

## Iraq: Kurdish challenges

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### **Kurdish autonomy**

Is a new, stable relationship between the Kurds of Iraq and the rest of that country, short of separation, possible? During the Cold War, the question would not even be put in this form; the international system took the territorial integrity of the existing states for granted (the only exception being Bangladesh' separation from Pakistan). Eritrea's separation from Ethiopia in 1991, the wars in former Yugoslavia and the break-up of the Soviet Union marked the beginning of a period in which ethnicity acquired a higher degree of legitimacy as a relevant factor in the international system. It was an international intervention that created a 'Safe Haven' for the Kurds in northern Iraq in 1991, resulting in a self-governing semi-independent Kurdish entity that year by year became more Kurdish and less Iraqi.<sup>[1]</sup> A similar international intervention on behalf of ethnic Albanians in 1999 separated Kosovo from Serbia and placed it under an interim UN administration mission. The Kosovars are evidently unwilling ever to revert to Serbian rule, and the status of the territory is likely to remain indeterminate for a long time, since full independence or unification with Albania are not yet acceptable options for the UN. The vast majority of the Iraqi Kurds adamantly reject the restoration of central, i.e. Arab, control of their region and would opt for full independence if that were an option. The modalities of re-integration of the Kurdish region into Iraq will be renegotiated at every step. Nothing short of a federal system with a high degree of self-government is likely to satisfy the Kurds.

In the early months of 2003, when the American invasion Iraq was being prepared, it looked as if the Kurds were willing to consider re-integration in a remade, democratic post-Saddam Iraq. The American planners of the invasion and administrators of the occupation had made it clear to the Kurdish leaders that they wished to see a united Iraq with a strong centre, and the Kurds appeared to concur. The two major Kurdish parties, the KDP and the PUK, had continued pleading for autonomy and federalism, which they have both written into their party programs, until weeks before the war. But then, not wishing to antagonise the Americans, the party leaders changed their tune and for a long time avoided even mentioning the words federalism and autonomy. They even appeared willing to accept the American demand that the Kurds' own armed forces, the peshmerga, were to be dissolved and become part of the new Iraqi army.

If the American plan for reconstituting Iraq had been more successful, the party leaders might have found it very difficult to maintain anything resembling the degree of self-rule that had existed for the previous 12 years. This would, however, have cost them the support of much or most of the Kurdish population, who were not at all willing to countenance renewed subjection to Baghdad and less susceptible to American (and Turkish) pressure than the political leaders. A genuine grassroots movement calling for significant autonomy, and then for a referendum on independence, swept through all of Kurdistan, forcing the leaders to put autonomy back on the agenda. This movement was led by intellectuals critical of the party leadership, but it provided them with a strong argument in the negotiations with the Americans and the other Iraqi political forces. In late 2003, both leaders publicly stated that autonomy was not negotiable. Mas`ud Barzani wrote in the Arabic-language KDP newspaper that the Kurds would not settle for anything less than the measure of self-rule they had enjoyed for the past twelve years.<sup>[2]</sup>

The Transitional Administrative Law of mid-2004 explicitly speaks of federalism and local government (but also of unified Iraq), and it recognises the Kurdistan Regional Government as one of the local authorities – a result of tough negotiations. National security policy and border control, however, are to come under the Federal Government, and independent militias will be prohibited, which means that considerable powers will have to be transferred from the Kurdish Regional Government to the Federal Government. The Kurdish peshmerga are presently the most experienced and powerful military force in Iraq, and although the Kurdish parties have agreed to the Transitional Administrative Law it is unlikely that they would be willing to allow the peshmerga to be demobilised. Their incorporation into the Iraqi Armed Forces and Police, proposed as the solution for at least part of the peshmerga, conjures up the problems of an ethnically divided army. Former peshmerga do not appear willing to serve under Arab officers; and the Kurdish population will not easily tolerate an Arab military presence in their region. It is true that Kurdish peshmerga have joined the Iraqi Armed Forces and have apparently taken an active part in operations in Falluja and Mosul in 2004, but this appears to be more an extension of Kurdish military power into the Sunni Arab zone than the absorption of Kurdish forces into all-Iraqi ones.

### **Autonomy, integration into Iraq, or independence?**

The grassroots movement for independence ran a successful campaign collecting 1.7 million signatures to demand an internationally supervised referendum on the question of independence or integration in Iraq. On the day of the elections, 30 January 2005, it organised its own unofficial referendum in booths outside the official polling stations. The elections that day may not have been entirely free – other parties than the Kurdish Alliance did not have much of a chance in the districts under Kurdish control – but there can be little doubt that this unofficial referendum allowed the Kurds to express their real feelings on Iraq. The outcome probably surprised even the organisers: almost 2 million people took part, and over 95 per cent of them opted for independence rather than staying in even a federal Iraq.<sup>[3]</sup> The experienced leaders of the Kurdish parties have always been more pragmatic and diplomatic than the organisers of the referendum and have carefully avoided speaking of independence, limiting their demands to autonomy within Iraq. However, these leaders not only tolerated but also facilitated the referendum (although the initiative came from intellectuals critical of them), probably because it strengthens their position in the coming negotiations in the National Assembly.<sup>[4]</sup>

Autonomy for Kurdistan (and democracy for Iraq) has been the rallying call of the Iraqi Kurdish movement since the 1960s. (The major Kurdish party of Iran adopted the same slogan: ‘autonomy for Kurdistan and democracy for all of Iran’. When journalists visiting KDP-Iran leader Abdul Rahman Ghassemlou during the years when his party controlled a large part of Kurdistan asked him why he did not claim independence, he famously joked that Kurdistan is a small land-locked country and he would love to be elected president of all of Iran.) The central element of the March 1970 peace agreement, which ended nine years of guerrilla war, was the recognition of autonomy for the entire regions where Kurds constituted the majority of the population as well as a significant representation of the Kurds in the central government. The agreement spoke of autonomy for Kurdistan; the pragmatic Kurdish negotiators had not insisted on the second part of their slogan, democracy for Iraq.

Subsequent experience has convinced all politically aware Kurds that autonomy as such is no guarantee against severe violations of human rights. The March 1970 agreement was the direct reason for the central government to carry out a wave of deportations of Kurds (and Turkmen) from the Kirkuk, Khaniqin and Sinjar districts designed to prevent these oil-rich and strategically important regions becoming part of the autonomous Kurdish region. Autonomy, for part of the Kurdish region (notably excluding Kirkuk, Khaniqin and Sinjar), was formally proclaimed in 1974 and never withdrawn in spite of the renewed Kurdish uprising

of 1974-75, in which the Kurds received unprecedented levels of Iranian, Israeli and American covert support.  
[5]

Following the collapse of the Kurdish movement in March 1975, when Iran ended its support, the regime unilaterally carried out its part of the autonomy agreement.[6] A regional parliament was established — as powerless as the national parliament, and perhaps even more devoid of popular legitimacy, but at least consisting of people from the region. The autonomy had stipulated that military and intelligence forces in the region as well as border control were to depend directly on the relevant departments of the central government. The presence of army and especially the intelligence services in the region was accordingly stepped up. Border control took the form of the evacuation of a broad zone along the Iranian and Turkish borders and destruction of all villages in this region ('in order to prevent infiltration by insurgents based abroad'). People uprooted from this zone, and from other sensitive areas where demographic changes were deliberately effected, were partly resettled in the south, partly in resettlement camps in the Kurdish region. Further forced resettlements continued through most of the 1980s, in response to the Iran-Iraq war and the low-intensity guerrilla activity by KDP and PUK. During the 1970s and 1980s, some 80 per cent of the Kurdish villages were destroyed and their inhabitants resettled. This culminated in the genocidal Anfal campaign of 1988, in which at least fifty thousand and perhaps several times that number were killed.[7] Altogether close to 4,000 villages in Iraqi Kurdistan (out of an estimated total of around 5,000) were destroyed during the 1970s and 1980s and their inhabitants deported or killed.[8]

Whatever autonomy and federalism mean to the Iraqi Kurds – and there exists no doubt a wide range of understandings of these key concepts – there appears to be a consensus that the only acceptable arrangement is one that will protect them effectively from a repetition of the Anfal campaign and the village destruction of the 1980s. The strength of the movement for independence is fed by the memories of oppression and genocide under Ba`th-administered autonomy.

