

The Ethnic Reality of the Kirkuk Area

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Researchers of constitutional law have recognized that the proper leadership of a society requires the lawmakers' acceptance of the hierarchy of social authority already in existence. As a matter of fact, a constitution in itself has always been described as the endurance of a society's traditional regulations, assuring the continuity of the social system, while emphasizing the importance of replacing tribal social authority by constitutional political authority.

The Iraqi leadership, while under British rule, made this transition and finalized a constitution on March 21, 1925. The constitution outlawed traditional tribal law and replaced it with a civilized rule, which is most evident in the constitution's sixth article. This article declares Iraq an indivisible state and all Iraqis equal regardless of race, religion, and language (1). Therefore, Iraqi citizens at the time did not discriminate against one another and aimed collectively to pursue the constitutional and legislative human rights denied them one way or the other by several previous government administrations.

The Turkomans and Kurds of Kirkuk have always acknowledged each other's existence in this strategic area of Iraq. Their disputes, however, arise from claims made by some Kurdish politicians and intellectuals that Turkomans do not constitute a majority of the inhabitants of Kirkuk. By making such a claim, Kurdish leaders hope Kirkuk will be considered a part of the Kurdish area.

It must first be emphasized that the natural rights of any individual or community are independent of political power or population size. This is in accordance with the International Declaration of Human Rights and the aforementioned Iraqi constitution--which was followed by a temporary constitution upholding the same principles. The Kurds in general have ignored this concept and so have some Turkoman intellectuals. Even as reported by Kurdish writers who greatly underestimate the size of the Turkoman population in Kirkuk, the size of the Turkoman community in this city exceeds that of some nations in the Arabian Gulf, Europe and Africa.

In attempting to determine the number of Iraqi Turkomans, one must account for the fact that successive governmental agencies in Iraq have repeatedly concealed their exact number and forged official reports, making the population of the Iraqi Turkomans appear much smaller than it is in reality. Even some Iraqi writers, while fully aware of the government's attempts, have knowingly accepted these false numbers as fact, making their reports and all reports based on these facts inaccurate. Sources of population information about the Iraqi people — especially of the Turkomans, who have been victims to some of the wicked of the Iraqi government's discriminatory actions — should therefore be intensely scrutinized before being accepted.

Again, the size of an ethnic group should not be considered fundamental to deserving rights. Both the Turkomans and Kurds have refused to be considered minorities in Iraq. The Iraqi State committed itself to considering all Iraqis equal before its legislation, irrespective of differences in language, ethnicity and religion.

Turkoman and Kurdish scholars ignored the Iraqi government's March 30, 1932 resolution declaring all non-Arab nationalities to be minorities subject to government protection. This controversial and conflict-inducing document was written by the League of Nations, which, in its March 19, 1932 resolution, required Iraq to pass the resolution in order to be accepted as a member nation. It is noteworthy that this declaration referred to the Turkomans as a majority in Kirkuk and Kifri (2).

Perhaps many people remember the January 1970 resolution of Iraq's Revolutionary Command Council, granting Turkoman citizens their cultural rights. With this legislation, the Turkomans were given the right to use the Turkish language for education in primary schools, and in newspapers and magazines. They were also given the right to begin educational directorates and foundations of Turkoman culture. Massive demonstrations followed to show the discontent of the Turkomans to the wording of this resolution. They insisted upon regarding the resolution as recognition of their rights. Suddenly, and soon after issuing it, the Iraqi government reneged on this legislation. Officials closed the Turkoman schools and arbitrarily handed the control of education and cultural affairs over to incompetent pro-government agents. The Turkomans protested the government's repressive actions by boycotting the educational system, and the government in turn responded with further harsh persecution and the imprisonment of a number of middle school and high school students involved in the protests. In this way in 1971 the government decidedly abused the Human Rights of the Turkomans in Kirkuk and other areas.

Many Iraqi citizens, including some Turkomans, were unaware of the Iraqi government's motives in passing this piece of legislation. The Iraqi government issued the legislation soon after signing the United Nations' resolution concerning the abandonment of all forms of discriminatory actions against its people. This international document was proposed December 21, 1965; gained the required number of member nation signatures January 4, 1969; and was signed by the Iraqi government February 18, 1969. In accordance with Iraq's Temporary Constitution, the House of Parliament was at the time replaced by The Revolutionary Command Council of Iraq, which endorsed the document January 14, 1970 with two reservations. The first reservation stated that the adoption of the resolution did not imply Iraq's recognition of Israel. The second reservation stated that Iraq would not be bound by the contents of Article 22 and therefore not subject to judgment by the International Tribunal.

