

SOITM presentation in the Lecture under the title

“The **north of Iraq**
Possible Turkish **Invasion**:
Is it threatening to the **stability** in Iraq?”

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I would like to thank the Association for the study of the Middle East and Islam for organizing such an important conference.

The north of Iraq can be divided into two regions, the eastern region which is under Kurdish administration and the western region which is under the control of Iraqi government. The two regions have almost the same area and both regions have a mixed population. In the west the Sunni Arabs are the majority, the Kurds are in the east, a significant number of Turkmen, Assyrians, Shabaks and Yazidies are found in both regions. Because the Kurdish regional authorities and the PKK, which are established in the east, are directly involved in the present problems with Turkey, I shall concentrate on the north eastern Kurdish region of Iraq. I shall discuss in details the **stability** and possible Turkish **intervention**.

Stability means an improved sustained situation, of which the major indicators are the **security**, **political** and **economic stability**.

The administration systems are considered the skeleton of a country. It has comprehensive influence on the stability. The well developed security and military administration stabilize the security. Democratic measures and rule of Law stabilize the policy. Economic developments are influenced obviously by the qualified administrative units.

Dissolution of the whole administrative systems and sectarianism are considered the two major causes of the instability in occupied Iraq. The huge numbers of the substituted appointees after occupation are inexperienced and even disqualified, this has disturbed the services in governmental and municipality offices and paralyzed the economy. The sectarianism policy of the occupation brought the political destabilization which influenced negatively both the security and economic stabilities. The insurgency which is an outcome of the political instability hugely distorts the security and economical stability.

Kurdish region

Several factors contributed in improving the administration systems of the Kurdish region which resulted in the relatively improvement of the stability there, such as:

- √ Formation of the 'safe haven' in 1991 gave a golden opportunity to establish the administration units.
- √ The involvement of the international community with the developments in the Kurdish region since 1991 brought an important financial and political support.
- √ The relatively homogenous population composition of the region
- √ The non-Kurdish communities in Kurdish regions are unarmed.
- √ Cooperation of the Kurdish authorities with occupation.

Despite these important advantages, the security is fragile in Kurdish region and the political and economic stabilities are insufficient.

Security

Security in the Kurdish region can be discussed under two topics, the intra-regional and extra-regional threats. The intra-regional threats are simple and almost under control, they are the extremist Kurdish Religious insurgents - who killed Fransu Hariri in 2001 - and those who are invading from other Iraqi regions. The legal Islamic groups are integrated into the political system, but they are still demanding the adoption of Shari'a law. The Kurdish region has also been infiltrated by foreign intelligence services, which trace their opponents. Al-Qaida maintains a presence in the region and there is some evidence that it is increasingly targeting the region.¹

Kurdish unity can be attributed to the security in the region, but this unity between the two major Kurdish parties, KDP and KUP, has been established only recently, in fact the agreement to establish a shared government has been realized only about two years ago. Furthermore, the long history of animosity and fierce battles between these two parties has cost thousands of lives and the difficulties in maintaining their cooperation remain.

Two important extra-regional threats in the Kurdish regions are: the PKK and the troubled situation in the vast border region, which the Kurdish authorities frequently threaten to occupy if needed. These regions are Mosul, Kerkuk and the lands situated on the long border from Tuz Khurmatu to Badra.

Mosul is a city of more than one million predominantly Arab inhabitants. They are known for their nationalist conservative nature and for their keenness to enroll in the former Iraqi army. The insurgency dominates the city. Almost all the Kurdish families which are estimated to be thousands ran out of the city after the occupation. On 1st December 2007, fifteen members of the Iraqi Parliament from Mosul published a press release which:²

- √ Accused the Kurdish Democratic Party of :-
 - Dominating the administration after the January election when the Arabs almost completely boycotted the election.
 - Dominating the national guards and security system
 - Robbing the city while the authority of central government is completely absent.
- √ The Mosul parliamentarians requested:-
 - Termination of the unfair applications of article 140
 - Taking the national guards and Kurdish security agents out of the city
 - Returning the prisoners from Kurdish prisons.
 - Canceling the oil agreements which were made by the KDP in Mosul province
 - Termination of the Kurdification processes in the education directorate and system
- √ Abandoning the hoisting of Kurdish flags in the province.

The other border region which threatens the stability in the Kurdish region is **Kerkuk**, which the Kurdish authorities threatened to occupy if the referendum is not realized. Kerkuk region is already unstable, the bombings in the city increase proportionally with Kurdish authorities declarations to annex the city. The assassinations, kidnappings and intimidations displaced tens of thousands of Turkmen and Arabs. Both the Arabs and the Turkmen are determinedly opposing the Kurdish attempts.

A great number of the **small and large cities** on the long border between Kurdish region and other Iraqi provinces from Tuz Khurmatu to Badra are inhabited by mixed Arab, Turkmen and Kurdish populations. As in Mosul, the Kurds are dominating the administration and fierce quarrels are expected if article 140 is implemented.

