

# Turkmens: Victims of Arabization and Kurdification Policies in Kirkuk\*

## Türkmenler: Kerkük'te Araplaştırma ve Kürtleştirme Politikalarının Kurbanları

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### Abstract

Kirkuk, with its large oil reserves, has constituted one of the most significant points of controversy politically, ethnically, and economically in modern Iraq. Historically a Turkmen city, Kirkuk underwent a massive Arabization policy during the Baathist regime in order to modify the city's demographics. This formed the major means by which the Baathist regime sought to control this multiethnic and multi-religious city.

After the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, Kurds launched a massive Kurdification program whereby Turkmen and Arabs have been encouraged to leave the city. The demography of the city has been changing in favor of the Kurds, who have resorted to all means, not excluding crimes against humanity, to form the majority of the city's population before the referendum that will decide not only the status of the city but also the future of Iraq and the Middle East. In supporting the Kurds, Western countries have ignored the suffering of the Turkmen, the primary victims of Arabization in the past and nowadays of Kurdification.

**Keywords:** Kirkuk, Turkmen, Arabization, Kurdification, Change of Demography

### Öz

Büyük petrol rezervlerine sahip olan Kerkük modern Irak'ta siyasi, etnik ve ekonomik olarak en tartışmalı konulardan birisidir. Tarihi olarak bir Türkmen şehri olan Kerkük Baas rejimi döneminde şehrin demografik yapısını değiştirme amaçlı olarak yoğun bir Araplaştırma politikasına maruz kalmıştır. Bu Baas rejiminin etnik ve dini açıdan karma bir yapıya sahip bu şehri kontrol etmek için kullandığı yöntemlerden birisi olmuştur.

ABD'nin 2003 yılında Irak'ı işgalinden sonra Kürtler Türkmen ve Araplara şehri terk etmeleri konusunda baskı yaparak yoğun bir Kürtleştirme politikası uygulamaya başlamışlardır. Şehrin demografik yapısı, sadece şehrin statüsünü değil Irak ve Orta Doğu'nun geleceğini de belirleyecek olan referandum öncesinde şehrin nüfusunun çoğunluğunu oluşturmayı hedefleyen Kürtler lehine insanlığa karşı işlenen suçlar dahil her türlü yöntemle değiştirilmektedir. Kürtleri destekleyen Batılı devletler önce Araplaştırma, şimdi de Kürtleştirme politikasının esas kurbanı olan Türkmenlerin acılarını görmezden gelmektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Kerkük, Türkmenler, Araplaştırma, Kürtleştirme, Demografik Yapının Değişmesi

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Şafak

Akademik  
Bakış

167

Cilt 9 Sayı 18  
Yaz 2016

## INTRODUCTION

The struggle for power in the Middle East, mainly for the control of oil resources, has been shaped by ethnic, religious, and sectarian clashes stemming from its complex demographical structure within artificial borders. Important regions or cities with historical, economical, religious, or social importance for different groups, constitute the focal points of the struggle. The multiethnic or multi-religious structures of these regions/cities lead rulers to resort to harsh methods to control these areas, with enforced change in the demographic structure, particularly by massive deportations of peoples within the country, constituting the major tool to effect this change.

Important economically, politically, and historically, Kirkuk presents one of the prime examples of the power struggle rooted in demographic changes. Since the discovery of oil here in 1927, Kirkuk has been economically important because of its large oil capacities, producing 340.000 barrels per day (bpd), almost 10 percent of Iraq's total production, and holding 40 percent of Iraq's oil reserves.<sup>1</sup> That makes Kirkuk's future important not only for Iraq but also for the region and for other countries. As Erol pointed out, Kirkuk is the Pandora's box of the new Middle East.<sup>2</sup>

Kirkuk has been traditionally noted for its ethnic and religious diversity, in particular its important Turkmen, Arab, and Kurdish populations, whose ownership disputes for the city cause major conflicts for Kirkuk. As a result, the major means employed to control Kirkuk has been enforced demographic change, especially after oil was discovered. Inhabited primarily by Turkmen historically, Kirkuk underwent heavy Arabization and then Kurdification programs in order for successive governments to effectively control the city.

Although started after the discovery of the oil, the massive Arabization policy was performed under the Baathist regime until 2003. Turkmen, Kurds and other minorities were replaced by Arabs transferred from southern Iraq, resulting in Arabs forming the major of the city's population, to the detriment of the formerly majority Turkmen and also of the Kurds resident there.

After the invasion of Iraq by the U.S. in 2003, the balance of power changed in northern Iraq, and Kurds, with help from western countries, started a massive Kurdification policy in Kirkuk. Under the cover of "Reversing Arabization", the Kurdish authorities resorted to violent methods to change the demography of the city, deporting, killing or threatening other ethnic groups, especially Turkmen and Arabs. Preparing for the referendum in Kirkuk after the seizure of the city in 2014 by Peshmerga, under threat by ISIS, the Kurdish aut-

1 OPEC, [http://www.opec.org/opec\\_web/en/about\\_us/164.htm](http://www.opec.org/opec_web/en/about_us/164.htm) .

2 Mehmet Seyfettin Erol, "Kerkük üzerinden Yeni Türkiye'ye Derin mesajlar", *Milli Gazete*, 9 Aralık 2013.

horities intensified their efforts to expel remaining Turkmen, in order to alter the demographical structure of the city in Kurdish favor.

This paper argues that Turkmen have constituted the major victims for both Arabization and Kurdification policies. Western countries, media, and scholars focused on Kurdish claims concerning the Arabization period while disregarding historical facts and official figures about the Turkmen population, tend to ignore the position of Turkmen as the main victims of Kurdification after 2003.

### ARABIZATION AND KURDIFICATION: CRIME AGAINST HUMANITY

Kirkuk's strategic, political, and especially economic importance prompted its ethnic communities (in particular its historical majority population groups of Turkmen, Arabs and Kurds) to assert jurisdiction over the city based on their different historical perspectives. As James Glanz stated, "the conflicting views on Kirkuk are rooted in conflicting readings of the same history."<sup>3</sup>

The main methodology in the struggle for the control of the city has been to alter demography, mainly deporting other ethnic groups and minorities to the other parts of Iraq, by force, threat or intimidation. That policy, Arabization, the Iraqi government pursued against Turkmen and Kurds until the end of Baath regime. Kurdish efforts to change the demography of Kirkuk through deportation, killings, torture, violence, intimidation and threat, under the supervision of Kurdish officials, especially military and civilian officials of the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), which began under the cover of reversing Arabization since 2003, is called Kurdification.