### **Kirkuk, the Turkmen, and Turkey**

Most Kurds want independence, and they want control of Kirkuk as well, claiming that the Kurds had constituted the majority in that province before deportations and boundary changes decreased their numbers. Both demands are unacceptable to most Iraqi Arabs and perhaps even more so to Turkey, which fears the impact of such developments on its own Kurds. Turkish politicians and generals have repeatedly warned that Kurdish independence or even a significant autonomy is unacceptable to them, and that Kurdish control of Kirkuk is considered as a threat to vital Turkish interests. It strengthened its relations with the Turkmen minority and supported Turkmen territorial claims in order to counter those of the Kurds. Before the war, Turkey threatened it would intervene militarily if the Kurds were to attempt to press their claims. However, since Turkey's parliament refused the US access to its territory for opening a northern front against Saddam, the country has not been in the position to carry out this threat, and its statements in support of the Turkmen minority have been ineffective.[9]

The Kurdish claims to Kirkuk and the government's determination to keep this province under central control were perhaps the major reason why the 1970 peace agreement did not hold and a new war broke out in 1974. Mulla Mustafa Barzani in those years insisted that Kirkuk should be the capital of the autonomous Kurdish region, a claim that has recently been repeated by various Kurdish spokespersons. This claim inevitably brings the Kurds in conflict with at least two other claimants to the city and surrounding districts, the Turkmen minority and the central government. Kirkuk lies in a wide zone with an ethnically mixed population, which has moreover experienced dramatic demographic changes in the course of the twentieth century. Kurds, Turkmen and Arabs lay conflicting claims to this zone, and all have their historical accounts and memories to buttress their claims.

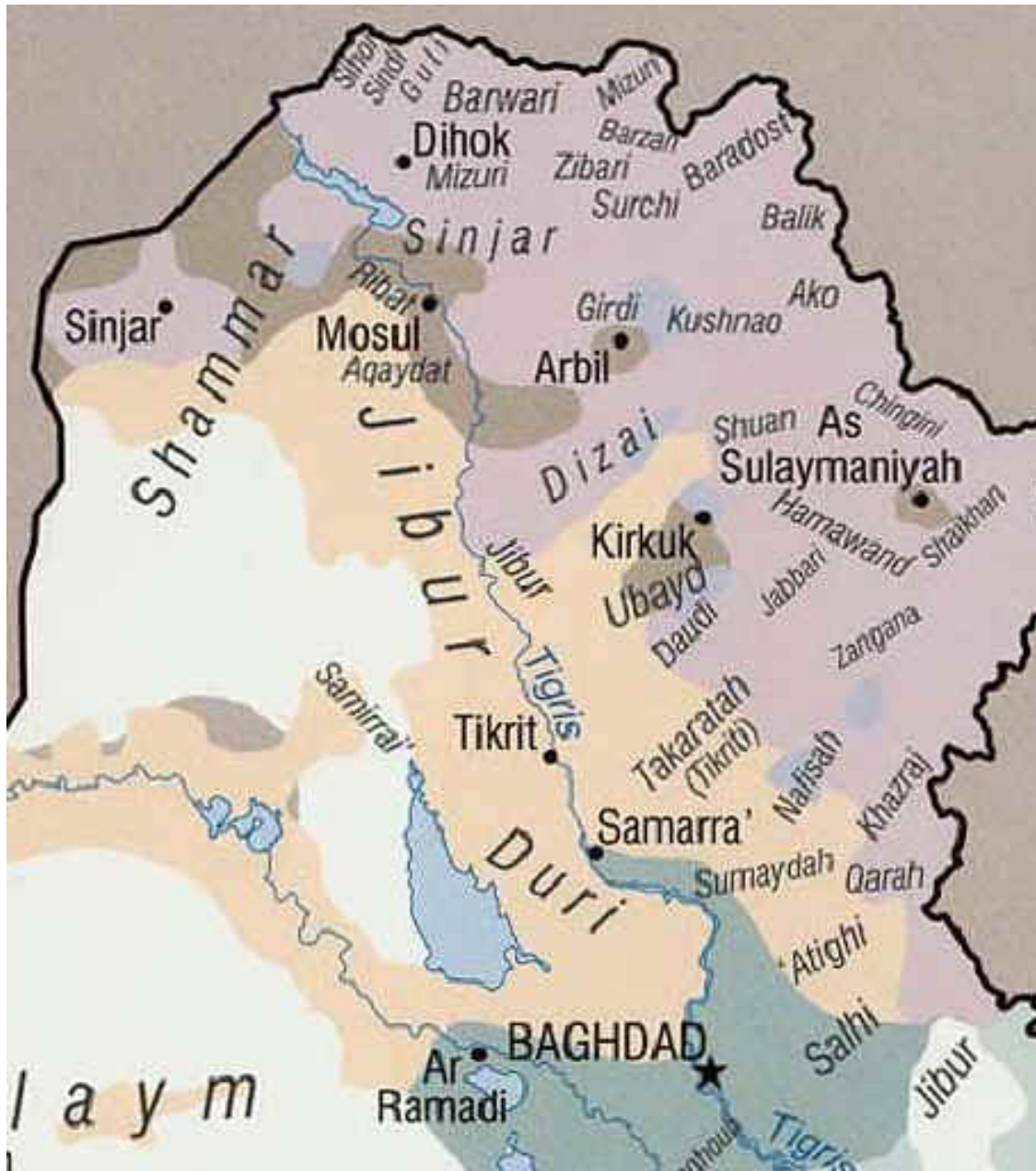
It is widely accepted that the region that was controlled by the Kurdish Regional Government during the 1990s constitutes only a part of the entire Kurdish region; there is a large zone to the south and west where many Kurds live or used to live, and in parts of that zone they constitute, or once constituted, the majority of the population. This can be illustrated with the first two of the accompanying maps.

Map 1 (from the 2003 edition of the CIA's *World Factbook*) gives a very sketchy impression of a much more complex situation. It shows the regions controlled by the two major Kurdish parties, KDP and PUK (with a smaller area under the control of the Islamic Movement of Kurdistan), and a considerable Kurdish-inhabited zone to the south and west of these regions, which had remained under central government control until 2003. Note that Kirkuk and surroundings are not indicated as Kurdish on this map (which is based on estimates of actual population distribution before 2003). The large Kurdish area between Kirkuk and Mosul, known as Makhmur, is an extension of the fertile plain of Arbil. The districts to the west of Mosul are not densely inhabited, with the exception of the Sinjar hills, which are largely Kurdish.



Map 2 (also from the 2003 CIA *World Factbook*) shows some of the other ethnic groups in this region: the Turkmen and the Arabs, and it locates the major Arab and Kurdish tribes. Kirkuk is shown here as mixed Arab, Kurdish and Turkmen; there is a broad Arab corridor northwest of Kirkuk that cuts deep into Kurdish

territory — a cartographic rendering of Arabisation policies of the previous decades. The situation on the ground is far more complicated than this map can show: besides Sunni Turkmen there are also Shi'i Turkmen communities (e.g. in Tel `Afar, west of Mosul and in Tuz Khurmatu, south of Kirkuk) and numerous Shi'i Arabs (around Kirkuk, arriving since 1970) as well as Shi'i Kurds (at Khaniqin, Mandali and further south). There are moreover various groups in the zone between Mosul, Kirkuk and Khaniqin that are neither Kurds nor Turks or Arabs but are claimed by all.



For Kurdish nationalists, most of the population inhabiting this zone is Kurdish, or was so before the Arabisation policies and deportations of the 1970s and 1980s, and the Hamrin mountain range is conveniently considered as the southern boundary of Kurdistan. This is illustrated by Map 3, showing current Kurdish claims. The southern boundary circumvents the city of Mosul, which has a large Arab and Christian population but also some populous Kurdish neighbourhoods (and some Kurdish nationalists would therefore lay claim to part of the city as well).



