati is almost the second authority in the *Badr* organisation, and Abbas al-Beyati and Jasim Mohammed Jafar are in the leadership of the Islamic *Dawa* party (The Washington Institute website 2017).

The organising of immense congresses by the Iraqi opposition parties abroad, which started after the occupation of Kuwait by the Baath regime of Iraq in 1990, prepared the stage for Iraqi Turkmen politicians



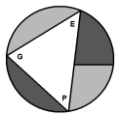
to start establishing political parties. Within a few months, both Turkmen political groups, the conservative nationalists and the religious Shia, had established their first parties.

Regarding the establishment of the religious political parties of the Iraqi Shia Turkmen, the first was the Islamic Union of Iraqi Turkmen (*Irak Türkmenleri İslam Birliđi*, الاتحاد الاسلامي لتركمان العراق). The Shia Turkmen politicians who were and still are members of the Iraqi Islamic *Dawa* Party founded the Islamic Union of Iraqi Turkmen in Syria on 2 March 1991.

Regarding Iraqi Turkmen political organisations, the Turkmen conservative-nationalist political community ¹ (SOITM Foundation 2019) established their first party under the name of the Iraqi Turkmen National Party, inside Turkey and under control of the Turkish government, in late 1990 and early 1991. After a few months, the religious Shia Turkmen political community founded their first political party in Syria, called the Islamic Union of Iraqi Turkmen.

The Turkmen conservative-nationalist political community, which includes Shia Turkmen politicians too, is much larger than the religious Shia Turkmen political community. Later on, the Turkmen conservative nationalists founded several other political parties, of which the majority are dominated by the Turkish intelligence services.

Notably, Turkey allowed the Turkmen of Iraq to establish political parties after the occupation of Kuwait by the Baath (Saddam) government in August 1990, when the Iraqi opposition abroad announced the organisation of their first congress. Before this, the



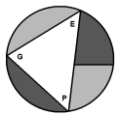
Turkmen were not allowed to establish any political party in Turkey.

The second political organisation of the Shia Turkmen, the *al-Wafa* movement, was founded in 2002 by the Turkmen in the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq so as to compete with the Islamic Union of Iraqi Turkmen in the meetings of the Iraqi opposition before the fall of Baath regime in 2003. It should be noted that all the Iraqi Turkmen political organisations lack the most basic requirements of a political party. Thus, the *al-Wafa* movement is almost only known by the names of its few founders, and it has no headquarters or any public base.

Given the aforementioned developments, Turkey controls the Turkmen of Iraq with an iron fist that is assisted by the blind obedience of the Iraqi Turkmen to Turkey due to geopolitical and historical factors. This blind obedience has decreased in recent years, yet not to a degree to free the Turkmen political system from Turkish domination.

Thus Turkey dominates the Turkmen conservative-nationalist political community, marginalising all the other Turkmen politicians and organisations which are not subjugated to Turkey, particularly Shia Turkmen politicians and organisations. The submission of Turkmen to Turkish political will gives a negative impression about the Turkmen among other national, regional and international powers, and deprives the Turkmen of their support.

Turkey stood in the way of any cooperation between the Turkmen conservative-nationalist and the Turkmen religious Shia groups. For example, the Shia Turkmen parties have been deprived of participating in the Iraqi Turkmen Front and in the Iraqi Turkmen Assembly



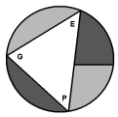
(Samanchi 1999) which are under control of Turkey. When Iraqi Turkmen intellectuals and politicians increased their call for the establishment of a general Iraqi Turkmen council, Turkey dissolved the then-existing Iraqi Turkmen council in 2011, preventing its (re)establishment until today.

As another example, Turkey prevents the two Turkmen political groups (those subjected and not subjected to Turkey) from cooperating with each other, and the disadvantages of this harmful Turkish policy is evident particularly during the Iraqi general elections.

The Turkish domination of the Turkmen polity can be considered one of the major reasons why the Turkmen of Iraq were unable to reflect their true population number in the Iraqi political arena and so during the elections and in the activities of parliament. Consequently there were always just a few Turkmen members from the Turkmen political groups ever elected and represented in the Iraqi parliament. Turkey's Turkmen policy has distorted and weakened the Turkmen political system to the point that the system is considered collapsed today.

