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To cite this article: Tarik H. Oğuzlu (2004) Endangered community: the Turkoman identity in Iraq, *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 24:2, 309-325, DOI: [10.1080/1360200042000296681](https://doi.org/10.1080/1360200042000296681)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1360200042000296681>



Published online: 07 Aug 2006.



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Endangered Community: The Turkoman Identity in Iraq

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Abstract

This paper provides a preliminary survey of the origins, population size and areas of settlement of the Turkoman community in Iraq. After examining their political status during the pre-1990 and post-1990 periods in Turkey, an attempt is made to assess Turkey's policies towards this community with particular focus on the post-Cold War era developments. The paper also analyses post-September 11 developments in Iraq as far as their possible impact on the Turkoman community is concerned and examines prospects for the future. In closing it is argued that for the Turkoman community in Iraq to be treated fairly, first, the US should focus on the installation of a truly representative democracy. Second, the Turkish approach towards Iraq in general and the Kurds in particular should be revised so that both Kurds and Turkomans are seen as Turkey's true relatives in the region. Third, the old policy of balancing the Kurds through the strengthening of the Turkomans should be replaced by the policy of constructive engagement with the Kurds. Finally, the Turkomans should avoid internal bickering and try to speak and act with one voice.

Introduction

This article aims to analyse the political and social status of the Turkoman community in Iraq within the context of the political developments in Iraq. It will also examine Turkey's approach towards these people living in Iraq. The main reason why such an attempt is timely is based on the fact that Iraq has been going through radical developments at this stage of its history that will certainly affect the status of its various ethnic communities including the Turkomans. Depending on the future political shape of the country, the status of the Turkoman community will vary. Even though Iraq is known to consist of various ethnic communities, the international community has mainly turned its attention to two of them, the Arabs (either Sunni or Shi'as) and the Kurds. This was so mainly because of the fact that various Iraqi constitutions, notably the most recent one promulgated in 1990, only accepted the Arabs and the Kurds as the two main constitutive nations making up the Iraqi state. Other communities, ranging from the Assyrians to the Jews to the Turkomans, were considered to be small nationalities deserving the minority treatment. This treatment of the Iraqi Turkoman community by the Iraqi political authorities has intermittently engendered consternation and anger on the part of the Turkomans. These people argue that they deserve a main nation status within Iraq, for they make up approximately 10% of the Iraqi population and their distinct social, cultural, political, ethnic and linguistic characteristics are all well established and legitimate.

Against this background, this article will first attempt to shed light on the origins, population distribution and settlement areas of the Turkoman community in Iraq. Then attention will be turned to the political status of these people both during the

pre-1990 and post-1990 periods. An attempt will be made to assess Turkey's policies towards this community with a particular focus on post-Cold War era developments. The concluding segment will provide an assessment of the recent post-September 11 developments in Iraq as far as their possible impacts on this particular community are concerned and then offer some prospects for the future of the community in Iraq.

Origins, Population, Settlement

Even though the people of Turkic origin living in Iraq are variously called 'Turkomans', 'Turkmens' or 'Turkmans', this should not imply that these people do not share the same Turkish origin, as do the Turks of Anatolia and Azerbaijan.

Orhan Ketene claims that Turkmens are a mix of many migrating Turkish tribes, mainly Oguz tribes.¹ Though they speak a unique Turkish dialect similar to the one spoken in Azerbaijan, they use the Anatolian Turkish in writing. As for the origins of the Turkoman people in the region, there are different interpretations. The Iraqi historian Abdul Razzak Al Hasani asserts that the Turkomans of this region are descendents: 'of the forces of Sultan Murad the Fourth who captured Iraq from the Saffawis in 1638 and remained in these parts to protect this route between the southern and northern Ottoman Wilayets'.²

Turkish sources are inclined to trace the origins of the Turkomans back to the remnants of the Turkoman soldiers who served under the Abbasids, the Atabekians, and the Ottomans. According to the Turkomans themselves, they began to settle at the foot of the mountains in northern Iraq and were part of a wave of immigrants coming from present-day Azerbaijan and Central Asia.³ They migrated to Iraq during the Amawi and Abbasid periods because they were in demand by these rulers as a result of their prowess in battle. However, they acknowledge that this period of their residence in Iraq was one of introduction rather than settlement. They believe that the real settlement began during the Seljouki period and was later expanded during the Ottoman period.

According to Fazil Demirci and Ersat Hüzmüzlü, the Turkoman people came to Iraq in three consecutive waves.⁴ The first era of migration occurred under the Amawis and Abbasids. The second took place during the era of the Seljouki, and the final wave of Turkomans to the region occurred after the Ottoman Empire acquired control of this land. One can surely claim that when the British tried to carve up an artificial Iraqi State out of the remnants of the Ottoman Empire in the aftermath of the First World War, the region was to a great extent a part of the broader area of Turkish Culture.⁵

Estimating the current population of the Turkomans residing in Iraq is a daunting task mainly for two reasons. One concerns the relative lack of official and objective sources. Given that the only reliable official source is the 1957 Iraqi census, the urgency of the situation becomes more evident. The second reason relates to the population movements of the Iraqi Turkomans within Iraq due to the official state policy of decomposing the Turkish character of the Turkoman regions.

In the hope that the historical developments in relation to northern Iraq might shed some light on the population issue, I would like to refer to the Mosul question, which followed the establishment of the modern Turkish Republic as the Turkish attempts at incorporating the Mosul region into Turkey were accelerated. Following the war of independence Turkish attempts at incorporating Mosul into the newly established Turkish Republic did not cease as this region was mentioned within the contours of

TABLE 1. Population estimates of Turks, Arabs, and Kurds in Mosul

Ethnic group	Population estimate	
	Turkish	British
Turks	146,960	65,895
Arabs	43,210	185,763
Kurds	263,830	427,720

Source: Mim Kemal Öke, *Musul-Kürdistan Sorunu 1918-1926 (Musul-Kuridstan Question 1918-1926)*, Istanbul: İz Yayıncılık, 1995, p. 267.

'Ahd-i Milli' (National Pact), which was accepted by the last Ottoman Parliament on 28 January 1920.