Turkmen nationalists, supported in this by many Turkish politicians, claim the same zone and even more, including Mosul as well as Arbil and surroundings, for themselves because the towns in this zone have a large Turkish-speaking population (see Map 4). In the early twentieth century, most of this Turkish-speaking population were Turkmen, who claimed descent from the Seljuq Turks, and some were Ottoman officials, [10] but there were also urban families of Kurdish descent who had adopted Turkish, the language of the state, as their first language. Under Ottoman rule, the Turkmen had constituted the predominant element of the urban population in this zone, though never the majority of the population. Under the British mandate and in independent Iraq, they gradually lost their predominance. Arabic replaced Turkish as the first official language, and in education and public life, Kurdish was used besides Arabic. The decline of the Turkish language was accompanied by the receding influence of the Turkmen elite. Some members of this elite left the region and settled in Turkey. [11]

## المناطق التركمانية



الخارطة رقماً

In Arbil, Kurdish came to replace Turkish as the dominant language in the first half of the twentieth century, partly due to immigration, partly to the Kurdicisation of Turkish speakers. Kirkuk had always been the centre of Turkmen culture and Turkmen power, and the most important families of notables were all Turkmen. Their family names indicate that they had held high military or bureaucratic office or used to be traders or craftsmen. Here too, the Kurds living in the city were often Turkish speakers. (The same was true much further north, in such cities as Bitlis and Diyarbakir, well before the Republic banned the use of Kurdish.) The British officials who knew these parts best, Edmonds and Lyon, call the Turkmen the predominant population of Kirkuk but add that Kurds constituted the majority of the rural population of Kirkuk. The most influential Kurd in the city was a religious leader, a shaykh of the Naqshbandiyya Sufi order, Ahmad-i Khanaqa, whose power derived from his large rural following.<sup>[12]</sup> Another religious family, affiliated with the Qadiriyya Sufi order, was that of the Talabani, who had settled in the city in the first half of the nineteenth century.<sup>[13]</sup> The family's prominence gradually increased through the twentieth century; in the 1970s, the incumbent shaykh was said to have some 50,000 followers.

The commercial exploitation of the oil wells of Kirkuk, which began around 1930, caused a rapid urbanisation and attracted workers from other parts of the country. Initially it was in particular Kurds who came to settle in the city; later these were joined by smaller numbers of Arabs. At the same time, large

numbers of Kurds from the mountains were settling in the uninhabited but cultivable rural parts of the district of Kirkuk.

Many Turkmen have an understandable fear of being submerged by the Kurds. The claim of (some) Turkmen to the entire zone, however, as opposed to just the town of Kirkuk, is a recent development and probably a response to the establishment of the Kurdish Regional Government in the 1990s. Some Turkmen have begun referring to this zone by the recently coined name of Turkmeneli, 'Turkmen land'.<sup>[14]</sup> Turkish politicians of various persuasions have spoken out strongly in favour of Turkmen territorial claims in northern Iraq, apparently hoping to prevent the Iraqi Kurds from achieving their objectives.

In the claims for this contested and ethnically heterogeneous zone, all claimants have recourse to statistics from the early twentieth century. There exist Turkish, British and Iraqi statistics of the ethnic composition of Kirkuk as well as the entire Vilayet of Mosul (the Ottoman province comprising present northern Iraq). These statistics diverge enormously, which reflects conflicting ambitions towards this region as well as the ambiguous ethnic identity of part of the population. The future political status of the Vilayet of Mosul was to be determined by the League of Nations after a consultation of its population, and Turkey, Britain and the British-appointed Arab King Faisal had an understandable interest in influencing the League's decision, and population statistics were adduced to argue in favour of independence (as some Kurds demanded), assignment to Turkey, or to Iraq. Another possible reason for contradictory statistics is the existence in this region of various communities that are not unambiguously Kurdish, Turkish or Arab. Heterodox communities, such as the Kaka'i, Sarli and Shabak, who speak various Gurani dialects (an Iranian language different from but related to Kurdish proper), and even the Kurdish-speaking Yezidis, have been counted as Kurds by the Kurds, as Turkmen by the Turkmen, and as Arabs by Arab nationalists.<sup>[15]</sup> The Christians of the region, mostly Assyrians and Chaldaeans, have been called 'Kurdish Christians' as well as 'Christian Arabs' (whereas in Kirkuk, the Christians spoke Turkish). Disagreement on the ethnic identity of ambiguous communities, however, can hardly explain the low percentage of Kurds and the inflated number of Turks in the statistics presented by the Turkish government:

*Population of the Vilayet of Mosul:*

	A	B	C
Kurds	263,830 (39.2 %)	427,720 (54.5 %)	520,007 (64.9 %)
Arabs	43,210 (6.4%)	185,763 (23.7 %)	166,941 (20.8 %)
Turks	146,960 (21.8 %)	65,895 (8.4 %)	38,652 (4.8 %)
Christians and Jews	31,000 (4.6 %)	62,225 (7.9 %)	61,336 (7.7 %)
Yezidis	18,000 (2.7 %)	30,000 (3.8 %)	11,897 (1.5 %)
Total settled population	503,000 (74.7 %)	-----	-----
Nomads	170,000 (25.3 %)	-----	-----
Total population	673,000	785,468	801,000

Sources: A Turkish statistics produced at the Lausanne conference in 1923

B Estimates by British officers in 1921

C Enumeration by the Government of Iraq (1922-24)

(After: Mim Kemal Öke, *Musul meselesi kronolojisi (1918-1926)* [A chronology of the Mosul Question, 1918-1926]. Istanbul: Türk Dünyası Araştırmaları Vakfı, 1987, p. 157)



The Mosul Commission of the League of Nations found that the Turkish government had listed various tribes and communities as Turkish that had no discernable Turkish origins and spoke Kurdish or related dialects. Of the Bayat tribe, which is in fact of Turkish ancestry, the Commission noted that it was largely Arabised, through intermarriage and linguistic assimilation.<sup>[16]</sup> It is probably on the basis of these early Turkish statistics, which were produced to shore up Turkish claims to the province in the course of negotiations at the conference of Lausanne, that later extravagant Turkish and Turkmen assertions were made. Turkish politicians such as (former Prime Minister) Bülent Ecevit have repeatedly put forward, and apparently themselves believed, the amazing claim that there are no less than 2.5 million Turkmen in Iraq, the protection of whom is Turkey's natural duty.<sup>[17]</sup>

The Kurds also refer to the early twentieth century statistics (but for obvious reasons to the British or Iraqi figures) to stake their claim of being the dominant ethnic group in the entire Vilayet of Mosul. The most reliable statistics available, however, may be those of the 1957 general census. In that census people were asked for their mother tongue. That is not identical to their ethnic affiliation, of course, but the question was apparently perceived as one of ethnicity rather than of language per se, as the quaint categories 'Hebrew' and 'Chaldaeian and Syrian' indicate — Iraqi Jews did not speak Hebrew but Aramaic or Arabic; most Chaldaeians spoke Arabic, those of Kirkuk even Turkish.

#### Results of the Official General Census of 1957 for Kirkuk Governorate (*liva*)

	City of Kirkuk	Remainder of the <i>liva</i>	Total <i>liva</i> of Kirkuk	Percentage of total <i>liva</i> pop.
Mother tongue				
Arabic	27,127	82,493	109,620	28.2 %
Kurdish	40,047	147,546	187,593	48.2 %
Turkish	45,306	38,065	83,371	21.4 %
Syriac (*)	1,509	96	1,605	0.4 %
Hebrew (sic!)	101	22	123	0.03 %
Total (**)	120,402	268,437	388,829	

(\*) The census category indicated is not linguistic but religious: 'Chaldaeian and Syrian'

(\*\*) Including speakers of languages not listed here, such as English, Persian, Hindi.

(after: Nouri Talabany, *Arabization of the Kirkuk region*. Uppsala, 2001, p. 103)

The data of the 1920s, even if reliable, are not really comparable to those of 1957 and of later counts because the Kirkuk *liva* then included Arbil, whose population has a different composition. In the 1970s, the heavily Kurdish districts of Chamchemal and Kalar were detached from Kirkuk province and joined to Sulaymani. Only very rough estimates of the volume of population movements into and from Kirkuk are therefore possible. Turkmen complaints of demographic changes are not unfounded. During the first half of the twentieth century, the plains between Arbil and Kirkuk were gradually settled by Kurdish peasants, a process that had already begun in the nineteenth century. The exploitation of Kirkuk's oil, as said, attracted both Arabs and Kurds to the city in search of work. Kirkuk, which had been a predominantly Turkish city, gradually lost its uniquely Turkish character.