The legal aspects of Arabization and Kurdification are key factors to understand in the struggle for Kirkuk. Both processes include torture and violence, but especially the forcible and arbitrary transfer of populations, defined by the International Criminal Court statutes as a "crime against humanity".<sup>4</sup> Although the crimes performed during Arabization occurred prior to the ICC statute's coming into force in 2002, and when Iraq in any case was not a party to the statute, the Kurdification policy was executed after the ICC statute took effect, and mainly after Iraq acceded to the ICC in 2005. Thus, the crimes that occurred during Kurdification have more international obligations than those of Arabization.

The crime of deportation or forcible transfer of populations means forced displacement of the persons concerned by expulsion or other coercive acts

3 Glanz, James. "Letter from the Middle East: A City with 3 Chips on its Shoulder." *The New York Times*, 10 Aug. 2005.

4 Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, Article 7-1 (d).

Gazi

Akademik  
Bakış  
169  
Cilt 9 Sayı 18  
Yaz 2016

from the area in which they are lawfully present, without grounds permitted under international law.<sup>5</sup> That includes “the full range of coercive pressures on people to flee their homes, including death threats, destruction of their homes, and other acts of persecution such as depriving members of a group of employment, denying them access to schools, and forcing them to wear a symbol of their religious identity.”<sup>6</sup> All the above occurred during both Arabization and Kurdification.

The actions of the former Iraqi government meet all the requisite elements of the crime against humanity, in the forced transfer of civilian populations. First, Iraq has “forcibly transferred, without grounds permitted under international law,” hundreds of thousands of Kurds, Turkmen, and Assyrians “to another ... location, by expulsion or other coercive acts.” Second, the persons expelled or forcibly transferred from northern Iraq “were lawfully present in the area from which they were deported or transferred.” Third, the Iraqi government knew that the expelled persons were lawfully present in northern Iraq. Finally, the expulsions from northern Iraq were pursued as a matter of government policy<sup>7</sup>

The same situations hold for Kurdification in Kirkuk. Since the 2003 US invasion, many Turkmen, Arabs, and other minorities have been forcibly transferred to another location by expulsion or other coercive actions, including killings. US officials ignored the torture, violence, and intimidation against Turkmen and Arabs, if they did not help. Kurdish leaders intensified their efforts after the seizure of Kirkuk by Peshmerga in 2014 under the cover of the ISIS threat. Kurds called their actions “reversing Arabization”. However, a majority of the deportees are Turkmen, who have been living in Kirkuk for centuries. Turkmen are “lawfully present in the area from which they were deported or transferred”, unlike Arabs settled during Arabization, because there has never been a Turkmenization in Kirkuk.

Finally, Kurdish officials have been partly or completely involved in this action. As the Human Rights Watch observed, after the 2003 invasion, military and civilian officials of the two main Kurdish political parties—the KDP and the PUK—took a direct role in the intimidation, suggesting that the two political parties actively supported the forced displacement in Kirkuk.<sup>8</sup> Since 2014, Kurdish officials have been officially responsible for the events in Kirkuk where Peshmerga controls the city.

5 Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, Article 7-2(d).

6 Christopher K. Hall, “Article 7: Crimes against humanity” Otto Triffterer (ed.), *Commentary on the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court*, Baden-Baden, Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, 1999, p. 162.

7 Claims in Conflict Reversing Ethnic Cleansing in Northern Iraq, Human Rights Watch, August 2004, Vol. 16, NO. 4(E), <https://www.hrw.org/reports/2004/iraq0804/iraq0804.pdf>, p.20-21.

8 Claims in Conflict Reversing Ethnic Cleansing in Northern Iraq, Human Rights Watch, p.35.

Göz

As pointed out above, Kurdification, like Arabization, meets all the requisite elements of the crime against humanity that consists of the forced transfer of civilian populations. As Ezzat pointed out “crimes against humanity have been committed in terms of deliberate acts, encompassing a deliberate campaign of massacre, impoverishment, abduction, torture and deportation, cultural destruction, as well as negligence of their rights to political representation.”<sup>9</sup> The Kurdish leaders’ plan is to change Kirkuk’s demography in favor of Kurds before the referendum that will determine the status of Kirkuk and other disputed areas. They do not refrain from committing crimes against humanity in the 21st century. Not surprisingly, most of the western media and governments ignore the crimes against humanity when the victims are Turkmen. Thus the governments, who openly support an independent Kurdish state in the region, do not feel obliged to stop the crime against Turkmen which is not on the agenda of the international community because it is not published in their media. Turkmen will also not have evidences credible for western institutions if they would like to sue in the future.

## ARABIZATION

Kirkuk was the main centre of the Turkish population in Iraq. Several villages in its vicinity are also Turkish speaking , whereas other towns are isolated communities surrounded by Kurds and Arabs.<sup>10</sup> The Turkish-speaking population in Iraq and Syria, which have historical and cultural ties to Turkey, are called Turkmen. The origin of the Turkmen people is unclear, but the supposition is that they must be descended from colonists settled by the Seljuk state as the outpost of their rule.<sup>11</sup> The power of the Turkmen reached its peak after the conquest of Kirkuk by the Ottoman empire in 1534. In nineteenth-century Ottoman Iraq a verifiable claim to Turkic origin was the key to social and political advancement, with the result that Turkic families occupied the highest socio-economic strata and held the most important bureaucratic jobs.<sup>12</sup> Ottoman rule in Kirkuk ended in 1926 according to the decision by League of Nations and Kirkuk became a part of the Kingdom of Iraq, which was in turn ruled under British administration until 1932.

The discovery of oil in 1927 changed the fate of Kirkuk and the city became one of the most important revenue resources for the Iraqi government, which is one of the main reasons for the struggle over control of the city. The Kirkuk oil field consist of three domes---Baba, Avanah and Khurmala---and it

9 Yawooz Ezzat, *The treatment of Iraqi Turks since the Aftermath of WWI: A Human Rights perspective*, Trafford Publishing 2012, p.5.