As far as the population of this region is concerned, the statistical figures, which the Turkish delegates presented during the Lousanne negotiations, put the number of the Turkish population in the Mosul region far ahead of the Arab population. However, the British estimates privileged the Arabs at the expense of Kurds and Turks. The figures given by Mim Kemal Öke in his study on the Mosul question gives the following numbers: according to the Turkish figures, the Turks consisted of 146,960 people whereas the Arabs were 43,210 and the Kurds 263,830, respectively. Öke points out that in stark contrast to these figures, the British statistics put the population of the Arabs at 185,763 and those of the Turks and Kurds at 65,895 and 427,720, in that order.⁶ The significance of these findings lies in the discrepancy between the two figures regarding the Arab population. While the Turkish government claimed that the Turks and Kurds outnumbered the Arabs, and therefore, Turkey would have had the right to incorporate this region into Turkey, the British government of that time put an effort in proving that the area was actually Arab, hence the borders of Turkey should not be allowed to extend into this region.

As for the current population of the Turkomans in Iraq, there seems to exist a consensus among Western sources. According to them, the population of the Turkoman people living in Iraq does not exceed 2% of the overall Iraqi population. Most of these sources rely on the statistics provided by the Iraqi government. According to a country study conducted by the Federal Research Division in the United States in 1990, the Turkoman population lingers at around 220,000.⁷ The results of the 1987 census give the following numbers: the overall Iraqi population is 16,278,000, the ratio of the Arabs is 76%, of the Kurds is 19%, and of the others, including Turks, is 5%. A very recent CIA estimate of the Iraqi population is 22,675,617 consisting of Arabs at the ratio of 75-80%, Kurds at the ratio of 15-20%, and the others at the ratio of 5%.⁸

In contrast to the Iraqi and Western sources, the Turkoman sources give different numbers regarding the population of the Turkomans. As a reaction to the denial of their fair existence, which was made evident in the censuses of 1927, 1934, 1947, 1957, 1965, 1977 and 1987, Iraqi Turkomans have tried to prove that these official figures do not reflect the truth. By no means, according to them, can the Iraqi Turkomans be making up just 2% of the overall Iraqi population. For example, Ziyat Köprülü claims

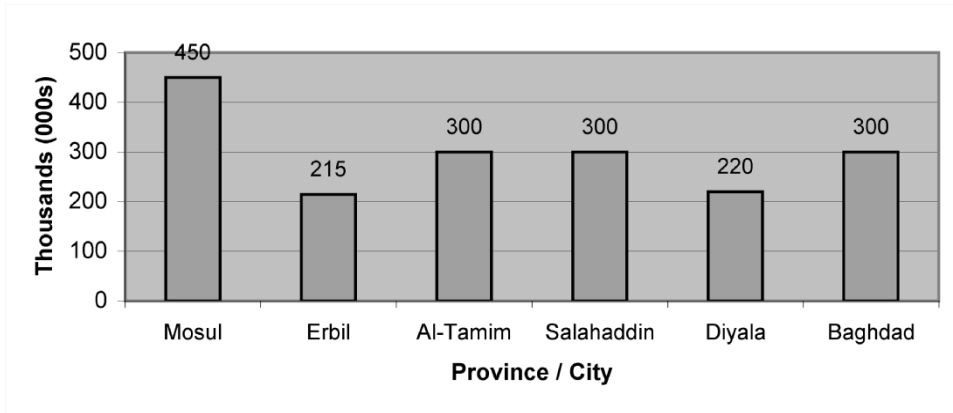


FIG. 1. Size of Turkoman population in 1999. *Source:* available online at <<http://www.angelfire.com/tn/turkoman>>

that the overall Turkoman population in Iraq living in Kirkuk, Mosul, Erbil, Selahattin, Diyala and Baghdad is above two million at the lowest estimate.⁹

Another Turkoman source estimates the overall Turkoman population in Iraq to be around 2.5 million and suggests the distribution as reflected in Figures 1 and 2.¹⁰ Another Turkoman estimate, by Mustafa Ziya, the former representative of the Turkmen National Front in Turkey, claims the current Turkoman population in Iraq to be around 2,600,000 making up 10–12% of Iraqi population. The population in and around Talafer, the biggest city within the Mosul province, is around 1,000,000. Arbil has a Turkoman population of 300,000. The centre of Kirkuk has 350,000 Turkomans, while the environs of Kirkuk have 650,000 Turkomans. Lastly, Baghdad has 300,000 Turkomans.¹¹

According to Demirci and many other Turkish and Turkoman scholars the populations of Turkoman people in Iraq cannot be less than 10–15% of the overall Iraqi

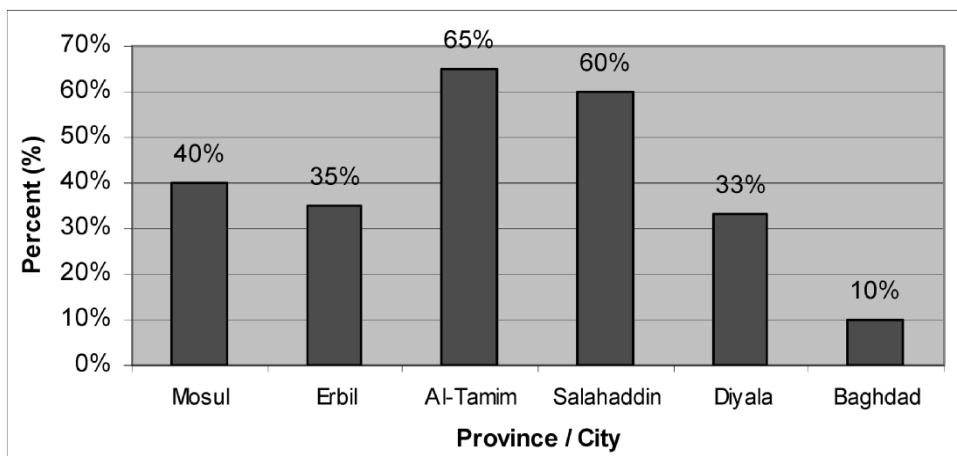


FIG. 2. Percentage of Turkoman population in 1999. *Source:* available online at <<http://www.angelfire.com/tn/turkoman>>; Baghdad statistic obtained from discussions with Turkoman representatives in Ankara, Turkey, 2 August 2004.

population.¹² In Demirci's study, the 1957 census puts the Iraqi population at 6,300,000 and the Turkoman population at 567,000.¹³ The importance of the 1957 census lies in the fact that this was the first and last Iraqi census which allowed the Turkoman people to register themselves as Turks. In other censuses conducted later, the 'Turkoman' category under the section of 'nationalities' was dropped.