The political mobilisation following the 1958 coup d'état and the prominence of the Iraqi Communist Party among the (Kurdish) oil workers caused increasing tension between Turkmen, who felt they were being submerged, and the mostly Kurdish immigrants. Violent clashes in 1959, variously described as 'communist-

Turkmen' or 'Kurdish-Turkmen', left several dozen dead, most of them Turkmen. In the Turkmen exile press in Turkey, supported by Turkish nationalist circles, this event attained almost mythical proportions and it has been of lasting importance in defining Turkish perceptions of northern Iraq.[\[18\]](#)

The influx of Kurds into Kirkuk continued through the 1960s. Soon after the peace agreement of 1970, however, which opened the door to Kurdish autonomy, the government took measures to strengthen the Arab character of the governorate of Kirkuk (which, after the nationalisation of the Iraq Oil Company in 1972 was renamed Ta'mim, 'Nationalisation'). Kurds were deported to southern Iraq, Arabs from the south (mostly Shi'a, it seems) were settled in Kirkuk. From the 1980s there are also reports of hundreds of Turkmen families from Kirkuk being resettled in *mujamma`at* in southern Iraq.[\[19\]](#)

In the 1988 *Anfal* operations, a large part of the Kurdish population of the eastern districts of Kirkuk governorate disappeared.[\[20\]](#) There may not be many male survivors of those operations. In the Kurdish uprising of early 1991, following the liberation of Kuwait, the Kurds and Turkmen of Kirkuk, like the population of other parts of Kurdistan, took control of the city and expelled Iraqi Ba`th party and intelligence personnel.[\[21\]](#) For a few weeks, the city was under Kurdish control. The elite Republican Guard had, however, not been destroyed in the war as was initially believed. After brutally putting down the Shi'i rebellion in the south, it moved towards Kurdistan. The Shi'i Turkmen town of Tuz Khurmatu was razed; the people of Kirkuk fled their city in panic towards the mountains and thence to the Iranian or Turkish borders. The Iraqi troops reoccupied all towns and pushed the fleeing masses towards the borders. Turkey allowed Turkmen to cross into the country and opened a refugee camp for them at Yozgat, but the much more numerous Kurds were not allowed to enter and had to camp in snow and mud on the Iraqi side of the border. This humanitarian disaster — an estimated one to two million had fled their homes, hundreds of thousands were pressed on the Turkish-Iraqi border, exposed to snow and rain and wind — was the reason for the international intervention ('Operation Provide Comfort') that established a 'safe haven' and ultimately a free Kurdish region in northern Iraq.

Arabisation policies continued after 1991 in the regions under central government control. Kurds, Turkmen and Assyrians were pressured to 'correct' their ethnic identity and register as Arabs, become members of the Ba`th party and join one of the militia forces. Families who refused were harassed; and many were forced to flee to the Kurdish-controlled region. In the most detailed study made of Arabisation policies of the 1990s, Human Rights Watch concluded that "[s]ince the 1991 Gulf War, an estimated 120,000 Kurds, Turkomans and Assyrians have been expelled to the Kurdish-controlled northern provinces", most of them from Kirkuk and surrounding villages.[\[22\]](#)

### **Kirkuk after the war**

Many of the displaced persons from Kirkuk did not dare to return to their city and remained in the 'free' Kurdish zone, especially in Sulaymani and Arbil, until 2003. Small numbers succeeded in finding their way to Europe. Since the 'conquest' or 'liberation' of Kirkuk by PUK peshmerga and US special troops in April 2003, both Kurds and Turkmen who had previously lived in the city and governorate have returned, from Turkey or from the 'free' Kurdish region. Both streams of returnees – the Kurdish no doubt more numerous than the Turkmen – were considered by the others as part of a deliberate effort by the Kurdish parties or the Turkish government to change the demographic balance. On the day after the conquest of Kirkuk, newspapers in Turkey carried stories about Kurds raiding the city's land and population registries in order to wipe out record of the Turkmen presence, and destroying Turkmen graveyards in order to erase proof of the Turkmen past. These allegations, originating with Turkmen exile circles in Ankara, appeared to have no basis in fact and soon disappeared again from the Turkish press.[\[23\]](#) They were soon followed by numerous Turkmen complaints of American partiality favouring Kurds over Turkmen and Arabs.

In the city council elected in May 2003, Turkmen were severely under-represented, with 6 out of 30 members, against 11 Kurdish, 7 Christian and 6 Arab members). A year later, the council was enlarged by 10 members, of whom 4 were Turkmen and only 2 Kurdish. However, as the most vocal Turkmen party complained, one of the new Turkmen members and a new Arab member were 'pro-Kurdish'. These councils elected Kurds to most of the important positions: the governor, police chief and mayor are Kurds, and so are the vast majority of heads of government offices.<sup>[24]</sup> Not all Turkmen were equally distressed by the new situation; as the report noted; there were apparently also 'pro-Kurdish' Turkmen. And, one should add, there was a broad range of Turkmen political parties and movements, several of which co-operated closely with the Kurdish parties.

The Iraqi Turkmen Front, established in 1995, is a coalition of over twenty groups, including the Iraqi Turkmen National Party, which had previously been the party most closely allied with Turkish military and intelligence circles (to the extent that it was considered by many as the local front for Turkey's national intelligence organisation). The Front has been receiving Turkish government largesse, and it is the most active Turkmen organisation abroad and in cyberspace. It presents the Turkmen as a numerous and compact nation, whose homeland, Turkmeneli, constitutes a broad zone between the Kurdish and Arab parts of Iraq, of which Kirkuk is the natural capital (see Map 4). It is obvious that this view conflicts with that of the Kurds, who also see Kirkuk as their future capital and claim to be the majority population of the same broad zone. The Front's legitimacy is also contested by many Turkmen who are uneasy about its close relationship with the Turkish state. The very day after the Iraqi Turkmen Front was established, a rival front with largely Shi'i Turkmen support emerged, the Turkmen Islamic Front, allegedly an Iranian proxy.<sup>[25]</sup> Its successor, the Turkmen Islamic Union, apparently has good relations with the leading Kurdish party in the region, the PUK. Two other Turkmen parties exist but appear to be small, the Iraqi Turkmen Democratic Party and the Turkmen People's Party.

There is a small but vocal Iraqi Turkmen community in Turkey, which has close contacts with Turkish extreme nationalist and intelligence circles; besides, the Iraqi Turkmen Front established a representation in Washington to press its claims for a greater share in post-Saddam Iraq. It has issued numerous statements about Kurdish violations of Turkmen rights and clashes between Kurds and Turkmen, but most of these appear much exaggerated.

Most observers had expected serious ethnic clashes in Kirkuk, but primarily between Kurds and Arabs when the former would return to reclaim houses and land they had been forced to leave under Arabisation. There have been reports of fights over houses and land, both in the city and in surrounding villages, but the level of conflict proved much less than predicted — for which the PUK, which conquered the city and organised security, claims credit. Many Arabs appear to have fled the region during the war, fearing retribution; where they had stayed behind, negotiations and threats rather than outright expulsions were the rule. An equal sharing of the harvest between original owners and present occupants of the land, proposed by the Americans, was widely observed.<sup>[26]</sup>

The elections obviously were crucial to the Kurdish and Turkmen claims to Kirkuk, and the question of who was to be allowed to vote there was clearly most contentious. By threatening to pull out of the elections altogether, the KDP and PUK succeeded in persuading the High Election Commission that some 108,000 Kurds who had recently re-entered Kirkuk from elsewhere would be allowed to vote for the Ta'mim governorate council. As a result, the Kurdish united list (which also contained Turkmen candidates) won no less than 58.5 per cent of the votes and 26 out of 41 seats; 9 seats went to Turkmen parties, and 6 to Arab parties. Even before the election results were known, there were predictable protests from the Iraqi Turkmen Front and two Shi'a parties, al-Da'wa and Muqtada al-Sadr's movement. It was claimed that the latter had withdrawn from the elections in protest. A demonstration on Friday 11 February in Kirkuk (Al-Jazeera spoke

of ‘hundreds of Arab and Turkmen protestors’, indicating this was not a massive protest movement) called for a new election in Ta’imim. The Turkmen Front protested with the High Election Commission over alleged vote rigging by the Kurdish parties, but their protest was rejected by the council, which admitted that some irregularities had taken place but that contrary to what was asserted, only people who were registered as voters had cast their ballots.