Turkmen in Armed Shia groups

The Shia Turkmen are found in almost all the armed groups of the Iraq Shiite parties, such as the military forces of the *Badr* organisation and *Saraya al-Salam* of the Sadrist movement, the latter, led by the Islamic Shia cleric and politician Muqtada al-Sadr. Shia Turkmen participate also in all armed units of *al-Hashd al-Shaabi* (Popular Mobilisation Forces), which was set up after the Supreme Shiite Ayatollah Al-Sistani

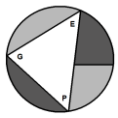


invited Iraqis to resist and fight the strictly Sunni religious groups which announced the establishment of the so-called *al-Dawla al-Islamiyah* (Islamic state 'IS'), after its occupation of Mosul city in June 2014.

The so-called Islamic State (IS) occupied large Turkmen regions in the four Iraqi provinces of Nineveh, Kerkuk, Salah al-Din and Diyala, while other Turkmen regions remained on the frontier battle lines between the warring sides. The Shia Turkmen constitute the majority of inhabitants of those areas. For example, in the Telafer district, large number of Shia Turkmen were executed and hundreds of women were taken as captives of the terrorist organisation the Islamic state of Iraq and Syria (الدولة الإسلامية في العراق والشام).

In Kerkuk province, massacres were committed in al-Bashir region and bodies of the victims were hanged on electric fences. Another massacre was committed in the village of Bir Awchi, a sub-district of Salah al-Din province. Shia Turkmen are found in lower numbers in sub-district of Qara Tapa, al-Saadiya (Kizil Rabat), Mansuriyat al-Jabal (Deli Abbas) and Jalawlaa in the province of Diyala, which were seized by IS.

The Turkmen of south and south-east of Kerkuk province established 16th Brigade of *al-Hashd al-Shaabi*, soon after the appearance of Islamic State. The brigade is also called *al-Hashd al-Shaabi al-Turkmani*. Shia Turkmen are found in the other factions of *al-Hashd al-Shaabi* too, as in large numbers in Brigade 52 of *al-Hashd al-Shaabi* and the *al-Abbas* brigade, the latter connected directly to the supreme Shia authority in Karbala.



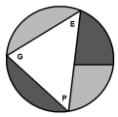
The Turkmen nationalist Haq Party is the only Turkmen conservative-nationalist party that has *al-Hashd al-Shaabi* forces, and most of its members are Sunni Turkmen. The number of Iraqi Turkmen in *al-Hashd al-Shaabi* before and during the elimination of the so-called Islamic State in Mosul city was estimated to be around seven thousand fighters. The Shia Turkmen in the factions of *al-Hashd al-Shaabi* participated in all the battles in all the regions against IS; many of them lost their lives—but also inflicted heavy casualties among the IS fighters (E. Gaston & A. Derzsi-Horvath 2018 and Anadolu Agency website 2015).

Some of the first and major causes for the emergence of armed groups in Iraq were the dissolution of the Iraqi Army during the fall of Baathist regime and the American-led occupation of Iraq in 2003. The major cause for the emergence of the large, overarching armed group called *al-Hashd al-Shaabi* is the emergence of Sunni extremist armed groups, which occupied different Iraqi provinces whereby the most violent and brutal one of these declared the so-called Islamic State.

Thus *al-Hashd al-Shaabi* gained almost complete legitimacy in the eyes of the Iraqi state and even indirectly in those of the international coalition, and cooperated with them and actively participated in liberating Iraqi lands and bringing the Islamic State to its knees.

Conclusion

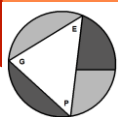
The Iraqi Turkmen are considered the third largest component of the Iraqi people, though their population number has been continuously underestimated since the foundation of the Iraq state in 1921.



In terms of doctrines, the Turkmen majority in Iraq is composed of the Sunni branch of Islam. The proportion of Shia Turkmen is estimated to be less than half of the Turkmen in Iraq. There are small numbers of Shabak and Kakayis Turkmen, as well as a very small number of Turkmen Christians. The presence of Turkmen in Iraq dates back to about twelve centuries ago, while the presence of Shia Turkmen in Iraq dates back to the Safavids era (1508-1534 CE). The Iraqi Turkmen are found in the northern and middle provinces of Iraq, and Shia Turkmen are found almost everywhere where Turkmen found in Iraq.

The Iraqi Turkmen suffer from severe weaknesses in political terms and human rights protections. It can even be said that Turkmen politics is collapsing today, and Turkey is playing the biggest role in sabotaging Turkmen politics. The conservative-nationalist trend is considered the largest segment of Turkmen politics which is dominated by Turkey. As for the Shiite religious political trend, it consists of two weak indigenous parties and Turkmen leaders in high positions in the large Iraqi Shiite ruling parties. The Shiite Turkmen are present in significant numbers in all the armed Shiite factions, and there are also independent Shiite Turkmen armed factions.