According to one Kurdish scholar, the majority in northern Iraq consists of Kurds, as opposed to the counter-claims made by Turkomans. According to him, in the 1920s and 1930s the Turkomans constituted 2.1% of the overall Iraqi population. In the 1957 census the Turkomans ranked third among the ethnic groups in Iraq at the figure of 2.16%. This number further went down to 1.15% in the 1977 census.¹⁴ Regarding the population of Kirkuk, which is the city claimed to be populated overwhelmingly by Turkomans, he claims that Turkomans rank second after the Kurds with the ratios of 21.4% in 1957 and 16.75% in 1977, respectively. He puts the Turkoman population in Mosul at lower levels with ratios of 4.8% seen in the 1957 and 0.99% in the 1977 census. This particular Kurdish scholar draws a picture in which he tries to show that the Kurds, rather than the Turkomans, are the majority in northern Iraq. He even cites Shamsudin Sami (Semsettin Sami) who describes the demography of Kirkuk at the time of his writing his famous dictionary '*Qamous Al-A'ala'm*' as follows: 'three quarters of the inhabitants are Kurds and the rest are the Turkomanis, Arabs, and others'. To lend credence to his argument that the Kurds were the majority in the area he cites the number of deputies in the Iraqi National Parliament during the monarchy. Two-thirds of the deputies representing Kirkuk province in the Parliament were Kurds, and he considers this fact to be a corroboration of his claim. Despite the Turkomans' assertion that they constitute the majority in their traditional areas, the Kurdish estimates continue to put the Kurds ahead of the Turkomans in the population maps of the region.

The Turkoman people in Iraq live in northern Iraq on a diagonal strip of land called Turkmeneli or Turkmenland, stretching from the Syrian border in the north to the Iranian border in central Iraq. This area is composed of the major cities of the region and the small districts associated with those cities. Starting from Talafar in the north and ending in Mendeli in the south this region lies between the 33rd and 37th parallels. Called Turkmeneli in Turkish and Turkmenland in English, this region lies between the Arab areas of settlement to the south and Kurdish areas to the north. Reminiscent of the political history of these people, the areas of their settlement are squeezed between the Arab and Kurdish regions. The major cities in this region in a north-to-south order are Mosul, Arbil, Kirkuk, Salahaldeen and DIALA. Telafer, Sancar, Altunkoprü, Kifri, Hanekin, Kizilribat, Bakuba and Mendeli are some of the districts of these cities, and these are highly populated by Turkomans. In addition to these historically Turkoman populated areas, there is also a sizeable Turkoman presence in the capital city, Baghdad.

The Turkoman community of Iraq is mainly a secular community subscribing to the idea that the role of religion in politics should not be constitutive of a whole set of political rules and values. Even though approximately 30–40% of the Turkomans belong to the Shi'a sect, they do not share the political vision of the Shi'as in Iran or those in the southern parts of Iraq. It seems that the overwhelming majority of the Turkomans have internalized the secularist interpretation of state–religion affairs, as has been mainly practised in Turkey since the foundation of the modern Turkish Republic. Two factors seem to account for the Turkomans' predisposition towards a secular interpretation of state–society relations. On the one hand there are the Turkomans'

feelings that they have to have good relations with the secular Turkey if they want to secure Turkey's help in case their Arab and Kurdish neighbours want to suppress them. On the other hand one can see that these people have been living an urban life for centuries dealing in trade and commerce. When this combined with their proclivity to acquire higher education, the power of religious and tribal factors inherent in Iraq's political culture could not affect them to the degree that they seem to have affected the Kurds and Shi'a Arabs.

Another factor that seems to have shaped their political culture of peaceful co-existence with Kurds and Arabs within the borders of the Iraqi State, can be attributed to the geographical location of their areas of settlement. The fact that they live in a flat area surrounded by the mountainous Kurdish places in the north and Arab places in the south seems to have dramatically curbed the tendencies of the Turkoman people to seek their political, social and cultural rights in more militaristic ways. Their fear of entrapment between the Kurds and Arabs appears to have led them to develop a particular political strategy based on the notion of peaceful co-existence. Their experience with Turkey's hesitations to come to their aid in the past, most notably during the 1958 anti-monarchist coup when the Kurds masterminded the notorious Kirkuk massacre, has constituted another factor in the evolution of their political culture.

In sum, their special relationships with Turkey, their urbanized social life, their view of religion in political life, their different language and their particular culture all seem to set them apart from the other communities living in Iraq.

Turkomans in Contemporary Iraq

In order to analyse the conditions of the Turkoman people and their relationship with the Arabs and Kurds, a brief history of contemporary Iraq should be given. Following the end of the First World War, Britain, in accordance with its policy of holding geostrategically important places under its control, helped establish the Iraqi State as a monarchy under the rule of Emir Faisal Ibn Hussain in 1921. Though Iraq was granted its independence in 1930 with a treaty signed by Britain and the Iraqi Monarchy, Iraq continued to stay under the British Mandate officially until 1933 when Iraq was allowed to register as a member of the United Nations. Though Iraq continued to be a monarchy until 1958, the British governments were so influential in Iraqi politics that they could manipulate power politics in Iraq to an uncontrollable level through the enormous influence they had over the monarch and the royal family. This quasi-independent status turned an important corner in 1958 when a group of soldiers, called 'Free Officers', under the command of Brigadier Abdul-Karim Qassem overthrew the monarchy and took control on 14 July 1958. Qassem himself was assassinated in February 1963, when Ba'ath Arab Socialist Party Members took power under the leadership of General Ahmed Hasan al-Bakr as Prime Minister and Colonel Abdul Slam Arif as President. After nine months Colonel Arif ousted the Ba'athists from the government and consolidated his own rule, which was to continue until 1968 when the Ba'athists came back strong and determined to take the reign of the country into their own hands. On 17 July 1968 the Ba'athists overthrew Colonel Arif and Ahmed Hasan al Bakr became President and the Chairman of the Revolutionary Command Council. Ahmed Bakr ruled Iraq until July 1979 when Saddam Hussain came to power through a bloodless intra-Ba'ath putsch. Since then until early 2003, Iraq had been under the rule of Saddam.