The Iraqi Turkmen Front performed particularly poorly both in Kirkuk and at the national level. In the elections for the Iraqi National Council, the Kurdish Alliance (the united list of KDP and PUK) received just over a quarter of the vote and 75 out of 275 seats. The Iraqi Turkmen Front won 3 seats. Interestingly, more Turkmen candidates were elected on other tickets: 5 entered the Council as members of the (Shi`i) United Iraqi Alliance, 4 as representatives of the Kurdistan Alliance, and one on Allawi’s Iraqi list.

### **Turkey, Iran, Syria and their proxies**

The existence of the two Turkmen fronts just mentioned draws our attention to the not negligible role of neighbouring countries in northern Iraq. Turkey’s role has been quite conspicuous, carrying out military incursions into Iraqi Kurdistan more or less regularly since 1983 and having permanent military missions present as far as Sulaymani. Iran and Syria have been more circumspect, but they too have their close allies among the various political movements in Iraq, and they maintain relations of varying degrees of friendliness with a wider range of forces. Iranian troops in the 1990s made several incursions into the region in (unsuccessful) attempts to destroy the headquarters of the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran, located in the region between Sulaymani and Arbil.[\[27\]](#) Syria does not appear to have had a military presence itself in the region, but it has been accused of masterminding the attack by PKK guerrillas on KDP forces just after the US-brokered peace agreement of Drogheda between the PUK and KDP in 1995, which recognised Turkey’s ‘legitimate security interests’ in the region.[\[28\]](#)

The Kurdish parties have a relationship with Iran that goes back forty years. From 1964 on, Iran has been giving some logistical and arms support to the Iraqi Kurds, evolving into significant co-operation in the early 1970s, until the Shah concluded a favourable peace agreement with Saddam Hussein in March 1975 and stopped his support of the Kurds. This caused the collapse of the Kurdish insurrection, but some 50,000 refugees were welcomed in Iran. By the end of the decade, Iran was at least conniving in, and probably supporting, a low-intensity guerrilla movement of the revived KDP under Barzani’s sons Masud and Idris, and Syria supported Talabani’s PUK (that had been established in Damascus and moved its headquarters to the Iraqi-Iranian border in 1976). The Islamic revolution did not bring about major changes in Iran’s attitude towards the Iraqi Kurds: the relations with the KDP remained most cordial (to the extent that the KDP helped the Iranian regime militarily against the Iranian Kurds), but both parties were in regular communication with Iranian intelligence organisations. During the Iran-Iraq war, Iran encouraged the Iraqi Kurds to extend their activities and bring parts of the Kurdish region under their control.[\[29\]](#) The Revolutionary Guards established a liaison office (the *Qarargah-i Ramazan*) that co-ordinated military actions with the Kurdish parties. The *Qarargah-i Ramazan* still exists and is presently based in Sulaymani. It is believed to be the centre of Iran’s intelligence operations in northern Iraq.[\[30\]](#) Besides, there are also Iranian liaison officers in Barzani’s headquarters of Salahuddin.

Iran considers the American occupation as a serious threat to itself and perceives the encirclement of Iran as one of the objectives of America’s war on Saddam. Like Turkey, it does not wish to see Iraq dismembered, and it has been using its influence with the Kurdish parties to counsel them a course of moderation and re-integration in Iraq rather than further separation. Iran has been accused of supporting the radical Islamist Kurdish group *Ansar al-Islam*, allowing them to retreat into Iran when they were almost wiped out by a joint PUK – US operation in March 2003 and to infiltrate Iraq again after the war.[\[31\]](#)

Turkey's covert involvement with the Iraqi Kurds also goes back a long time. It has never actually supported them, but there have been intelligence liaisons since the 1960s. In the late 1970s, Turkey and Iraq signed a secret agreement allowing their armed forces to cross into each other's territory up to 30 km in hot pursuit of guerrillas. Iraq never had occasion to use this right, but Turkey frequently did so once the PKK, the radical Kurdish nationalist organisation from Turkey, established a presence in northern Iraq. Since 1983 there have been annual raids into Iraqi Kurdistan by the Turkish armed forces, that were not particularly effective against the PKK but had the effect of projecting Turkey's influence into the region. Many analysts are convinced that it was not only or not even primarily the PKK that was the objective of these operations but the protection of Turkey's strategic interests in the region – in other words, preventing the Kurds of Iraq from achieving a status resembling independence. In retrospect, Turkey was not very successful in this aim either. Improving the status of the Turkmen in Iraq appears not to have been a high priority objective of Turkey, although the plight and rights of the Turkmen have been prominent in public discourse. They provide Turkey with justification for its involvement but the real objective is to prevent developments that might give the Kurds of Turkey an incentive to work towards separation.

Turkey continues to express a vital interest in developments in northern Iraq, but its decision not to take part in the war on Saddam as well as its desire to join the EU have acted as brakes on the military's desire to play a more active role. There is an ambiguity in Turkey's relations with the Iraqi Kurds. For ideological reasons, most of the political and military elite consider significant Kurdish autonomy as unacceptable, let alone independence. On the other hand, Turkey has accorded the KDP and PUK a higher degree of recognition than most other countries; both have had high-level representatives in Ankara since the early 1990s. The Khabur border crossing between Turkey and Iraqi Kurdistan has remained open throughout this period (with a brief interruption during the war), and Iraqi Kurds could cross with documents provided by the Kurdish regional administration. In mid-2004, Turkey announced its intention to open a second border crossing. Trade relations have been mutually beneficial. It is not inconceivable that gradually more Turkish policy makers will come to see, as the late President Turgut Özal apparently did, that close economic and political ties with an autonomous or even an independent Iraqi Kurdistan might well serve Turkey's long-term interests.

Both Syria and Iran have supported the PKK (in the case of Iran, it is not very clear which segments of the establishment were involved, most likely the Revolutionary Guards and the intelligence organisation Savama). Both countries have engaged throughout the 1990s in periodic tripartite consultations with Turkey concerning developments in northern Iraq, but Syria and Iran have watched Turkey's involvement with concern.

All of Iraq's neighbours are highly concerned about the close relationship that has again been developing between the Iraqi Kurdish parties and Israel. Israeli instructors have since late 2003 allegedly been training Kurdish commando units for special operations against Sunni and Shi'i militants. Israeli intelligence operatives are also said to be using Iraqi Kurdistan as a basis for covert operations in the Kurdish regions of Iran and Syria, supporting opposition movements and electronically monitoring Iran's nuclear program.<sup>[32]</sup> Israeli agents can operate relatively easily in Iraqi Kurdistan because of the historically good relations between Kurds and the Jewish communities of Kurdistan, which have migrated to Israel but many members of which have been revisiting the region since 1991.

## **The PKK**

The PKK has had base camps in Iraqi Kurdistan since 1982, well before the raids on police and military posts of August 1984 that are commonly considered as the beginning of the guerrilla war in Turkey. The Turkish army has carried out numerous air strikes and land operations against these bases but has failed to dislodge

the PKK. Under Turkish pressure, the KDP (in whose territory most of the base camps were located) and the PUK have attempted to dissuade the PKK from carrying out guerrilla raids inside Turkey from these bases; the KDP has made a sustained but effort to expel or destroy the PKK units in its zone. This does not appear to have had much effect on the PKK's ability to carry on the guerrilla struggle. In the mid-1990s, there were tens of thousands of PKK guerrillas, who moved relatively freely between camps in Iraqi Kurdistan and their mountain camps in Turkish Kurdistan. The PKK was then gaining support among young Iraqi Kurds as well, as disaffection with Barzani's and Talabani's leadership was mounting. There are no estimates of its present influence among the Iraqi Kurds.