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Endnote

1. The Iraqi Turkmen political organisations can be categorized into three groups:

- I. Iraqi Turkmen Conservative Nationalist Political Community, which includes a large number organisations:

Organisation of the Turkmen Democrats and Patriots (OTDP) (1980)

Iraqi National Turkmen Party (INTP) (1991)

Turkmen Union Party (1991) (TUP)

Turkmen Eli (TE) (1996)

Turkmen National Democratic Movement (TNDM) (1993)

Turkmen Independent Movement (TIM) (1994)

Iraqi Turkmen Front (ITF) (1995)

Turkmen People Party (TPP) (1996)

Turkmen Eli Co-operation and Cultural Foundation (TCCF) (1996)

Islamic Movement of the Iraqi Turkmen (IMIT) (1997)

Turkmen Nationalist Community (TNC) (2004)

Turkmen Nationalist Movement (TNM) (2004)

Turkmen Justice Party (TJP) (2004)

Turkmen Decision Party (TDP) (2005)

Iraqi Turkmen Bloc (2009)

Turkmen Coalition (2012)

Turkmen National Right Party (2013)

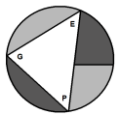
- II. Iraqi Turkmen Religious Shia Political Community, which include two parties and many Turkmen politicians in the leadership of the Iraqi Shiite parties:

Islamic Union of Iraqi Turkmen (IUIT) (1991)

Wafa Movement (2002)

Inside the large Shiite parties:

Islamic *Al-Dawa* Party



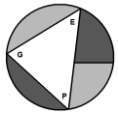
Supreme Council of Islamic Revolution, *Mohammed Taqi al-Mawla*
Badr Organisation, *Mohammed Mahdi al-Bayati*
Sadrists, Fevzi Akram
Others

III. Iraqi Turkmen organisations in the Kurdish region and cooperating with the Kurdish authorities, there are many of such political and civil society organisations, most of which lack the simplest requirements of an organisation:

Turkmen Union and Brotherhood Party (TUBP) (1992)
Turkmen Brotherhood Party (TBP) (1992)
Iraqi Turkmen Union Party (ITUP) (1994)
Turkmen Democratic Party of Kurdistan (TDPK) (1997)
Turkmen National Liberation Party (TNLP) (1998)
Kurdistan Turkmen Cultural Association (KTCA) (1998)
Turkmen People Party (TPP) (2002)
Turkmen National Community (TNC) (2002)
Turkmen Association of the Liberals (TAL) (2003)
Turkmen Sunrise Party (TSP) (2003)
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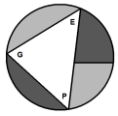
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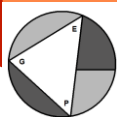
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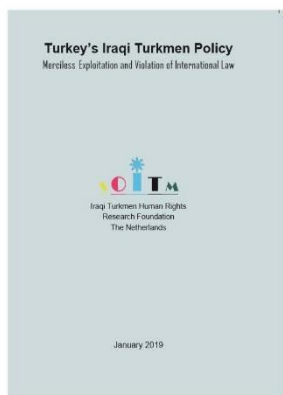
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About "Turkey's Iraqi Turkmen Policy"

The Turkmen in Iraq are of ethnic Turkic communities living in several countries neighboring Turkey.

The animosity and the hatred that had developed towards the Ottomans in the later decades of the Empire reflected onto those Turkic origin communities in the newly created countries after the Ottomans dismembered, which all were ruled by non-Turkish governments. The Turkic communities in the Balkans were exposed to massacres, in Greece they are still deprived of their ethnic rights, and in the Arabic countries, they are marginalized and exposed to serious assimilation policies, as in the cases of the Iraqi and Syrian Turkmen.

These suppressed communities had no other choice than to consider Turkey as their only rescuer and subjugate themselves to Turkey. At the same time, this has increased the animosity against them in their new countries and removed the possibility of getting help from any other national, regional or international powers.

On the other side, Turkey had neither ability nor intention to help these Turkic communities, in contrary, Turkey remain inattentive to their sufferings, even misused these communities benefiting from their blind obedience.

This book presents the history of 3 decades of the Turkish policy towards the Turkmen of Iraq, which can be considered a vivid view of the Turkish relation with Turkic communities in the neighboring countries.