The aforementioned legislation was passed within one week of authenticating the United Nations' resolution. To prove that it had complied with the resolution, the council also passed legislation granting cultural rights to Assyrians, and similarly to the Kurds in March 11, 1970. However, in less than one year, the Iraqi government went back on its commitments to the people and began once again to discriminate against the Turkomans by closing their schools and denying their cultural rights. The Iraqi government escaped the scrutiny of the United Nations by relying on the international community's unwillingness to interfere with other countries' internal affairs (3).

In attempting to determine the actual population size of Iraqi Turkomans, let us start with the numbers reported by the Iraqi government, which recognized a Turkoman population numbering 136,800 in its 1957 census (4). If we adopt these figures and subject them to the appropriate growth rate, we find that the Turkomans should number 505,000 at the beginning of 2001, but these numbers do not coincide with reality. There are, for example, at least 250,000 inhabitants in Telafar County alone, where—aside from a small number of people, the Turkomans comprise the entire population. In

addition, there are many Turkomans who live in tens of villages surrounding Mosul, Arbil, Altun Kopri, Taza Khurmato, Daquq, Tuz Kurmato, Kifiri, Kare Tepe, Khaneqeen, and Mendeli, in addition to the city of Kirkuk.

The Iraqi government adjusted its numbers in response to the successful 1958 revolution and, in 1959, admitted to a Turkoman population of 567,000 (5).

Writers who have tried to prove that Kirkuk is not primarily a Turkoman city have taken advantage of the initial inaccurate figures in the 1957 census report to misrepresent the actual size of the Turkoman population. These writers, and some historians, neither scrutinized the numbers themselves, nor did they use the corrected 1959 census figures.

The number of Iraqi Turkomans reported by the government in 1959 can be considered the absolute minimum size of the Turkoman population. In the absence of official correct figures, the current population size can be estimated by statistical techniques, which show that, by the end of the year 2000, there will be 1,904,226 Turkomans in Iraq.

This number is based on the rate of growth of the Iraqi population, which was approximately 3.2 percent in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s; 2.6 percent in the '80s; 2.4 percent in the early 1990s; and 2.3 percent as of 1993. These numbers were reported in the 1993 Unified Economic Report published by the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development, the Arab Monetary Fund, and the Arab Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (6).

Noting that population growth is inversely proportional to the socio-economic development of the inhabitants of a certain area, it can be assumed that the Turkomans, who generally received a better-than-average education, probably experienced a growth that was lower than the norm and so slightly less than 10 percent. The final estimate of the Turkoman population in Iraq is approximately 1,750,000.

Perhaps, the most accurate population size estimate can only be determined by a verifiable census performed with scientific means and procedures under a multicultural and fair democratic process, without governmental censorship or coercion. Under such circumstances, United Nations Observer States would add some credibility to such a census and, hopefully, this may materialize in the future.

The disputed ethnic reality of the Kirkuk area has led to some unfortunate ethnic conflict. Kurdish scholars and politicians have continually attempted to prove that a Turkoman majority has never inhabited the Kirkuk area. Their claims are based on books published by the Kurds themselves and on British publications written at the end of World War I during the negotiations between the British and the Turkish governments about the disputed city of Mosul.

Furthermore, we notice that most of the writers who have written on the Kirkuk area have systematically attempted to undermine the historical Turkoman presence in Kirkuk. The majority of the Kurdish authors have relied heavily on, and often referred to Shemseddin Sami's "Kamoos Al-Aalam" (*Dictionary of the World*) as a factual and important Ottoman encyclopedia of history and geography. This book states that three-fourths of Kirkuk's citizens were Kurds, while the remaining fourth was a combination of Turkomans, Arabs, and other ethnic groups. Citing this statement, Dr.

Nuri Talabani, in his book “*Kirkuk Zone and the Attempts of Changing its Ethnic Reality*”, claims to reference the most objective and reliable sources whether they were Turkish, Arabic or Western. Talabani states that Sami was a Turkish historian and traveler who held no allegiance to the Kurds, visited the Kirkuk zone over one century ago and wrote accurate information about Kirkuk (7).

We will deliberate on the ethnic reality of the Kirkuk region, but before entering into the details of the matter, we do need to shed some light on the so-called scholar and traveler “Shemseddin Sami”. As a matter of fact, he was not Turkish but an Albanian, born in Albania in 1266 A.H./1849 C.E. He completed his intermediate schooling in the Greek school of Yanya (Ioannina); and learned Turkish, Persian and Arabic from a private tutor. He later moved to Istanbul and started publishing a newspaper called “Sabah.” Sami then turned to writing stories and fiction.

During this time he wrote "The Love Story of Talat and Fitnat," the theme of which was obviously a critique of the Ottoman marriage traditions and morals. He also wrote "The Revolution of Kawa, the Blacksmith" a story about a blacksmith's struggle against the dictator Dhahhak. He was subsequently exiled to Tripoli, and upon his return to Istanbul, he started writing dictionaries and educational books (8).