Following the capture of its leader Abdullah Öcalan in early 1999, the PKK renounced on the armed struggle and withdrew its fighters from Turkey into Iraq. Several groups gave themselves up to Turkey, in a gesture meant to build trust — without having the desired effect, however. Other fighters may have moved elsewhere — to Iran, Armenia, various European countries — and some five thousand fighters are believed to remain (but there is no reliable source on their numbers). Their major military camps are in the Khakurk mountains in the 'triangle' where Turkey, Iraq and Iran meet, in the Qandil range further south on the Iranian border, and in a location yet further south, in PUK territory but out of reach of PUK fighters. One American observer saw them near Khakurk in mid-2004, and noticed they appeared comfortably in control of their mountainous hideouts, taxing surrounding villages.[\[33\]](#)

In the prelude to the American invasion, the PKK made conflicting statements, but after the Americans had occupied Iraq, the party's leadership council made several conciliatory statements. It has sought to approach the American authorities in Iraq and apparently hopes for American mediation in the hoped-for negotiations with Turkey. Neither the KDP nor the PUK has managed to dislodge these hardened fighters from their strongholds; the Americans have never even tried and appear to have given them a low priority among issues to be solved.

In the spring of 2004, the PKK leadership in Iraq announced the resumption of the guerrilla struggle in Turkey, and since then there have been a series of minor incidents in south-eastern Turkey and a few bombings in western Turkey that were attributed to the PKK. This caused a split among the party leadership and several leading members, including Öcalan's brother Osman, left the PKK to found another organisation.[\[34\]](#)

Besides the guerrilla fighters, there is also a contingent of civilian Kurds present in the region who are considered as close to the PKK. In April-May 1994, several thousand families from districts just north of the Iraqi border, altogether some 12,000-15,000 civilians, took refuge in northern Iraq. Their region was then subjected to extremely brutal counter-insurgency operations, which, they claimed, made ordinary life impossible. They were settled in a camp in Atrush in the Kurdish-controlled zone, under UNHCR supervision. The majority of these refugees appeared to sympathise with the PKK, and PKK activists appeared to be in control of the camp. About half of these refugees returned to Turkey in the course of the next few years. When Turkey announced a major military incursion into northern Iraq in 1997, the camp was moved further south to Makhmur, in a part of Kurdistan under central government control. The UNHCR continued to monitor the camp.[\[35\]](#)

The camp at Makhmur has acquired the symbolic importance of being the only place where a young generation of Turkish Kurds was educated in the Kurdish language. The camp ran a school where all classes were in Kurdish. Many families in the camp belong to the Goyan tribe, which was divided by the boundary of 1926. Members of this tribe moved easily across the border and back. In the 1970s, Iraq expelled hundreds of Goyan families to Turkey on the ground that they were of 'foreign' descent. The Goyan probably were culturally closer to north Iraqi Kurdish tribes than many other Turkish Kurds were. The PKK apparently expected that these refugees would play a role in spreading the party's ideological influence to the

surrounding Iraqi Kurdish population.

## Re-opening the Mosul file

In the past decade and a half, both Turkish and Kurdish politicians have suggested that the settlement of the Mosul question might not be definitive after all and that there might be a basis in international law for re-opening the case. This approach should perhaps be distinguished from the irredentist emotions appealed to by traditional nationalist circles in Turkey that have never given up lamenting the loss of Mosul. It will be remembered that the League of Nations had assigned the Vilayet of Mosul to Iraq in 1926, following the advice of a commission that had toured the contested province to assess the wishes of its population and had found Turkey's claims too weak and the Kurds themselves too divided. Mainstream Turkish politics has henceforth renounced all claims to Mosul (and by implication to the oil of Kirkuk). Kurdish nationalists have recognised that the League's decision on Mosul precluded international support for independence. Around 1991, however, the finality of this decision began to be questioned.

Turgut Özal, who dominated Turkish politics through the 1980s until his death in 1993, first as prime minister and then as the president, had a grand vision of solving Turkey's two major international questions (Cyprus and the Kurds) and leading the country into the European Union as well as making it the major interface between Central Asia, the Middle East and the West. Projecting Turkey's 'strategic sphere of influence' into northern Iraq was part of his vision; unlike his contemporaries, he appeared to believe in co-operation with, not domination of the Kurds. In 1991 he persuaded President George Bush sr. to intervene in northern Iraq on behalf of the Kurds. He called Turkey 'the natural protector of the Kurds' (*Kürtlerin hamisi*). He spoke several times of 'federation', leaving his intentions ambiguous: some read into his words that he was considering a federation of Turkey's Kurdish and Turkish parts, but it is more likely he was thinking of a federation between the 'Kurdish entity' in northern Iraq and Turkey, something that appeared to make good economic sense.

The first explicit questioning of the Mosul settlement came from a group of important Kurdish tribal chieftains, who called themselves 'The Mosul Vilayet Council'. They were chieftains who had not previously joined the Kurdish nationalist movement but rather had stayed in an uneasy alliance with the central government throughout the 1970s and 1980s and had been pro-government militia commanders. In 1991 it was these chieftains, and not the KDP and PUK, who had started the Kurdish uprising, and the parties could only regain a measure of control by concluding alliances with them. The Mosul Vilayet Council was established in 1992 and called for an act of self-determination, on the basis of the provisions of League of Nations recommendations that had never been carried out. The League had accepted the inclusion of Mosul in Iraq on certain conditions (including Kurdish education and a degree of self-government), but since these conditions had not been met by the Independent Government of Iraq, the Mosul Vilayet Council argued that the UN, as the successor to the League of Nations, had to review the situation. They hired a Swiss law firm to represent their claim in Geneva.<sup>[36]</sup> These chieftains, whose leader was Aziz Khidr Surchi of the large Surchi tribe, represented a considerable force in Kurdistan. Several of them have joined Surchi in establishing an independent party, the Kurdistan Conservative Party.<sup>[37]</sup>

In late 2002 the then Foreign Minister of Turkey, Ya•ar Yakı•, announced that he had ordered his legal office to investigate whether there were legal possibilities of re-opening the Mosul file. His successor has refrained from any similar suggestion.

Although the Turkish foreign affairs establishment finds it extremely difficult to even think of a different relationship between Turkey and the Iraqi Kurds, the facts on the ground have changed and have already had an effect on behaviour if not ideas. The economic development of Iraqi Kurdistan has had a significant positive impact on the economy of eastern Turkey – which became especially clear when the border was

temporarily closed at the time of the war. Although the Kurdish Regional Government is not recognised, the two parties KDP and PUK have had liaison offices in Ankara throughout the 1990s, and their representatives have had high-level contacts with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Turkish Army's General Staff was involved in setting up Barzani's Kurd TV satellite station (in an effort to lessen the impact of PKK-affiliated Medya TV). Some influential and well-connected journalists and businessmen in Turkey are pleading for a different analysis of the situation and different policies vis-à-vis northern Iraq. Inur Çevik, once one of the movers and shakers of conservative-liberal politics, recently spoke out in favour of 'a Kurdish state umbilically bound to Turkey', which he believed to be in the country's ultimate interest.[\[38\]](#)

### **Who controls the Kurdish region?**

Kurdish party spokesmen like to present Iraqi Kurdistan as a haven of democracy but that should be taken with a grain of salt. The KDP and PUK exert a degree of control of social, political and economic life as well as security that is not unlike that of the Ba`th party under Saddam Hussein. There is not much of an independent associational life, nor is there a vibrant public sphere. The only significant independent medium is the weekly newspaper *Hawlati*;[\[39\]](#) the daily press and television are almost completely controlled by the parties. There is somewhat more pluralism in PUK-controlled Sulaymani than elsewhere; a number of small parties of different ideological orientations, from Marxism to Islam, are allowed to exist there and engage in various activities.

Between 1994 and 1997, the KDP and PUK fought a civil war, resulting in a strict separation of territory between them (see Map 1). Where prior to the civil war both parties had existed throughout the Kurdish region, though each with a strong regional concentration, after the war each controlled one zone and did not allow the other's activities there. Arbil had been the joint capital, where the Kurdistan National Assembly (parliament) and the Kurdish Regional Government had their seats; in 1996 the KDP, with some help from Saddam's army, dislodged the PUK from Arbil. The deputies and ministers of the KRG who were affiliated with the PUK henceforth met in Sulaymani, so that to all purposes there were two regional parliaments and two regional administrations. The PUK complemented its administration with some representatives of other currents, including the Islamic Movement of Iraqi Kurdistan (IMIK) and the Kurdistan Conservative Party. IMIK, a non-violent Islamic party influenced by Muslim Brotherhood ideology, also has a strong regional concentration around Halabja. It contested the first free Kurdish elections in 1992 but then remained slightly below the 7 per cent threshold so that it was not represented in the original Arbil parliament.[\[40\]](#)

The parties appear to have lost considerable popularity among the population at large, in part because of the fratricidal war that they fought, in part because of the flourishing corruption and favouritism, and the incompetence of many officials who owed their appointments to tribal or party affiliation only. Several months before the elections, 46 per cent of the respondents in an opinion poll indicated that they would prefer to vote for independent candidates rather than the established parties. When the time to do so arrived, however, few people actually did so (although there were independent candidates). The KDP and PUK had, prior to the elections, re-united their parliaments and regional governments and they took part in the 30 January elections with a combined list that collected virtually all votes.