10 Paul J. Rich, *Iraq and Rubert Hay's two years in Kurdistan*, Lanham, Lexington Books, 2008, p.61.

11 Ibid, p.61.

12 Lian Anderson and Gareth Stansfield, *Crisis in Iraq: The Ethnopolitics of Conflict and Compromise*, Philadelphi, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009, p.17.

Gazi

Akademik  
Bakış

171

Cilt 9 Sayı 18  
Yaz 2016

was at the Baba dome that the country's first productive oil well was drilled.<sup>13</sup> That intensified the struggle between Arabs and Kurds to control social and economic life in Kirkuk. During this period, the Turkmen did not take part in the ethnic-nationalist struggles between Arabs and Kurds, yet they tried to maintain their identity. However, they were occasionally targeted by the Iraqi monarchy for assimilation, with massacres of Iraqi Turkmen occurring in Kirkuk in May 1924 and July 1946.<sup>14</sup>

Especially during and after the revolution of 1958, Kurds targeted Turkmen, which Anderson and Stansfield called "the moment that their relationship with the Kurds changed from one of coexistence to one of ethnic-based competition."<sup>15</sup> Yet by 1968, when the Ba'ath party took control of Iraq, the Turkmen of Kirkuk felt even more pressured by the Kurdish-Arab struggle that revolved around Kirkuk's inclusion in a Kurdish region.<sup>16</sup>

However, Turkmen remained in the the largest group in Kirkuk's population, despite the fact that "between the turn of the century and the 1957 Iraqi census, Kirkuk's population increased from roughly 25,000 to about 120,000"<sup>17</sup> thanks to the economic development based on oil production. According to the 1957 census, one of the most reliable sources for the ethnic structure of Kirkuk, Turkmen (37.6 percent) were the largest group, just outnumbering Kurds (33.3 percent), who in turn outnumbered Arabs (22.5 percent).<sup>18</sup> The census data from 1957 indicate that Kirkuk city's total population of 120,000, just over 45,000 were Turkish speakers, 40,000 were Kurdish, and 27,000 were Arabic speakers.<sup>19</sup> However, the 1960's experienced a massive Arabization process in Iraq, resulting in Kirkuk experiencing more change than any other city in the region<sup>20</sup>, in favor of Arabs.

The Baath Party seizure of power in 1968 became the prime determinant force for the future of Northern Iraq. The Baath Party granted more autonomy to Kurds than they had ever received before, however the Baath excluded Kirkuk from this gesture. Kirkuk was one of the main controversial issues for the 1970 Autonomy Accord between Baghdad and Mullah Mustafa Barzani, which

13 Iraq facts and figures, [http://www.opec.org/opec\\_web/en/about\\_us/164.htm](http://www.opec.org/opec_web/en/about_us/164.htm)

14 Barry Rubin, "People of the Middle East", Barry Rubin (ed), *The Middle East: A Guide to Politics, Economics, Society and Culture*, Oxon, Routledge, 2015, 529.

15 Anderson and Stansfield, *ibid*, 2009, p. 64.

16 *Ibid*, 79-86.

17 Arbella Bet-Shlmon, Group Identities, "Oil, and the Local Political Domain in Kirkuk: A Historical Perspective", *Journal of Urban History*, September 2012, Vol. 38, no. 5, p.916.

18 Brendan O'Leary, *How to get out of Iraq without integrity*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009, p.152.

19 Liam Anderson, Power-sharing in Kirkuk: Conflict or Compromise?, Paper prepared "Globalization, Urbanization and Ethnicity Conference"(Ottawa, December 3-4, 2009), [https://www.academia.edu/203542/Power-Sharing\\_in\\_Kirkuk\\_Conflict\\_or\\_Compromise](https://www.academia.edu/203542/Power-Sharing_in_Kirkuk_Conflict_or_Compromise)

20 Anderson and Stansfield, *ibid*, p.42.

Göz

has been a cornerstone for the evolution of Kurdish autonomy. The Baath Party intensified its Arabization efforts in Kirkuk, to make sure that Arabs would be in the majority in the plebiscite they were planning to hold.

"Barzani insisted on Kirkuk's inclusion within the Kurdish region while Baghdad (represented in the negotiations by then Vice-President Saddam Hussein) categorically refused to allow Kirkuk and its surrounding oil fields to fall out of its control."<sup>21</sup> As Gunter pointed out, the uncompromising position of Barzani and Talabani on whether Kirkuk formed part of Kurdistan is probably at least in part a result of their fear of losing control of the Kurdish "street", which considers Kirkuk to be the Kurdish "Jerusalem".<sup>22</sup> The Turkmen presence in great numbers in Kirkuk, was seen by Mullah Mustafa Barzani as an obstacle to the realization of his dream for an independent Kurdish state and the control of Kirkuk's oil wealth.<sup>23</sup>

The struggle for Kirkuk increased tension between Kurds and the Iraqi government, endangering Kurdish autonomy. In June 1973, Barzani angered Saddam by telling the Washington Post that Kirkuk's oil belonged to the Kurds and plainly demonstrating his refusal to compromise on that stance. Tiring of Barzani, in March 1974 Saddam gave the Kurds two weeks to reject or accept his government's offer. Barzani turned him down.<sup>24</sup> That resulted in the massive Arabization process in Kirkuk that affected Turkmen much more than Kurds.

Saddam Hussein's success in breaking the relationship between Iran and the Kurds, and the collapse of Kurdish rebellion, which resulted in Barzani's exile, started a new Arabization wave in Kirkuk. To ensure that the Kurds could never again claim they had a majority in the city, the Baath regime embarked upon a deeper Arabization of the region, with tens of thousands of families moved off their land to sites in the southern deserts.<sup>25</sup> In 1975, the Iraqi Baath Party, under Ahmat Hassan al Bakr, began to Arabize the Kirkuk area by imposing restrictions on Kurds and Turkmen who lived there while trying to replace them with Arabs from central and southern Iraq.<sup>26</sup>

The 1988 Halabca massacre and the 1991 Gulf War played an important role in the second step of the Iraqi government's Arabization policy in Kirkuk.