Even though the process of granting political rights to the Turkomans of Iraq seems to have started with the inclusion of a Turkoman in the first Iraqi interim cabinet in 1920, hopes for more participation in the political arena were soon dashed as the following years saw no such inclusions of Turkomans in governments.

It was the question of Mosul that mattered in the Kingdom era as far as the Turkoman presence in Iraq was concerned. The dispute over the provinces of Mosul and Kirkuk was highly contested between the newly born Turkish State on the one hand and Britain and Iraq on the other. Even though with the Ankara Treaty of 1926, the Mosul problem was resolved to the disadvantage of Turkey, the Turkish claims to the region were based on solid grounds, in that the majority of this region, including Mosul and Kirkuk, consisted of Turks. The British were against the undertaking of any plebiscite fearing that the result of such a plebiscite would most probably yield pro-Turkish results. The 1925 Constitution implicitly recognized the Turkish entity in Iraq as one of the constitutive elements of the newly established Iraqi State. This can be inferred from the fact that this constitution was written in all spoken languages used in Iraq, including Turkish.¹⁵ However the case, it needs to be pointed out that there was no mention whatsoever of any single word associated with the Turkoman identity in the Constitution.

Preceding the 1925 Constitution is the landmark Draft Constitution of 1920, which states through its 14th article that Turks are one of the constitutive peoples making up the Iraqi nation, together with the Arabs and the Kurds.¹⁶ There is a consensus among Turkoman scholars that neither the original text of the 1925 Constitution nor the two revised versions (of late 1925 and 1943) include a single word in recognition of the Turkoman presence in Iraq. These sources point out that this constitution does not include any word directly related with either the Turkomans or Kurds in Iraq. The only positive thing about this constitution is its acceptance that all people residing in Iraq are equal before the law irrespective of their religion, ethnicity and language. Conceived in the ideal sense, the clauses stressing the equality of the Iraqi people might be regarded as the greatest achievement of the Turkomans. However, despite all statements of equality and privileges concerning their rights to use their own languages in education and interactions with state authorities, the Turkoman community did not see the proper implementation of this constitution by the Baghdad regime.

The 1925 Constitution allowed the Turkomans and other ethnic communities to use their own languages in their schools. Moreover, through this constitution all Iraqi nationals were put on an equal footing before the law. There was no discrimination against any particular ethnic group on the basis of majority or minority status. However, in the interim constitutions of 1958, 1968 and 1990 only Arabs and Kurds were mentioned as constitutive peoples of the Iraqi nation whereas the Turkomans were categorized under the clause of minorities.

An important milestone in the constitutional process, as far as the Turkomans are concerned, took place in 1932 with the declaration of the Iraqi government following the membership of Iraq in the League of Nations. In this historical document Turkomans were classified as one of the minorities living in Iraq with special rights to education and other aspects of life.¹⁷ It was with the 1932 declaration that the Iraqi government, for the first time, recognized the Turkomans as one element of the Iraqi nation, though as a minority. Through a declaration, read out by the Prime Minister Nouri Saaid in the wake of Iraq's entry into the League of Nations as an independent country, the Turkish language was accepted as one of the official languages in the Turkoman populated areas.

With the 1932 declaration of the Iraqi government and the revisions in the 1925 Constitution, the first seeds of discrimination against the Turkoman community were sowed. From then on, Iraqi Turkomans were regarded as a minority under special protection. Arabic was made the only official language. Turkish and Kurdish languages were allowed to become official languages only in areas of Turkish and Kurdish concentration. Though rights to use their own languages both in education and transactions with the state were protected by laws, this situation began to take on an 'up-down' character following the fall of Hikmet Suleiman from the government in 1938. Since then, the cultural and educational rights of Turkomans were seriously curbed by the successive regimes in Baghdad.

The hopes of the Turkoman community to have better treatment under the republication rule established by the coup of Free Officers in 1958 seem to have been bolstered by the announcement on the radio of the leaders of the coup that Iraq consisted of Arabs, Kurds and Turks. However, this announcement became void with the proclamation of the 1958 interim constitution, which only recognized Arabs and Kurds as constitutive peoples of Iraq.

An important turning point in the history of the Turkomans in contemporary times occurred on 24 January 1970 with the proclamation by the Ba'athist regime of cultural rights for the Turkomans. The backbone of these cultural rights consisted of the rights for the Turkomans to have their own schools and publications in their own language.

The following points can be made as to the general conditions of Turkomans during the contemporary Iraqi history. The first point that warrants attention is that the destiny of the Turkoman people in northern Iraq was held hostage to the relations between the Arabs and the Kurds. History has witnessed that whenever the Arabs were in open conflict with the Kurds and the Kurds challenged the Iraqi authority in their region in an effort to gain regional autonomy, the Arab rulers of the country showed sympathy towards the Turkomans. Many of the Turkoman and Turkish sources argue that the destiny of the Turkomans has been indexed to the Kurdish-Arab political struggle over Kurdish autonomy in northern Iraq. Whenever the relations between the regime in Baghdad and the Kurdish factions living in northern Iraq soured and became tense, the relative position of the Turkoman community improved, compared to the situations in which Arabs and Kurds had an understanding and better relationships.¹⁸ The conditions of the Turkoman people after the 1968 Ba'ath coup demonstrate this point well. Although the new regime declared in 1970 that new cultural rights would be given to the Turkoman, these were never implemented. After the Ba'ath regime signed an accord with the Kurdish fractions in the mid-1970s granting them autonomy, the condition of the Turkomans started to deteriorate again. Once the need to gain the support of the Turkomans against the Kurds withered away, the Arab establishment began to forget the promises they made to these people in 1970.