Electors in the Kurdish-controlled region voted in three separate elections simultaneously (besides the unofficial referendum on independence, which can be considered a fourth poll): for the Iraqi National Assembly, for the governorate council (Duhok, Arbil, or Sulaymani), and for the Kurdistan Regional Assembly. The usefulness of a united Kurdish list in the election for the National Assembly — useful not only to the Kurds themselves but also to their American patrons — was self-evident for it gave them a major influence in the formation of the new Iraqi government. With slightly over 25 per cent of all cast votes and 75 out of 275 seats in the Assembly, the Kurds became the one significant check on Shi'a power in Iraq and are perhaps in the position to impose the conditions under which they will re-integrate their region into Iraq.



The parties also came out with a joint list for the Regional Assembly, and their control of the media had ensured that hardly anybody knew about alternatives to this list, which received some 90 per cent of the votes. The electorate has had no say in the composition of this list, and by implication in the composition of the Kurdistan Regional Assembly. The parties divided the seats equally among themselves, allotting a few seats to minorities. In the new Kurdish regional government, both parties will hold an equal number of ministries, with an additional three ministers representing Islamist parties, one communist, one Assyrian and one Turkmen.[41]

By the end of April, the new Regional Assembly had not yet been convened, suggesting disagreement between the parties about the unification of the Kurdish region. Negotiations about the composition of the Regional Government were also continuing. The KDP and PUK had earlier agreed to one major division of effort between them: the presidency of the Kurdish region would fall to Masud Barzani with Nechirvan Barzani (Mas`ud's nephew and 'crown prince', who also controls much of the region's economy) as the prime minister, and Jalal Talabani was to be the Kurds' candidate for the presidency of the entire country. This made good sense: Arab Iraqis have long considered Talabani as the one Kurdish leader who was willing to 'discuss the Kurdish question in terms of Iraqi politics and not as a purely Kurdish one'.[42] Talabani also made efforts to reassure Turkey that the Iraqi Kurds, in spite of their desire for autonomy and a federal Iraq, knew and respected Turkey's concerns and were eager to improve bilateral relations.

Talabani's inauguration as Iraq's president was a major symbolic event, even though the position is largely ceremonial and entails little real power. A Kurdish nationalist has become the head of state in a country that used to vie for leadership of the Arab world. Another Kurd was confirmed as the country's foreign minister: Hoshyar Zebari, who also held this position in the interim government. Zebari is a close relative of the Barzanis, so that both parties have senior-level representatives in Iraq's new leadership. This may persuade the Kurdish political elite that re-integration into Iraq is a rewarding option — as long as it is in the American interest to let the Kurds hold the balance in Baghdad. The widespread desire for independence among the Kurdish population, however, is unlikely to be silenced by such apparent Kurdish gains at the central level.

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## Notes

[1] Education at all levels, for instance, used Kurdish instead of Arabic as the medium of instruction. A new generation has grown up that speaks little or no Arabic and cannot read that language. The same is true of the press, radio and television: in the Kurdish region these are only in Kurdish (although there are some Arabic-language media directed to other parts of the country).

[2] *Al-Ta'akhi*, 21 December 2003 (<http://www.ikurd.info/kmedia-dec03.htm>).

[3] See the news reports of election day and, e.g., the commentary by observer Peter W. Galbraith, "As Iraqis celebrate, the Kurds hesitate", *The New York Times*, 1 February 2005. The Democrat Galbraith, former US Ambassador to Croatia, is the strongest supporter of Kurdish claims in the American establishment.

[4] An Al-Jazeera report claims that the Kurdish parties paid a subsidy of \$150,000 to finance the

referendum, see: “Kurdish party says self-rule inevitable”, 2 February 2005, [http://www.thewe.cc/contents/more/archive2005/february/kurd\\_independence.htm](http://www.thewe.cc/contents/more/archive2005/february/kurd_independence.htm).

[5] For a study of this period from a Kurdish point of view, see: Ismet Cheriff Vanly, "Le Kurdistan d'Irak", in: Gérard Chaliand (ed.), *Les Kurdes et le Kurdistan*, Paris: Maspéro, 1978, pp. 225-305 (English translation: *A people without a country: the Kurds and Kurdistan*, London: Zed Books, 1980). A study more sympathetic to the government's point of view is: Edmund Ghareeb, *The Kurdish question in Iraq*, Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1981.

[6] For a concise but good discussion of the autonomy law and its implications, see: Helena Cook, *The safe heaven in northern Iraq: international responsibility for Iraqi Kurdistan*, London: Kurdistan Human Rights Project, 1995, pp. 23-33.

[7] The *Anfal* ('Spoils') campaign — named for the eighth chapter of the Qur'an, which urges the Prophet and his companions to not to turn their back on the enemy but continue the struggle — was a series of military offensives, in many cases preceded by shelling with chemical arms, directed at Kurdish rural districts that had been under control of the Kurdish parties during the Iran-Iraq war. See: Martin van Bruinessen, "Genocide of Kurds", in: Israel W. Charny (ed.), *The widening circle of genocide*, New Brunswick, NY: Transaction Publishers, 1994, pp. 165-191; Human Rights Watch / Middle East, *Iraq's crime of genocide: the Anfal campaign against the Kurds*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995.

[8] A detailed list of all destroyed villages, sub-district by sub-district, and numbers of families deported was compiled by Shorsh Mustafa Rasool, "Forever Kurdish: statistics of atrocities in Iraqi Kurdistan", privately published (distributed by the PUK representation in Europe), 1990.

[9] Cf. International Crisis Group, "Iraq: Allaying Turkey's fears over Kurdish ambitions" [Middle East Report No. 35], Amman/Brussels: International Crisis Group, 26 January 2005.

[10] The Seljuqs were Turkish-speaking nomadic warriors who invaded Iran from Central Asia in the 1040s and went on to conquer Baghdad and finally Syria and Asia Minor in the 1070s. The Seljuq empire that they established replaced the Abbasid caliphate; it was the first major state established by a Turkic group in West Asia. Several later waves of Turkic migrations followed. The Ottomans belonged to one of these later waves; their empire began as a tiny principdom in western Asia Minor in the fourteenth century, became the last great Muslim empire, and finally collapsed after the First World War.

[11] The memoirs of British political officers who served in these districts in the 1920s give an interesting insight in the relations between Turkmen, Kurds and Arabs and in the Turkmen's gradual loss of their predominant position: W.R. Hay, *Two years in Kurdistan. Experiences of a political officer 1918-1920*, London: Sidgwick & Jackson Ltd, 1921; C. J. Edmonds, *Kurds, Turks and Arabs. Politics, travel and research in north-eastern Iraq, 1919-1925*, London: Oxford University Press, 1957; D.K. Fieldhouse (ed.), *Kurds, Arabs & Britons: the memoirs of Wallace Lyon in Iraq 1918-44*, London: I.B. Tauris, 2002.

[12] Edmonds, *Kurds, Turks and Arabs*, p. 266; Fieldhouse (ed.), *Kurds, Arabs and Britons*, pp. 172, 220.

[13] The Talabanis are a large family, with branches in various parts of southern Kurdistan. Dr. Nouri Talabany, the author of the most forceful justification of Kurdish claims to Kirkuk (*Arabization of the Kirkuk region*), is a descendant of the first shaykhs of this family in Kirkuk. The nationalist politician, Jalal

Talabani, belongs to another branch of the family, based on Koy Sanjaq.

[14] It is especially the Iraqi Turkmen Front that puts forward extravagant claims this Turkmeneli, see e.g. the map and accompanying text on one of its websites, <http://www.turkmenfront.org/English/index.htm>.