- 21 David Romano, *The Future of Kirkuk*, Sherrill Stroschein (ed), *Governance in Ethnically Mixed Cities*, New York, Routledge, 2007, p.94.
- 22 Michael M. Gunther, *The Kurds Ascending: The Evolving Solution to the Kurdish Problem in Iraq and Turkey*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2008, p.46.
- 23 Mofak Salman Kerkuklu, *The Plight of Iraqi Turkoman*, Istanbul, Turkmeneli Research and Idea Center Publications Nu: 2, 2015, p. 14.
- 24 Said K. Aburish, *Saddam Hussein: The Politics of Revenge*, New York, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2000, p. 121.
- 25 Anderson and Stansfield, *ibid*, p.39.
- 26 Spencer C. Tucker, *Kirkuk, Iraq, US Conflicts in the 21st Century, Afghanistan War, Iraq War and the War on Terror*, Santa Barbara, ABC Clio, 2016, Volume 2, p.492

gazi

Operation Desert Storm deepened the rift between Arabs and Kurds, where Kurds enjoyed a new autonomous region of Dohuk, Suleymaniye and Erbil north of the thirty-six parallel and protected by the US and UK, but which did not include Kirkuk. The Baath regime then launched a new and massive Arabization program in Kirkuk, replacing expelled Kurdish, Turkmen and Assyrians with Arabs, most of them Shi'a families brought from the south. Arabs took over the homes of expelled families, but the Iraqi government also constructed entirely new neighborhoods to drastically alter the ethnic demography of Kirkuk--the very aim of Arabization.<sup>27</sup> "Kurds, Turkmen, and Assyrians came under constant pressure to sign ethnic identity correction forms relinquishing their ethnicity and registering officially as Arabs, while non-Arabs were required to become members of the Baathist Party, and to serve in "volunteer" militias. Families that refused to comply were issued formal expulsion orders requiring them to leave their homes and move to Kurdish-controlled areas. . . . Arab families were given financial incentives to move north, and the Iraqi government embarked on housing construction projects to bring more Arab families north in order to change the demographic make-up of the north"<sup>28</sup>. It is estimated that between 1991 and 2003 as many as 120,000 Kurds and Turkmen were forcibly relocated out of Kirkuk.<sup>29</sup> As Brendan O'Leary pointed out, Arabization and gerrymandering altered the demographic character of the province.<sup>30</sup>

There has not been any credible information about the change of population in the Kirkuk city during the Arabization process. However "The Arabs forcibly expelled Kurds and especially Turkmen from Kirkuk city. The situation in Kirkuk Province was even worse than in the city itself, as the Turkmen population declined from 21% to 7% between 1957 and 1997"<sup>31</sup> as shown below.

**Table-1 :** Comparison of Kurdish, Arab and Turkmen population in Kirkuk

	1957 Census		1977 Census		1997 Census	
Kurds	187.593	48 %	184.875	38 %	155.861	21 %
Arabs	109.620	28 %	218.755	45 %	544.596	72 %
Turkmens	83.371	21 %	80.347	17 %	50.099	7 %

**Source:** Anderson and Stansfield, (2009: 43)

27 Claims in Conflict Reversing Ethnic Cleansing in Northern Iraq, Human Rights Watch, p.35.

28 Claims in Conflict Reversing Ethnic Cleansing in Northern Iraq, Human Rights Watch, p.35.

29 Tucker, *ibid*, p.492

30 Peter W. Galbraith, Kurdistan in Federal Iraq, "The Future of Kurdistan in Iraq", Brendan O'Leary, John McGarry and Khaled Salih (eds), Philadelphia, University Press of Philadelphia, 2005, p.277.

31 Anderson and Stansfield, *ibid*, p.43.



## KURDIFICATION

Kirkuk is one of the most important cities for Kurds for several reasons. It is mostly defined as "Jerusalem for Kurds" or as "historic capital". As Gelletly argues, "those who purpose an independent Kurdish state would like to see it as the capital".<sup>32</sup> On the other hand, Kirkuk is the key to oil fields that represent 40 percent of Iraq's proven petroleum reserves. At the least, those fields constitute an enormous bargaining chip in the negotiations with the future Iraqi government; at most they provide the economic base for a future Kurdish state."<sup>33</sup> An independent Kurdish state would only be economically independent with Kirkuk's oil. This is the reason Kurds have been using all means to kurdify Kirkuk, even resorting to violence, torture and ethnic cleansing. They believe that if they can secure Kirkuk and its vital oil fields, they can fulfill their ancient dream of an independent Kurdish nation<sup>34</sup>

The Second Gulf War became a cornerstone of the Kurdification process of Kirkuk that took place in most of Northern Iraq. During the 2003 invasion, PUK Peshmerga entered Kirkuk on April 10, ignoring the agreement between the Kurds and the US that Peshmerga forces would remain outside Kirkuk, but US soldiers replaced PUK fighters in a short period. However, the PUK then brought in civilian defense units, traffic police, and medical staff for the hospitals in order to fulfill the vacuum left behind when Iraqi government forces and officials fled Kirkuk. During that period, Kurdish gangs in some neighborhoods of Kirkuk demanded that Arab residents leave their homes.<sup>35</sup> With the status of the city and its possible inclusion in the Kurdistan Region becoming a critical issue on the table of Iraq's post-Baathist leaders, and with US advisers focusing once again on the importance of Kirkuk not only to Iraq but also to the Kurds as a potential resource base for independence.<sup>36</sup>

After the invasion, Kurds were willing to have Kirkuk's people determine its status by referendum. But they insisted that before such a referendum take place, the effects of the "Arabization" program must be reversed.<sup>37</sup> Article 58 of the interim Iraqi Constitution, or the Transitional Administrative Law (TAL) drafted in 2004, outlined the 'normalization' process to reverse Arabization, including the return of displaced people, the recovery of their properties and homes, and the reversal of border alterations. Article 140 of the Iraqi Constitution, ratified in 2005, introduced a three-step process in Kirkuk and other disputed territories involving "normalization," to be followed by a census, and fi-

32 Leanne Gelletly, *Major Muslim Nations: Kurds*, Broomall, Mason Crest Publisher, 2010, p.92.

33 Sandra Mackey, *The Coming Clash Over Kirkuk*, *New York Times*, 09 February 2005.

34 Sam Kiley, *Iraq: The Road to Kirkuk*, *PBS*, <http://www.pbs.org/frontlineworld/stories/iraq203/thestory.html>

35 *Claims in Conflict Reversing Ethnic Cleansing in Northern Iraq*, Human Rights Watch, p.48.