In fact, Sami was not a traveler at all. He wrote about both Kirkuk and Baghdad without having visited either of the cities. The *Islamic Encyclopedia* refers specifically to his work as compiled with information taken from Bouillet's “*Dictionnaire d'Histoire et de Géographie Universel*” and other Arabic and Persian sources. In completing his book, Sami added some inaccurate reports and government documents (9) about Eastern and Ottoman cities that were not mentioned by Bouillet.

The accuracy of Sami's information is further questionable in that he also considered Baghdad a Turkish city; writing that Turkish was spoken mainly in Baghdad and Arabic was the second most common language (10).

Lately and despite the Kurds’ and Arabs’ attempts to distort the ethnicity of the Kirkuk area, most reliable sources refer to the ethnic population of the area as being purely Turkoman. We shall refer to some of these sources in investigating the true ethnic composition of Kirkuk. Moreover, we intend to avoid the many Turkish and Turkoman sources and instead rely on other sources.

The Iraqi government accepted the reality of a strong Turkoman presence in Kirkuk and other areas with the League of Nations’ declaration adopted by the House of Representatives May 5, 1932. The declaration was based on a draft by the League of Nations, which required Iraqi compliance with the declaration of January 28, 1932. The ninth article of the declaration refers to Kifri and Kirkuk counties, in essence predominately inhabited by Turkomans. The Turkish language was accordingly accepted beside Kurdish and Arabic as the official language in this region. No one had expected that the Iraqi government, which was vehemently opposed to the Turkish language at that time, would commit itself in this manner to a populace it viewed and treated as an insignificant minority (11).

Acutely, the subsequent Iraqi governments, realizing the ethnic fabric of the citizens, resorted to printing the first draft of the constitution prepared in 1921 in the Arabic, Kurdish, Turkish and English languages. The British commissioner issued a release in Kirkuk written only in Turkish after the Teyarien of Levi Army massacre on May 4, 1924. According to historian Abdulrazzak Al-Hasany,

the release was issued only in Turkish because it was the commonly spoken language in Kirkuk at the time (12).

The permanent Iraqi constitution, adopted in 1925, was printed in Turkish in addition to Arabic and Kurdish. A nation-wide law named "Local Law Number 74" was issued in 1931 and acknowledged the need for jurisdiction in Turkish in all regions inhabited by the Turkomans, mainly Kirkuk and Arbil. Schools that Turkoman children attended were allowed to educate them in their native language (i.e., Turkish). The only official newspaper printed in Kirkuk by the municipality was in Turkish along with Arabic until just a few years ago. Eventually, this natural right of the people was confiscated along with other similar human rights of the people of Iraq.

Scholar Sati' Al-Husary, in his book *My Memories in Iraq*, confirms this fact and also tells of his conflict with the British Captain N. Varel who acted as a consultant to the Ministry of Education. Al-Husary explains that when he rejected the post of Deputy Education Advisor, Varel suggested that he should go to Kirkuk and take the post of education director there because he spoke Turkish, and Kirkuk was a Turkish town. Later in the book, Varel repeats his suggestion to the Chief of the Royal Court, Rustam Haydar, saying that the people in Kirkuk speak Turkish (13).

Khayree Ameen Al-Omari, a prolific writer of recent Iraqi history, also mentions, in discussing the conflicts around the Iraqi crown, that Kirkuk is inhabited by a Turkoman majority (14).

Fareeq Mizhar Al-Firoun, one of the leaders of the 1920 uprising, writes that non-Arab minorities in Iraq are mainly in the north. He places the Kurds in Sulaimaniya and Arbil, the Turkomans in Kirkuk, and some Armenians, Assyrians and Nestorians in Mosul (15).

Abdulmajeed Hasseb Al-Qaysi, who, in his article published in "Al-Hayat" newspaper on June 1, 2000, describes himself as an historian, who has researched the political history of Iraq for more than 50 years. He writes in his book, *The Assyrians*, "Kirkuk is a Turkoman city inhabited by people of Turkish origin while the mighty Kurdish tribes live nearby" (16).

Sayyar al-Jameel, a professor of modern history, in his book entitled "*Leaders and Effendies, An Historical Structure of Modern Iraq*", asserts: "Whereas, the Turkoman population being spread over specific areas of Northern Iraq, is concentrated mainly in areas of Kirkuk at the east of and Talafar at the west of the river Tigris including all of their small and large villages. The origin of this ethnic populous relates to the Turkoman States which governed some parts of Iraq" (17)

In "The Political Situation and Political Parties in Kurdistan," Mudir Al-Mously refers to American journalist William Egilton, Jr.'s "The Republic of Mahabad - 1946 Kurdish Republic" in saying that Kirkuk city is the only area in the Kirkuk district that is subject to conflict. Kirkuk city is almost equally divided between the Turkoman and the Kurds, while the western and the northwestern areas, where the oil wells are, a mixture of Arab and Turkoman villages (18).