The second point concerns the character of the regime in Baghdad. Whenever pro-British/Western and non-pan-Arab nationalistic regimes reigned in Baghdad, the conditions of Kurdish and Turkoman ethnicity were better compared to the times of pan-Arab nationalism in the capital. The long period of monarchy attests to this point. When pro-British Prime Minister Nouri Saaid and King Faisal Ibn Hussain reigned in the capital, pressures on the Kurds and Turkomans were relatively less compared to pan-Arab Ba'ath rule since 1968.

The third point relates to the intentions and policies of the regimes in Baghdad to change the demographic structure of areas in northern Iraq where Kurds and Turkomans outnumber the Arabs by great margins. These policies started soon after the

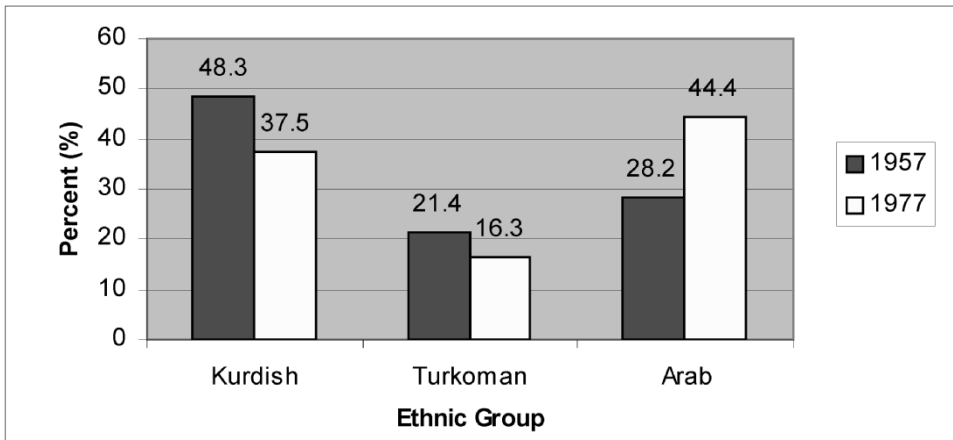


FIG. 3. Ethnic distribution in Kirkuk Governorate for 1957 and 1977. *Source:* Nouri Talabany, 'Iraq's Policy of Ethnic Cleansing: Onslaught to Change National/Demographic Characteristics of the Kirkuk Region', London, 1999, available online at: <http://www.puk.org/nouri_kirkuk.htm>.

proclamation of the Monarchy in 1921 and gained momentum and a new face with the coming of the Ba'ath regime to power. The gist of Arabization, or to put it differently, 'de-Turkification' policies, was based on the concurrent claim of the British and Arab authorities to Kurdify the Irbil area and to Arabize the Mosul area, where the Turkomans constituted the bulk of the population. In order to entice Arab families to come to the Turkoman areas with a view of settling there, the Baghdad regime paid large sums of money to them. Those Arabs who wanted to marry Turkoman girls were given attractive rewards. Those Turkomans who worked in the civil service were forced to move to other parts of Iraq. They would have lost their jobs if they refused.

In addition to these measures, the Ba'ath regime shrunk the size of the city of Kirkuk by nearly half and incorporated the Turkoman dominated provinces into Arab dominated cities with a view to decompose the Turkish characters of those regions.¹⁹ The establishment of the Iraqi Oil Company in 1925 provided the regime with the opportunity to bring in Arab people to the area from the other parts of Iraq. This trend has continued up until today.

The Ba'ath regime of 1968 started a policy of Arabization of northern Iraq at the expense of Turkomans and Kurdish people. Since then the proportion of the Arab people living in Northern Iraq, the traditional areas of Turkoman and Kurdish settlement, has increased dramatically. The figures given by Nouri Talabany and presented in Figure 3 confirm this point. The sharp increase in the Arab population from 28.2% in 1957 to 44.4% in 1977 explains the fall in the numbers of others.²⁰

Another reason for the flow of Turkomans from their traditional areas of settlement to other parts of Iraq, especially the capital Baghdad, stemmed from economic considerations. Since the Ba'ath regime made it difficult for the Turkomans to either run their own businesses or to get involved in other aspects of economic life in northern Iraq, it turned into a necessity for some of the Turkomans to flee these areas and to seek opportunities in other places.

Suphi Saatci claims that the Turkoman people in Kirkuk have been exposed to unbearable pressures coming from the Saddam regime.²¹ He points out that Turkoman people were allowed to stay in Kirkuk and get involved in economic life provided they

disclaimed their Turkoman identity, with which they registered in the 1957 census, and re-registered as Arabs. This was a well-intended policy of discrimination against the Turkoman people,²² of whom only 6,000 decided to remain in Turkey. In conformity with the general policy of 'Arabization', the Iraqi Turkomans were exposed to severe limitations of their fundamental human rights. Documented by Ziyat Köprülü in a very detailed brochure published in 1992,²³ it suffices here to say that consecutive Iraqi governments did not honour their commitments toward the Turkomans arising from the treaties they signed. The latest constitution of Iraq, dated July 1990, recognized only the Arabs and Kurds as constitutive parts of Iraq. There is no mention of the Turkomans in the related article of the aforementioned constitution, article 6, to that effect.

In overt violation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Turkomans were denied the rights to have peaceful assembly and association; to buy and sell property; to travel freely within the country and to leave the country in which they reside; to express thoughts and opinions freely; to be exempt from torture, inhuman and degrading treatment; to be equal before the law; to be exempt from arbitrary arrest, detention or exile; to be presumed innocent until proven guilty according to the law; to be exempt from arbitrary interference with their privacy, family, home or correspondence, or attacks upon their honour and reputation; to take part in the government of their country, directly or through freely chosen representatives; to have equal access to public service in their country; to form and join trade unions for the protection of their interests; to freely participate in the cultural life of the community; to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits. Turkomans have been denied all these basic human rights in the country of their citizenship.