36 *Claims in Conflict Reversing Ethnic Cleansing in Northern Iraq*, Human Rights Watch, p.45.

37 Galbraith, *ibid*, p.277.

Gazi

Akademik  
Bakış

175

Cilt 9 Sayı 18  
Yaz 2016

nally a referendum to determine whether the citizens of Kirkuk want to join the Kurdistan region. The constitution tasked the Iraqi government with undertaking the necessary steps to complete the implementation of the requirements of Article 58, through a referendum with a deadline no later than 31 December 2007. The Kurds suggested that a referendum in Kirkuk could resolve once and for all the issue, but they are not prepared to proceed with such a plan unless population numbers are altered by the return of those Kurds who had been expelled from the region.<sup>38</sup> However, the referendum has been delayed repeatedly, and currently has no firm date.<sup>39</sup> Anticipating such a referendum, the Kurds have reportedly begun using their intelligence service Asayesh to strengthen their position in Kirkuk by pressuring the city's Arabs (both Sunni and Shii), and Turkmen to leave.<sup>40</sup> That heralded the beginning of the Kurdification process in Kirkuk.

The Kurdification program has been executed in steps, with massive help from western countries. The first step was to counter the power of Turkey, which has stressed that measures to destabilize Kirkuk Turkmen, demographically or politically, would constitute a reason for Turkish military intervention. Turkey also aimed to prevent Kurds from capturing Kirkuk in the first place, since that would trigger aspirations for an independent Kurdish state. Events in the future clearly showed that Turkish concerns were right.

The dispute between Kurds and Turkmen over Kirkuk has become one of the largest problems between the US and Turkey, and Kurdish control of the city constitutes a potential reason for Turkey's intervention.<sup>41</sup> "In the lead up to the Iraqi War, Kirkuk and Mosul proved to be sticking points that prevented the US from being able to launch a prong of its assault into Iraq from bases in Turkey. The Turkish parliament wanted guarantees that Kurdish fighters would not be allowed to capture Kirkuk or Mosul. Because the US would not, or could not, make such a promise, Turkey refused to grant Americans and their allies permission to launch an attack from Turkish soil. The Turks saw this move also as a means of squelching of Iraqi Kurds' nationalism".<sup>42</sup>

Thus, ending Turkmen power in Kirkuk and eliminating the Turkish intervention threat, which would have required western help, played an important role in the Kurdification of the city. The US authorities opted for a direct

38 Costas Laoutides, *Self-Determination and Collective Responsibility in the Secessionist Struggle*, Burlington, Ashgate Publishing Company, 2015, p.181.

39 Mehmet Seyfettin Erol, "'Kürt Devleti' Projesi Rafa mı Kaldırıldı?", *Yarınlara İçin Düşünce Aylık Ulusal ve Uluslararası Analiz Dergisi*, 3 (31), Mayıs 2008, pp.64-70.

40 Kenneth Katzman, *The Kurds in post-Saddam Iraq*, 01 September 2009, Congressional Research Service, <http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a535831.pdf>, p.7.

41 Rajan Menon and S. Enders Wimbush, *Is the U.S.-Turkey Alliance at an End?*, *The Washington Post*, 24 April 2007.

42 Tucker, *ibid*, p.492

confrontation with Turkey, which resulted in one of the most serious crises in the history of Turkish-American relations. American soldiers raided a Turkish compound in Suleymaniye, where Turkish Special Forces troops were located, on 4 July 2003, the so-called “Hood Event” that yielded information on the Turkish covert organizational structure consisting mainly of Kirkuk Turkmen. These Kirkuk Turkmen were killed thereafter in different ways,<sup>43</sup> clearly showing that the Americans transmitted the information to the Kurds, and highlighting the American role in the Kurdification program in Kirkuk and elsewhere. Thus project offers in Turkey such as “Turkmen Federal State<sup>44</sup>” has been eliminated.

The second step in the Kurdification program, reversing the Arabization program, forms a major goal for Kurds before the upcoming referendum, along with other methods to compel other ethnic groups, especially Turkmen, to leave Kirkuk. As Rajan Menon and S. Enders Wimbush note, with the help of the Kurdish Regional Government there was an inflow of 350,000 Kurds into Kirkuk, many of whom had no ties to the city.<sup>45</sup> As .... pointed out, new Kurdish settlements were popping up everywhere in and around Kirkuk.<sup>46</sup>

Demographic change occurred also through violence, torture, and intimidation, with western help. Kurds have used their position as American allies to bring in Kurdish families and thus bolster their demand that Kirkuk be incorporated into the Kurdish autonomous zone.<sup>47</sup> As Denise Natali pointed out, “KRG officials and their party apparatus started to “kurdise” what the Iraqi government had “arabized”. The KRG engaged in its own territorial gerrymandering, demographic changes, and settler policies that attempted to erase the notional Green Line, which the Kurds considered the “Saddam Line”, from the public imagination. From 2003 to 2014 Kurdish officials took advantage of weak and dysfunctional Iraqi government and the political and security vacuum in the disputed territories”.<sup>48</sup> Since the fall of the Saddam Hussein government in 2003, the city of Kirkuk has been subjected to major demographic changes by the Kurds in a more brutal way than that which was carried out by the Saddam Hussein government.<sup>49</sup>

- 43 İsmail Hakkı Pekin, Dikkat Cemaat Çıkabilir: Kozmik Oda Fethullah Gülen Türk Ordusuna Neden Kumpas Kurdu?, İstanbul, Kyrhos, 2015.
- 44 Mehmet Seyfettin Erol, “11 Eylül Sonrası Türk Dış Politikasında Vizyon Arayışları ve Dört Tarz-ı Siyaset”, *Gazi Akademik Bakış* Cilt 1, Sayı 1 Kış 2007, p.49.
- 45 Rajan Menon and S. Enders Wimbush, “The US and Turkey: End of an Alliance?”, *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy*, Summer 2007, Nu: 2, 01 June 2007, p.141.
- 46 Peter W. Connors, The US Army in Kirkuk: Governance Operations on the Fault Lines of Iraq Society, 2003-2009, Fort Leavenworth, Combat Studies Institute Press, 2011, p.42.
- 47 Sandra Mackey, The Coming Clash Over Kirkuk, *New York Times*, 09 February 2005.
- 48 Denise Natali, Settlers and State-Building: The Kirkuk Case, Oded Haklai and Neophytos Loizides (eds), Settlers in Contested Lands Territorial Disputes and Ethnic Conflicts, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2015, p.128.
- 49 Mofak Salman Kerkuklu, *The Plight of Iraqi Turkoman*, İstanbul, Turkmeneli Research and Idea Center Publications Nu: 2, 2015, p.180.