Stephen Hemsly Longrigg describes, in his well-known book *Four Centuries of Modern Iraq's History* the settlements of the Turkomans: "The remnant population of the old Turkoman migrations are scattered in Talafar and divided along a line of villages on the Mosul road from Deli Abbas to the Zab Al-Kabir River, while the majority inhabited Kirkuk." He adds, "The beautiful city of Kirkuk did not change much within the last two centuries, neither the Turkoman villages on the periphery of the Grand Road nor the numerous villages, whose inhabitants depended on the rain for irrigation".

Turkish influence penetrated these areas and was evident in places where Turkish blood, language and belief prevailed. According to Longrigg, Kirkuk's common language is Turkish (19). In another book, Longrigg describes the Turkomans as non-feudal farmers who inhabit Kirkuk, Altun Kopri, Erbil, Kifri, and the villages of Kara Tepe, Tuz Khurmato and Dakuk, along the road from Baghdad to Mosul. Longrigg also states that "a number of Turkomans live in Talafar, which lies half-way between Mosul and Sinjar. He describes the Turkoman people living harmoniously in Iraq after the settlement of the Mosul issue". Longrigg suggests that the unselfconscious Turkomans of Kirkuk, Kifri and their villages made no effort to emerge from a useful and honest obscurity; they created no problems since the Mosul settlement, and were represented in "Iraqi Officialdom" far beyond their numerical proportion. (20)

British author Sarah Graham Brown states that attempts to convert Kirkuk into an Arab region by forcing the Turkomans and Kurds out of their residential areas in Kirkuk and Mosul goes back even before the second Gulf War (21).

David McDowell, remarks that Mosul city has an Arabic majority, but all the towns and villages on the main road between Mosul and Baghdad are inhabited by Turkish-speaking Turkomans (22).

Vladimir Minorsky in his article "The Disputed Zone" referred to the Mosul case and very clearly states that the Turkomans constitute the majority in cities that line the historical main road, or the "Silk Road." This road runs through Southern Mosul and other major cities including Talafar, Erbil, Altun Kopri, Kirkuk, Taza Khurmato, Dakuk, Tuz Khurmato, Kifri and Kara Tepe (23).

In the memoirs of Nadhem Al-Tabakchaly; the Commander of the Second Division in Kirkuk he mentions a report he made to the General Military Commissioner, referring to the ethnic dispute in Kirkuk. Al-Tabakchaly described the dispute as a conflict between the Turkoman majority of the city and the Kurds (24).

Al-Tabakchaly refers in another report to the resolutions of the first Teachers' Conference, held between February 2-5 1959, confirming that the Kurds have never been a majority in Kirkuk but only in the minority (25).

A document of the British Ministry of Foreign Affairs registered under the number 371/134255 on 18 July 1958, the British Embassy in Baghdad refers to Kirkuk as a city which generally Turkish is spoken. (26)

A second document for the Ministry registered under the number 371/134212 contains the confidential telegram no. 1286 dated 12.August.1958 which refers to the Turkish majority of Kirkuk zone. (27)

In his third volume on Iraq, Hanna Batato writes: "Kirkuk, a petroleum center, lies 180 miles (280 km) to the north of Baghdad. It was an absolutely Turkish city until the past few years. The Kurds gradually moved in, changing this reality for political reasons or economic reasons from the nearby neighboring villages of this city, especially after the development of the oil industry. In 1959 Kurds comprised one third of the population of Kirkuk, while the number of the Turkoman decreased to a little more than half. Other Turkish cities like Arbil faced similar attempts to change to Kurdish atmosphere. The Kurdization of Arbil was completed in peace. However the people in Kirkuk were resistant. They maintained strong cultural relations with Turkey and kept their ethnic identity (28).

The *Encyclopedia Britannica* describes Kirkuk as a primarily Turkoman city with some Arabic and Kurdish-speaking populations (29). The most recently edited versions refer to the ethnicity of Kirkuk as primarily Turkoman (30).

So far, we have discussed facts about the ethnic composition and history of the Kirkuk area, which are known by everyone who has lived in this region, in spite of the attempts by certain people to distort the truth for vindictive, political, or economic reasons. The Turkomans of Iraq defend, and so properly demand, a unified Iraq, where everyone is equal, and where opportunities and justice are independent of one's ethnic backgrounds.

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