The Process of Politicization

By the advent of the 1930s, having observed that passive resistance could not help them improve their status, a new trend began to take root among the Turkomans. Tracing back to the early 1980s and gaining momentum in the aftermath of the second Gulf War, the Turkoman community began to get 'politicized'. This process of politicization became conspicuous with the establishment of political organizations, of which the Iraqi National Turkman Front is the most important. The first Iraqi Turkoman organization was established in 1960 with the title of 'Turkman Brotherhood Association'. As a reaction to the execution of their community leaders in 1980, the Turkomans founded the 'Iraqi National Democratic Turkman Organization' in 1981. In 1988 the 'Iraqi National Turkman Party' was founded following the suspension of the activities of the previous Turkman Organization in 1985. In April 1995 the Iraqi National Turkman Front was established as an umbrella Turkman organization, uniting other Turkman parties and associations under its roof. So far, the Iraqi National Turkman Front has organized two international Turkman conferences, the first one in 1997 and the second in 2000.

Although the momentum of politicization is gaining support among the Turkomans, this should not mean that the Turkomans favour the dismemberment of Iraq and the establishment of a Turkoman state. On the contrary, according to Turan, the overwhelming majority of them would like to see the territorial integrity of Iraq continuing provided that their fundamental rights are granted and that their status is elevated to those of Arabs and Kurds. Their first priority continues to be the continuation of Iraq's territorial integrity and independence along with an improved status of all sup-

pressed people under Saddam's regime. A life in a democratic Iraq recognizing the fundamental political, economic, social and cultural rights of all Iraqi nationals would satisfy the Turkoman people more than anything else.²⁴ The sincere desire of the Turkomans to see the continuation of Iraq's territorial integrity and indivisibility can be seen in the peaceful way they have been trying to improve their well-being. Having never taken up arms against the regime in Baghdad, the Turkoman community in Iraq seems to be well aware of the fact that its well-being can be attained through a well-planned and managed democratization process in Iraq, which would free the Turkomans of the pressures coming from the Arabs in the south and the Kurds in the north.

In explaining the reasons why the Turkomans have never revolted against Baghdad and harboured any secessionist desire, Izzettin Kerkük refers, first, to the geographical location of the areas where Turkomans live, and second, to the level of education among Turkomans. Given that Turkoman places lie between the Kurdish and Arab areas and that the terrain is very flat, it becomes difficult for the Turkomans to continue a secessionist movement very long. Assuming that Turkomans took up arms against the regime in Baghdad, it would not be difficult for Baghdad to overrun the Turkoman places in a counter military attack. Another reason for the disinclination of the Turkomans to take up arms against Baghdad relates to their high level of education and culture of having a settled life that goes back centuries.²⁵

Having surveyed the contemporary history of the Turkomans within Iraq, it is now time to focus on another dimension of the Turkoman reality, namely, their connection with Turkey.

Turkey's Policy towards Northern Iraq

Since the end of the Gulf War in 1990, the major concern of the respective Turkish governments has revolved around the discussions in regard to the ongoing situation in Northern Iraq. The reason for that lies in the fact that, for the first time, the Kurdish factions located in the area were given the chance to rule themselves on their own, independent of Saddam, within a safe area, which came into being following the decision of the Allies to create a no-entry zone for Saddam's forces above the 36th parallel of Iraq. This enabled the Iraqi Kurds to muster their own administration, with a possibility that they might either constitute an independent Kurdish state or become one of the federal units in a post-Saddam Iraq.

Fearing that the presence of the safe area in Northern Iraq might contribute to the creation of an independent Kurdish entity in the region, the backbone of Turkish foreign policy towards the region has been formulated with a view to preventing any such possibility from occurring.²⁶ The possibility that such an independent Kurdish existence in the region might have a direct impact on Turkey's Kurdish population led the Turkish foreign policy makers to make it clear that Iraq's territorial integrity and indivisibility has been the essence of the Turkish approach towards the region. Turkish political and security elites implicitly assumed that the Kurds of Northern Iraq were enemies of Turkey who had been for decades yearning for nothing but the establishment of their own independent state. Rather than engaging the Kurds of the region in a cooperative manner, the Turkish authorities tried to balance the influence of their Kurdish enemies by levelling all their support to the Turkomans, assumed to be the only relatives of Turks', in the region.²⁷ This Turkish attitude towards the Kurds of Northern Iraq emanated from Turkey's predicament with its own Kurdish problem. Failing to successfully, or unnecessarily, incorporate the Kurdish people into the

modern fabric of Turkish society, the Turkish political and security elites tended to view Turkey's Kurds as separatists and therefore a main existential threat to the Kemalist notion of national security.²⁸

Turkey tried to upgrade relations with the government in Baghdad in the hope that only a strong central authority in the capital could inhibit the break-up of the country and the eventual emergence of an independent Kurdish entity in the north. Turkey gradually upgraded diplomatic representation in Baghdad to the ambassadorial level in 2000.²⁹ Turkish governments—guided by economic interests, among other things—supported an end to sanctions which cost Turkey as much as \$30 billion in the 1990s.³⁰ Given that Iraq was Turkey's fourth largest trading partner in 1990, with annual trade volume amounting to \$2.5 billion, Turkey's losses from the cessation of trade with Iraq have been immense. In the last few years, following the initiation of the oil for food agreement with Iraq in 1996, Turkish exports to Iraq turned upward, reaching over \$1 billion in 2001.³¹

Since the creation of Operation Provide Comfort in 1992, and then the replacement of it by Operation Northern Watch in 1997, Turkey has been alert to the possibility that such a situation in the region might pave the way for an autonomous, federal or independent Kurdish rule in Northern Iraq. This anxiety was kept low while the Turkish military had been engaged in its struggle with the separatist PKK forces in the region. Until 2000, when the Turkish military seemed to have dried up the power sources of the PKK in the region following the apprehension of the PKK's leader Abdullah Ocalan, Turkey appeared to have believed in the necessity that a strong authority should fill the power vacuum in the region and, thus, prevent the PKK from using this area for sheltering and training purposes. This Turkey tolerated the strengthening of KDP-PUK control in the region. Turkey has also acquiesced in the presence of the Operation Provide Control/Operation Northern Watch in the region, in return for tacit American support to Turkey's military incursions into the region, in her attempts at finishing off the PKK there.³²