*Gazi*

The role of western countries in the Kurdification process was reflected also in reports prepared by various organizations. For example, the report prepared by Human Rights Watch states that “during the same period, Arab residents in some neighborhoods of Kirkuk reported pressure from Kurdish armed gangs to leave their homes, although it was difficult to determine whether the armed gangs responsible for acts of intimidation were official Peshmerga forces belonging to the KDP or PUK, or armed elements outside the formal control of the political parties”,<sup>50</sup> refraining directly blaming Kurds for events. The report further argued that “among the reasons cited by the Arabs for their flight were the intensity of the bombing campaign and the proximity of the front lines with its associated dangers, fears of revenge from returning Kurds, and in many cases the remarkable recognition that the land they lived on did not truly belong to them, but rather to the Kurds or other minorities who had been expelled”. The report also states “that although sporadic violence and intimidation by Peshmerga forces did take place, Human Rights Watch is not aware of a single massacre committed against Arab settlers by returning Kurds or other minorities.”<sup>51</sup>

On the other hand it should be noted that some journalists reported the events in a biased way. For example Frontline/World correspondent Sam Kiley underlined the torture performed by the Peshmerga against Turkmen, who make up a quarter of the Kirkuk population, and noted that “although the Peshmerga fighters who liberated Kirkuk had promised there would be no revenge for the Anfal, only justice, he observed around the City center that women and children are now caught up in what looks like ethnic cleansing in reverse.”<sup>52</sup> Kerkuklû describes all atrocities Turkmens suffered in his book “The Plight of Iraqi Turkoman.”<sup>53</sup>

ISIS provided an opportunity for the Kurds to implement the final process of Kurdification in Kirkuk, namely control of the city by Peshmerga, when ISIS seized Mosul after Iraqi soldiers and police fled the city and thus allowed the terrorist organization to seize the city on 8 June 2014. Once ISIS entered Diyala, 90 km north of Bagdad, Kurdish forces poured into Kirkuk after it was evacuated by government forces. As The New York Times pointed out: “Kurdish forces exploited the mayhem convulsing Iraq to seize complete control of the strategic northern oil city of Kirkuk as government troops fled in the face of advancing Sunni militants.”<sup>54</sup> The possible seizure of Bagdad by ISIS alarmed

50 Claims in Conflict Reversing Ethnic Cleansing in Northern Iraq, Human Rights Watch, p.48.

51 Claims in Conflict Reversing Ethnic Cleansing in Northern Iraq, Human Rights Watch, p.28.

52 Sam Kiley, “Iraq: The Road to Kirkuk”, PBS, <http://www.pbs.org/frontlineworld/stories/iraq203/thestory.html>

53 Mofak Salman Kerkuklu, *The Plight of Iraqi Turkoman*, İstanbul, Turkmeneli Research and Idea Center Publications Nu: 2, 2015.

54 Kurdish Fighters Take a Key Oil City as Militants Advance on Baghdad, *The New York Times*, 12 June 2014

Göz

the western community, with the help of the international media that depicted a doomsday scenario, and resulted in ignoring Kirkuk's control by Kurds. Western countries, including many Eastern European countries, started a support campaign for the KRG, especially for heavy weapons that would bypass the Baghdadi government. The support urged the central government, which controls Irbil's airspace, to ban cargo flights to the north, which in the past brought in new weapons from Eastern Europe.<sup>55</sup> It is important to note that Turkey had to deal with the seizure of 49 staff members of the Turkish consulate in Mosul by ISIS while Kurds were seizing the control of Kirkuk.

The seizure of Kirkuk by Peshmerga increased the tension between the Iraqi government and the KRG. Iraqi Prime Minister Maliki accused the Kurds of turning their regional capital into the headquarters of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, as well as harboring members of the Baath Party of former President Saddam Hussein and other opponents of the Iraqi government. .... He asked the Kurds to "stop the operations room for ISIS" and implied that the Kurds had assisted the Sunni militants who swept into northern Iraq and seized territory in June, saying that the government had "diagnosed the internal and external parties who supported the conspiracy that took place in Iraq." (underlining the role of some countries). In retrospect, the Kurdish president, Mesud Barzani, said that "Maliki has become hysterical and has lost his balance, doing everything he can to justify his failures and put the blame on others."<sup>56</sup>

Despite harsh criticism by the Iraqi government, the Kurdish Parliament passed a resolution that allowed Peshmerga to continue to control the city. Finally the Iraqi government and the KRG agreed that the Peshmerga will stay and provide security in the regions they control, including Kirkuk.<sup>57</sup> Hemin Hawrami, the head of the Kurdish Democratic Party's foreign relations office, declared that they will not leave Kirkuk as long as the ISIS threat continues and Article 140 of the Iraqi Constitution is not enforced.<sup>58</sup>

The seizure of Kirkuk encouraged Kurdish politicians to declare themselves loudly for the fragmentation of Iraq and possible independence for the Kurds. As James Dorsey notes, Kurdish aspirations for independence peaked with the seizure of Kirkuk.<sup>59</sup> Hoshyar Zebari, the Kurdish Foreign Minister of Iraq, made clear his ambitions by stating that whereas five or ten years ago it was taboo even to mention the word "federalism" in his talks with Iraqi leaders

55 Iraq's Kurds want US help to hold off Islamic extremists, *Washington Post*, 25 July 2014.

56 Alissa J. Rubin and Alan Cowell, Kurdish Government Calls on Maliki to Quit as Iraqi Premier, *New York Times*, 10 July 2014