[15] On the position of two of these communities in recent times, see: Michiel Leezenberg, "Between assimilation and deportation: the Shabak and the Kakais in northern Iraq", in: K. Kehl-Bodrogi, B. Kellner-Heinkele and A. Otter-Beaujean (ed.), *Syncretistic religious communities in the Near East*, Leiden: Brill, 1997, pp. 175-194.

[16] "Question of the frontier between Turkey and Iraq: report submitted to the Council by the commission instituted by the council resolution of September 30th, 1924", Geneva: League of Nations, 1925, pp. 38-9.

[17] A reasoned estimate claiming over 2 million Turkmen in 2002, is given most recently by: Ershad al-Hirmizi, *The Turkmen & Iraqi homeland* (N.p.: Kerkük Vakfı, 2003). This estimate is entirely based on extrapolation from dubious old statistics and 'reasonable' assumptions.

[18] Kadir Mıstro•lu, *Musul meselesi ve Irak Türkleri* [The Mosul Question and the Turks of Iraq], Istanbul: Sebil, 1985; Nefi Demirci, *Dünden bugüne Kerkük* (Kerkük'ün siyasi tarihi) [Kirkuk from yesterday till today, the political history of Kirkuk], Istanbul: privately published, 1990; •evket Koçsoy, *Irak Türkleri* [The Turks of Iraq], Istanbul: Bo•aziçi Yayınları, 1991; Suphi Saatçı, *Tarihten günümüze Irak Türkmenleri* [The Turkmen of Iraq, from the earliest history to our days], Ankara: Ötüken, 2003.

[19] `Aziz Qadir al- Samanji, *Al-ta'rikh al-siyasi li-Turkman al-`Iraq* [The political history of the Turkmen of Iraq]. Beyrut: Dar al-Saqi, 1999, p. 211; Ziyat Köprülü, *Irak'ta Türk varlığı* [The Turkish presence in Iraq]. Ankara, privately published, 1996, p. 65.

[20] Human Rights Watch / Middle East, *Iraq's crime of genocide*. This concerns what the report calls the 'third' and 'fourth *Anfal*', see the map on p. 16.

[21] An excellent description of how the uprisings began and were organised, and of why they failed, is given by Faleh `Abd al-Jabbar, "Why the Intifada failed", in: F. Hazelton (ed.), *Iraq since the Gulf War: Prospects for democracy*, London: Zed Books, 1994, pp. 97-117.

[22] See the excellent and very detailed report by Human Rights Watch, "Iraq: forcible expulsion of ethnic minorities", *Human Rights Watch* Vol. 15 No. 3 (E), March 2003.

[23] The claim that the Kurds destroyed or seized all records of the Kirkuk population and deeds and property registries is repeated in a later document by the Iraqi Turkmen Human Rights Research Foundation, which is close to the Iraqi Turkmen Front, "Attempts to change the demographic structure of Kirkuk city by the American supported Kurds", 17 September 2004. I have not been able to find confirmation or otherwise of this claim.

[24] Iraqi Turkmen Human Rights Research Foundation, " 'US-made' " Kerkuk City Council decides once again in favor of the Kurds", report dated 28 December 2004. This foundation consists of 'independent' Turkmen intellectuals abroad but appears affiliated with the Iraqi Turkmen Front. Its reports as well as statements by various Turkmen parties are conveniently posted on its website, [www.turkmen.nl/](http://www.turkmen.nl/).

- [25] Kıvanç Galip Över, *Vaat edilmi• topraklarda ölüm kokusu: Kuzey Irak dosyası* [The smell of death over promised lands: the North Iraq file]. Istanbul: Papirüs, 1999, pp. 42-44.
- [26] Human Rights Watch, "Claims in conflict: reversing ethnic cleansing in Northern Iraq", *Human Rights Watch*, Vol. 16, No. 4(E), August 2004. The report notes 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 (...) an experience vastly different from that of the Balkans, where bloodshed was routine during the various 'ethnic cleansing' campaigns" (p. 28).
- [27] There is also a camp with some 4,200 Iranian Kurdish refugees in central Iraq, near Ramadi. The UN issued a press release on 24 November 2004 stating that many of these refugees fled the camp because of the fighting between US troops and Iraqi insurgents.
- [28] Michiel Leezenberg, "Irakisch-Kurdistan seit dem Zweiten Golfkrieg", in: C. Borck, E. Savelsberg and S. Hajo (ed.), *Ethnizität, Nationalismus, Religion und Politik in Kurdistan*, Münster: Lit, 1997, pp. 45-78, esp. 73-74.
- [29] On this period, see: Martin van Bruinessen, "The Kurds between Iran and Iraq", *MERIP Middle East Report* 141 (1986), 14-27 [reprinted in idem, *Kurdish ethno-nationalism versus nation-building states. Collected articles*, Istanbul: The Isis Press, 2000].
- [30] International Crisis Group, "Iran in Iraq: how much influence?" Amman/Brussels: International Crisis Group, 21 March 2005, pp. 20-21.
- [31] International Crisis Group, "Iran in Iraq", pp. 20-21. The ICG researchers consider it likely, in spite of official Iranian denials of involvement and in spite of ideological differences with the *Ansar*, that powerful circles in Iran support this radical Sunni group. Otherwise, the report is quite sceptical about the frequent claims of heavy Iranian involvement in Iraqi opposition to the American presence.
- [32] Attention was drawn to Israeli intelligence and special operations activities in Kurdistan in an article by Seymour Hersh in *The New Yorker* of 28 June 2004 ("As June 30th approaches, Israel looks to the Kurds"), based on conversation with American and Israeli intelligence officers.
- [33] Michael Rubin, "The PKK factor: Another critical enemy front in the war on terror". Dated 5 August 2004. Posted at: <http://www.benadorassociates.com/article/6378>. A year earlier a prominent British journalist had visited a PKK camp in the Qandil mountains with an alleged 5,000 women guerrilla fighters: Jason Burke, "Daughters of the revolution", *The Observer*, 11 May 2003.
- [34] The PKK has gone through a few confusing name changes during the past years, apparently in an effort to get rid of the stigma of association with terrorism. It first renamed itself KADEK (Kurdish Freedom and Democracy Congress), then Kongra Gel (Nation's Congress), and most recently PKK again. These changes were not accompanied by any noticeable changes in personnel or organisation. The group that broke away from the Kongra Gel in August 2004 (Osman Öcalan and allies) named its new formation the Patriotic Democratic Party (PDP).
- [35] The story of the camp is told, from the Turkish point of view, in: Över, *Vaat edilmi• topraklarda*, pp.

193-98.

[36] Relevant documents can be found on the law firm's website, <http://www.solami.com/a31.htm>.

[37] The Surchi tribe controls a large and prosperous area to the north of Arbil, in the region over which the KDP claims control. The Surchi, long-time rivals of the Barzani, tried to maintain a degree of independence by cultivating relations with the PUK, for which they were severely punished in 1996, when the KDP overran their central village and killed the head of the leading family. The Kurdistan Conservative Party was then no longer tolerated in the KDP region and had to operate from the PUK region. It had one minister in the Regional Government at Sulaymani. In February 2005 a ceremony of reconciliation of the KCP and KDP took place prior to talks between the KDP and PUK leaders on the formation of a new joint Kurdish government.

[38] Interviewed in *Tempo* Magazine, 11 November 2004.

[39] Available online, with brief English summaries, at <http://www.hawlati.com/>.

[40] The Islamic Movement of Iraqi Kurdistan should not be confounded with the more militant Ansar al-Islam and Jund al-Islam groups, in which some former IMIK members are involved, along with 'Afghan Arabs' who fled Afghanistan after the American attack. On the various Islamist groups in the region, see: Michiel Leezenberg, "Politischer Islam bei den Kurden", *Kurdische Studien* 1/2, 2001, 5-38; International Crisis Group, "Radical Islam in Iraqi Kurdistan: the mouse that roared?" Amman/Brussels: International Crisis Group, 7 February 2003.

[41] *Hawlati*, 20 April 2005. The Islamist parties joining the regional government are the Islamic Union of Kurdistan (2 positions) and Komal, both of which have come out of the Islamic Movement of Iraqi Kurdistan and both of which have good relations with the PUK and KDP.

[42] Thus the comments of a high Ba`th official who negotiated with the Kurds as early as 1963, quoted in Sa`ad Jawad, *Iraq and the Kurdish question, 1958-1970*, London: Ithaca Press, 1981, p. 111.