However, this situation could not be carried on further with the apparent end of the struggle against the PKK. As the Turkish army proved relatively successful in eliminating the PKK threat in Northern Iraq, Turkey's position *vis-à-vis* Operation Northern Watch has gradually become problematic. In eliminating the PKK threat in northern Iraq it has become difficult for Turkey to send its troops to this region and to seek US acquiescence to its actions there, in return for its own acquiescence to the continuation of Operation Northern Watch. To the Turkish security elite, the continuation of this Western mission would now only help the PUK-KDP-led Kurdish groupings in Northern Iraq to lay the infrastructure of a future independent Kurdish state with relative ease. Due to the constraints imposed on Turkey by the complexities of her relations with the United States, the Turkish security elites could not succeed in getting rid of Operation Northern Watch which they thought would only serve Kurdish interests. As the strong American determination to keep Saddam under blockade continued, this mission proved somehow inevitable for the United States to live with. Therefore, the only way for Turkey to counter the increasing Kurdish influence in the region appeared to be strengthening the Turkomans as a counter-balancing agency. Since 1999 until now, the quality and quantity of Turkish support to the Turkomans have dramatically increased.³³

However, the advent of the Bush administration in 2001 and its strong determination to eliminate the Saddam regime in the aftermath of the ominous September 11 events have all curtailed Turkey's capability to mould Northern Iraq to its liking.

Turkomans in Post-Saddam Iraq

As of today, the political status of the Turkomans in Iraq has not improved to the degree to which the major Turkoman political groups were aspiring before Saddam's regime came to an end with the US-led Western military campaign. The Turkomans have not been fairly represented within the temporary Iraqi Governing Council in proportion to their numbers, and nor have they been given a better political status in northern Iraq, mainly Kirkuk, the main Turkomans city in the region. As of today, there is only one Turkoman member of the Governing Council, a woman who can hardly be seen as a full representative of the Iraqi Turkomans.

It seems that there are two main reasons contributing to this outcome. One is that Turkey did not appear to cooperate with the Americans before the American military campaign started in March 2003. The Turkish Parliament did not allow the government to conclude a deal with the US government envisaging the deployment of approximately 60,000 American troops on Turkish soil in return for huge amounts of American financial assistance to Turkey, and this radically curtailed Turkey's ability to help shape the political status of the post-Saddam Iraq, particularly Northern Iraq.

The crux of the issue between Turkey and the United States is that none of the parties fully trusts each other. Turkey is not sure of the real American interests in the region. It is not clear whether the Americans aim at bolstering the territorial integrity of Iraq or paving the way for an independent Kurdistan state in the north. On the other hand, the Americans doubt the reason why Turkey wants to maintain a significant number of Turkish troops in northern Iraq. Is the real Turkish goal to help eradicate the remaining segments of the outlawed PKK-KADEK terrorist organization, or to prevent the Kurds from founding their own independent or federal state in the region, particularly by incorporating the oil-rich Mosul and Kirkuk provinces into what they call Kurdistan? The fact that some American troops operating in Northern Iraq detained some Turkish military personnel in the early July of this year and treated them badly has further contributed to the bitter test of Turkish-American relations. Under these psychological conditions, it would be difficult, if not impossible, for Turkey to credibly have a say on the future political shape of Iraq, particularly as far as the status of the Turkoman community in Iraq is concerned.

It is of particular importance to mention here that the credibility of Turkey's 'red lines' policy in the region had been given a serious setback when Turkey could not deploy a significant number of troops in the region in defiance of the Americans, and since the Kurds have been trying to establish a strong military and political presence in Kirkuk and Mosul. As of today, the Kurds have increased their political influence in northern Iraq and Turkey has turned out to be less able to preserve the Turkomans' political standing *vis-à-vis* the Kurds and the Arabs.

When one adds to this the active Kurdish support to the American military efforts to unseat Saddam, the picture gets clearer. In the face of Kurdish cooperation and Turkish hesitation, the American leadership in the post-Saddam Iraq has appeared to bow to the Kurdish political demands that northern Iraq is mainly a Kurdish area and that the two most important cities in the region, namely, Kirkuk and Mosul, are heavily populated by Kurds, and therefore deserve Kurdish rule.

Conclusion

It seems that the fortunes of the Turkoman community in Iraq are tied to various factors. The first one concerns the degree of American commitment to true representative democracy in Iraq. If the US government of George W. Bush is serious in its commitment to bring real democracy to Iraq, then one might hope that all ethnic communities of Iraq will be equally represented within the emerging state institutions. For representative democracy to flourish in Iraq, all Iraqi ethnic communities should be allowed to fairly participate in this process. However, the developments on the ground indicate that the main American concern is, and will be, that the would-be Iraqi government must first and foremost be pro-American and help the US materialize its strategic interests in the Middle East.

The main risk that might curb the American willingness to let the forces of real democracy take root in Iraq is the possibility that in such a case anti-American and anti-Israeli circles may easily come to power in Baghdad, hence jeopardizing the whole American project of redesigning the region. If such a possibility proves to be higher in the months or years ahead, the Americans' sympathy towards the Kurds might increase given that these people have wholeheartedly supported the US during its military campaign and the Kurdish area has been the only part of today's Iraq that seems to have been in order. As a result of the relative tranquillity and the existence of a working political order in the Kurdish areas, thanks to the existence of the no-fly zone in the region during the first decade of the post-Cold War era, the Kurdish region seems to provide the Americans with an example to prove to the international community that their efforts in helping to bring about a new regime in Iraq were warranted. If the degree of dependence of the Americans on the Kurdish groups increases, the ability of the Turkomans to improve their political status is likely to decrease.