57 Bağdat ile Erbil anlaştı, *Milliyet*, 17 Haziran 2014.

58 PKK'nın teklifini geri çevirdiler, *Milliyet*, 19 Haziran 2014.

59 Dorsey, James, "Re-Configuring the Middle East: IS and Changing Demographics", *Huffington-post*, 08 July 2015.

Gazi

Akademik  
Bakış

179

Cilt 9 Sayı 18  
Yaz 2016

and Arab League colleagues, today federalism is accepted, referring to the federal structure of Yemen and the United Arab Emirates.<sup>60</sup> Iraqi Kurdish leader Mesud Barzani has said Baghdad could no longer object to Kurdish self-rule in Kirkuk and other areas from which federal forces withdrew as the insurgents advanced.<sup>61</sup> Speaking to the regional legislature he also told lawmakers to set up an electoral commission to “hurry up” and prepare for “a referendum on self-determination,” stating “We will be in a better position and we will have better (political) weapons in our hands. But how we will do this? What kind of steps will there be? For this, you have to study the issue and take steps in this direction. It is time to decide our self-determination and not wait for other people to decide for us.”<sup>62</sup>

We have witnessed some countries openly supporting Kurdish independence. For example, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called on the international community to back the independence of Iraq’s Kurds as well as support for Jordan amid fears that ISIS might extend its control into that country.<sup>63</sup> The Wall Street Journal wrote that Israel, America’s staunchest ally in the Middle East, would welcome an independent Kurdistan, which it regards as a likely ally, referring to Reuters’ report that a tanker carrying Kurdish oil had docked that day in the Israeli port of Ashkelon, and stated that Israel would provide a steady market for future Kurdish production and remained quite indifferent to Iraqi threats that deterred other nations from purchasing this oil.<sup>64</sup>

Simultaneously we have witnessed articles and news stories that supported the idea of an independent Kurdish state, and argued that Turkey’s position has changed. William A. Galston, in the Wall Street Journal, advised the US to abandon outmoded doctrines, as Turkey has done, referring to a spokesman for Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan who formalized a historic shift in Turkish policy by saying that the Kurds of Iraq can decide for themselves the name and type of entity they are living in, and referring to the Turkish writer Mustafa Akyol who recently noted that Ankara, long fearful of Kurdish political ambitions at home and abroad, now regards Iraqi Kurdistan-and perhaps its Syrian counterpart-as a force for regional stability and security. He emphasized that Kurds should declare independence.<sup>65</sup> The Guardian argued that Turkey’s perception has gradually changed since 2003 amid heavy Turkish

60 Foreign Minister Zebari; Iraq is facing a mortal threat, *Der Spiegel*, 30 June 2014.; Mehmet Seyfettin Erol, “Irak’ta yumuşak bölünmenin adı: ‘Sünnistan’, ‘Şiistan’, ‘Kürdistan’”, *Yarınlara İçin Düşünce Aylık Ulusal ve Uluslararası Analiz Dergisi*, 2 (23), Eylül 2007, s. 94-99.

61 ISIL declares caliphate as Iraq presses counter-offensive, *AFP*, 30 June 2014.

62 Iraqi Kurdish leaders urges independence referendum, *AP*, 04 July 2014.

63 ISIL declares caliphate as Iraq presses counter-offensive, *AFP*, 30 June 2014.

64 Now is the moment for Kurdish Independence, *The Wall Street Journal*, 24 June 2014.

65 Now is the moment for Kurdish Independence, *The Wall Street Journal*, 24 June 2014.

commercial investment in northern Iraq, and that high-level political contacts with the KRG are now routine, while Ankara's relations with Baghdad have soured. The newspaper argues that Turkey may ultimately prefer a stable, friendly new border state free of extremists of any hue, and which is also an energy supplier and trading partner.<sup>66</sup> The Wall Street Journal wrote that the time has come for America and the West to support Kurdish independence and, simultaneously, to set up US bases in Iraqi Kurdistan that would make it America's military hub in the region. He said that a major American air base in Erbil or Suleymaniye, instead of Incirlik, would improve the US's much-weakened strategic position in the Middle East while guaranteeing Kurdish independence.<sup>67</sup>

There has not been any census to determine the demographical structure of Kirkuk to prevent a possible ethnic tension. As Turcan pointed out "since all efforts to conduct a reliable census to determine the demographic facts in Kirkuk have become futile in the post-2003 period, no one can deliver the exact numbers on the demographic facts of Kirkuk".<sup>68</sup> However there are credible data that clearly shows the effects of Kurdification in the city and in the Province. For example, a Council member stated in a report in International Crisis Group (ICG) that 350.000 Kurds came to Kirkuk between 2003 and 2006, where the city population increased from 850.000 to 1.150.00.<sup>69</sup> Kerkuklu supports this argument stating that the number of people transferred to Kirkuk according to the ration cards is 347,818 persons, all of whom originate from Suleimaniya, Erbil and Duhok towns, referring to the data of Ministry of Commerce.<sup>70</sup>

Anderson argues that December 2005 election, that was closely monitored by international observers, has been the most plausible indicator of Kirkuk's ethnic balance since the 1957 census and the results indicate that Kurds (as represented by the Kirkuk Brotherhood List [KBL]) comprise 53 percent of the population, Arabs, 27 percent, and Turkmens, 13 percent.<sup>71</sup> During the 2014 elections, Kurdish parties won 8 seats where Turkmens and Araps won 2 each which clearly shows the demographic change.<sup>72</sup> The situation is getting worse for Turkmens and Arabs after Peshmerga captured the city in 2014 and Kurds intensified their efforts to expel Turkmens and Arabs to alter

- 66 Analysis Kurds see prospects of independence rising from ashes, *The Guardian*, 03 July 2014.
- 67 Building the US-Kurdistan Special Relationship, *The Wall Street Journal*, 10 July 2014.
- 68 Metin Turcan, "Today Stems from Yesterday: A Kirkuk-Centric Analysis of Central Periphery Relationship of Baghdad and Iraqi Kurds", *Uluslararası Hukuk ve Politika*, Cilt 7, Sayı: 25, 2 011, p.88.
- 69 "Iraq and the Kurds: The Brewing Battle over Kirkuk," International Crisis Group - Middle East Report, Nu. 56, 18 July 2006, p. 12.
- 70 Mofak Salman Kerkuklu, *The Plight of Iraqi Turkoman*, İstanbul, Turkmeneli Research and Idea Center Publications Nu: 2, 2015, p.100.
- 71 Anderson, Power-sharing in Kirkuk: Conflict or Compromise?, p.12-13.
- 72 Irak'ta resmi seçim sonuçları açıklandı, CNN Türk, 19.05.2015, <http://www.cnnturk.com/haber/dunya/irakta-resmi-secim-sonuclari-aciklandi>

Gazi

Akademik  
Bakış  
181  
Cilt 9 Sayı 18  
Yaz 2016



the demographical structure before the referendum that will change the fate of Iraq as well as the Middle East.