The second factor concerns Turkey's ability to play a determinative role in the future shape of Iraq. The more Turkey becomes able to mould the events in the region and the more leverage Turkey has with the United States, the more significant a role she will play in the region. It seems that without active Turkish support, neither the international community nor the regional actors will take the Turkomans into account seriously. For Turkey to have a credible say in the region, two conditions need to be met. The first is that the local people in Iraq, the most important of all being the Kurds, should subscribe to the Turkish claim that Turkey's main interest in the region is the preservation of Iraq's territorial integrity and, second, they should subscribe to the Turkish claim that any Turkish military deployment in Iraq, be it in the disguise of UN-led peacekeeping troops or US-led multinational troops, aims at nothing, and particularly not at the annexation of the oil-rich Kirkuk region to Turkey, but it aims at the replacement of Iraq's chaotic domestic order by the reinstatement of Iraq's sovereignty all over the country.

It is important to point out in this regard that the Turkish security and political elites have recently reached the conclusion that for Iraq to remain intact and democratically governed, the current American mission needs to be successfully completed. The more chaotic and anarchic Iraq's domestic political status remains, the more likely the Americans will fail in their attempts at bringing democracy and the more likely Iraq will go down the path of dismemberment with the Kurds having the lion's share. Put in this context, it gets quite understandable why the Turkish Parliament has recently taken a decision that theoretically allows the government to send Turkish troops to Iraq whenever it sees fit. However, it seems that for Turkey to send its troops to Iraq in an effort to help the American-led military efforts to yield success, the Americans need first

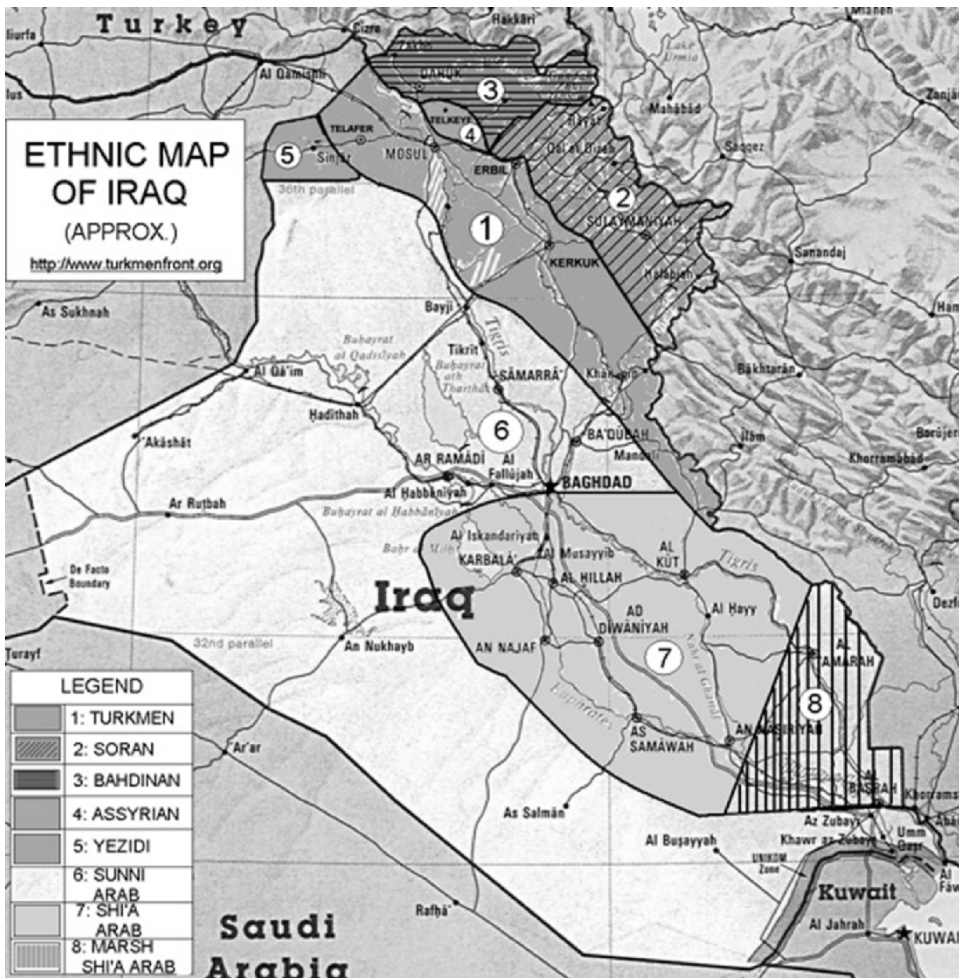


FIG. 4. Ethnic map of Iraq. *Source:* Iraqi Turkmen Front—The Official Site of Turkmen, available online at: <<http://www.turkmenfront.org/Image4/Etnik-Map.jpg>> (accessed 30 July 2004).

to convince the local Iraqi community, most importantly the Kurds, of the legitimacy and usefulness of such a Turkish move. Given that it is the Kurds, rather than Sunni or Shia Arabs, who vociferously argue against the deployment of Turkish troops in Iraq, even though such forces will not be stationed in predominantly Kurdish regions, one gets suspicious of real Kurdish goals in the region.

Within this context, the following factors may prove likely to increase Turkey's level of influence in the region. One is that Turkey should replace its current 'hostile exclusionary' policy towards the Kurds with a new policy of 'constructive engagement'. Rather than seeing the Kurds as 'enemies taken for granted' and channelling all Turkish support to the 'Turkoman friends', Turkey should start to view the Kurdish people in the region as the relatives of Turkey. The second is that Turkey's internalization of the main principles of liberal-plural democracy on the one hand and civic-constitutional citizenship on the other, alongside its march towards the European Union, will certainly

make the Turkish political-security elites more confident of themselves. This is the only way for these elites to get rid of their security syndromes.

The third one is related to the capability of the Turkoman community in Iraq to be able to speak and act with one voice. Unlike the pragmatic logic the various Kurdish groups have demonstrated through their efforts in mobilizing their combined power for their common cause, the Turkoman people in Northern Iraq are currently divided among each other. While some of them see cooperation with Turkey as the only alternative for their existence and prosperity in Iraq, at the expense of building cooperative and inclusionary relations with their Kurdish and Arab neighbours, others are more predisposed to sharing their future with the Kurds and the Arabs. The more fragmented the Turkomans stand, the less influential they will be in the future of Iraq.

NOTES

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