## CONCLUSION

Historically in the modern Middle East, altering demographics by force, especially through the forcible and arbitrary transfer of populations, which is defined in the International Criminal Court statute as a crime against humanity, has constituted one of the most common policies in order to control a multiethnic or multi-religious city or region.

The historical, social, political and especially economic importance of Kirkuk, with one of the largest oil reserves in Iraq, has set the stage for the struggle between Arabs and Kurds over the city. With its highly complex ethnic composition, Kirkuk has been subjected to forced demographic change for decades, first through Arabization and then through Kurdification.

Occurring from the 1950s until 2003, Arabization resulted in the change of Kirkuk's demography in favor of Arabs, while Turkmen and Kurds suffered massive deportation to other parts of the country. The *raison d'être* behind the Arabization policies was to secure Kirkuk, which every subsequent Iraqi government pursued to ever-increasing degrees and which culminated in the mass deportations ordered by Saddam's regime beginning in the late 1970s.<sup>73</sup>

The 2003 invasion of Iraq by the US changed the fate of Kirkuk and provided Kurds the chance to realize their dream of seizing control of Kirkuk, which they called the Kurdish Jerusalem, assisted by massive support from the US and other countries. Kurdification replaced Arabization, with Turkmen again becoming victims and Kurds now favored. Kurdification is carried out in three steps, each of them interrelated.

The first step has been decreasing the influence of Turkey in Kirkuk and eliminating the Turkish intervention threat if Kurds seize control of the city. The US obtained Turkey's covert Turkmen scheme in Kirkuk when US troops raided Turkish Special Forces units in Suleymaniye in 2003. Turkish officials, media, community was kept busy with domestic issues especially after 2007.

The second step has been the Kurdification of Kirkuk, under the name of reversing Arabization. From 2003 onwards, Kurds compelled Turkmen and Arabs to leave Kirkuk through intimidation, violence and torture, while bringing many Kurds from other regions to alter the demography before the referendum of 2007. The demographic of Kirkuk changed in favor of the Kurds, but the referendum has been delayed to an unknown date.

The final step, seizure of the city by the Peshmerga, occurred when ISIS marched towards Mosul. Kurdish Peshmerga raided the city "to defend against

73 Anderson and Stansfield, *ibid*, p.51.

Göz



a possible ISIS invasion” despite strong opposition by the Iraqi government, and declared that they will stay in Kirkuk until the problem of disputed territories is solved. With massive support of western countries under the cover of the ISIS threat, the Kurdish leaders concluded an agreement with Bagdad and have retained control of the city. They started another massive and final Kurdification just before the referendum that will prove that “the majority of Kirkuk’s population” consists of Kurds.<sup>74</sup>

Kirkuk city has been marching toward being a Kurdish city despite the fact that it has been historically and undeniably a Turkmen city. Turkmen, who according to the 1957 census formed the majority of Kirkuk’s population, were the main victims of Arabization and then of Kurdification. First the Baath Party and now Kurds, under KDP leadership, killed, tortured, threatened and forcibly deported Turkmen in Kirkuk, committing a crime against humanity. The world has been ignoring the suffering of Turkmen and thus contributes to the crime against humanity.

The Kurds, with the support of western countries, have been working overtly and covertly for an independent Kurdish state since the first Gulf War, in particular by changing the demography in Northern Iraq and establishing institutions for an independent state. Changing the demographical structure of Kirkuk and seizing control of the city under the pretext of the ISIS threat apparently indicate that they have accomplished the final step toward their goal. Since the Kurdish capture of Kirkuk, which is planned to be the major financial resource for an independent Kurdish state, Kurdish leaders have stated with increasing frequency their intention to hold a referendum on independence.

Barzani’s statement that “Kurdistan is ripe for indepenence”<sup>75</sup> and pictures in the media that showed U.S. troopers on Syrian soil bearing the insignia of the armed forces of the Democratic Union Party “PYD”, an extension of the outlawed Kurdiztan Worker’s Party<sup>76</sup> clearly underlines the main purpose of Kurds and western countries for the region.

Turkey regards Kirkuk as its backyard and point of interest in terms of Turkmen’s historical rights and security. A threat to the security of Turkmens has been declared as the red line in terms of Turkey’s involvement in developments in Iraq. With a change of demography to the disadvantage of Turkmens, Turkey would lose one of its most important arguments for interfering in Kirkuk’s future, a future that will include the question of an independent Kurdish state. To protect its long-term interests in the Middle East, Turkey therefore should intensify its pressure on the Kurdish Regional Government and the Iraqi government, as well as on the international community, on behalf of the rights of Turkmens in Kirkuk.

74 Mehmet Seyfettin EROL, ABD’nin “Yeni Ortadoğu”ya Dönüşü, *Milli Gazete*, 26 Haziran 2014.

75 “KRG is ripe for indepenence, says Barzani”, *Hurriyet Daily News*, 24 May 2016.

76 How serious is Ankara in reacting to the US on Syrian Kurds?, *Hurriyet Daily News*, 28 May 2016.

Gazi

Akademik  
Bakış

183

Cilt 9 Sayı 18  
Yaz 2016

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gazi

Akademik  
Bakış

185

Cilt 9 Sayı 18  
Yaz 2016

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Gazi

Akademik  
Bakış

186

Cilt 9 Sayı 18  
Yaz 2016