Political stability

If the ultimate goal for Iraq is to be governed by a democratic system, then the spread of democratic culture should be the major purpose of the international powers dealing with the

region. Accordingly, the adoption of the rule of law and Human Rights principles will no doubt help in bringing political stability. Unfortunately, the occupation have adopted a completely contradictory policy in Iraq, they have consciously introduced sectarian and ethnic sentiments into the Iraqi community. The Kurdish authorities were supported to strengthen the Kurdish regional administration, suppress the Turkmen, Chealdo-Assyrians, Shabaks and other smaller communities. They were also allowed to dominate some important Sunni Arab regions as Mosul city. With the Shiite dominating government and National Guard, which constituted mainly Kurdish Pashmarga and Shiite Badr Brigade, the Americans destroyed the major Sunni cities in Anbar, Falluja, Telafer and a large number of districts in the west of Iraq. This can be considered the major reason of the sectarian violence in Iraq.

To study the political stability in the Kurdish region, the following headings should be discussed:

- √ Democratization, rule of law and respect of the Human Rights
- √ Minority rights
- √ Integration with the Iraqi government

Election in the Kurdish region

Under the pressure of the protecting countries of the 'Safe Haven', the two rival Kurdish parties organized the only election in 1992. The instituted parliament remained non-functioning and a brutal civil war took place between the two Kurdish parties in 1994 killing and displacing thousands of Kurds. The Kurdish region remained partitioned between the two parties, each with its own administration and government.

Party Structure and the Administration in the Kurdish region

The administration systems in the Kurdish parties are built on the tribal approach. The members are appointed, no regular congresses are held and no elections are done. The first degree relatives, sons, brothers, nephews, uncles hold the top posts in the parties and government and they possess the key resources of economy. Other relatives hold key positions in ministries or executive offices. They control telecommunications, construction and trade. The opposition is almost absent. The constitution of the Kurdish region has been recently approved and the Iraqi constitution is not respected.

The legal system is designed according to undemocratic principles. Besides the regular courts, there are another four militia, political and tribal courts. The sentences of regular courts can be annulled by other courts. Corruption is endemic, detention without trial and torture is widely and systematically applied.³ the prisoners are not given any written papers on the accusations. Most of the civil student unions and society organizations are administered by politicians or government staffs. The media avoid publication of criticizing or protesting articles to escape the punishments. As in the period preceding the occupation of Iraq, public properties are confiscated and the Barzani and Talabani families made priceless real estate.⁴

Despite the hegemony of the administration, several massive demonstrations have been organized in different cities in the Kurdish region. The demonstrators were attacked, killed, injured and arrested.

Ms. Judit Neurink, a Dutch journalist visited north of Iraq several times and each time she remained there several weeks to organize courses for the Kurdish journalists. She says in her article "Another copy of Saddam Regime" that the Kurdish authorities are similar to Saddam regime and that there is not much difference in the administration of the Kurdish region between pre and post occupation. She mentions that the Political parties control all the components of the society, only the party members are appointed in the government, the government has one million staffs, those who work for government receives other privileges too, and the power of the parties is observable everywhere.³

Ms. Neurink argues that the social modernization is very sluggish and that traditionalism is still preferred to the democratic culture in the region. The education not modernized.

The rights of not-ruling (Minority) groups

The Iraqi minorities constitutes not less than 15% of the total Iraqi population, the largest part is living in the north. The vulnerability of the not-ruling groups is well documented and their rights protected by United Nations. Violation of minority Human Rights in sphere of the war and incited sectarian and ethnic sentiments is unavoidable. The Turkmen, Chealdo-Assyrians and Shabaks are all suffering under the Kurdish administration.

The **Turkmen** are suppressed in Erbil and severely marginalized in Kerkuk. The strategic district of Telafer, which is almost exclusively inhabited by Turkmen, has been included in the map of the Kurdish regional government. The attempts to control Telafer district faced great resistance, this exposed the district to continuous attacks from the beginning of the occupation, on two occasions the city was exposed to destructive attacks by airplanes and tanks.⁵ The population of Kerkuk province was 870.000 on the day of the occupation, now it is 1.300.000. About 100.000 Arabs left the region after the occupation. This means that the population of Kerkuk increased more than half a million. According to Human Rights Watch, the United States special committee for refugees and pre-occupation Kurdish statistics, the number of Kurds and Turkmen, which were expelled from Kerkuk province by Saddam regime, was 120.000 – 140.000. The administration in the Turkmen regions have been extensively Kurdified. The general elections and referendum were done under this Kurdified administration. A great number of manipulations occurred during the elections.

The **Chealdo-Assyrians** complain about the relentless Kurdish campaign to undermine Assyrian Rights. They talk about abuses, arrests, tortures, intimidations, assassinations and expropriation of Assyrian villages in the Kurdish regions.⁶ Ms. Shamiran Mako, an Iraqi Assyrian from Mosul, in a statement to the 11th session of the working Group on Minorities mentions that the treatment of Assyrians under Kurdish control illustrates a pattern of systematic human rights violations, they have been disenfranchised in relation to their Kurdish neighbors, political crimes such as assassinations of Assyrian political leaders hinders appropriate representation in areas under Kurdish control.⁷

The **Shabak** parliamentarian and the chairman of the Iraqi minority council Mr. Hunain al-Qaddo says that the Shabaks of the Nineveh Plains are under pressure of the Kurdish political parties seeking to "Kurdify" them in a drive to assert wider control over the ethnically divided north. They face oblivion as a people, targeted politically by Kurdish authorities with claims on their land.⁸

Integration with the Iraqi government

The Kurds entered the Iraqi political arena after occupation much stronger than the other Iraqi political groups. They were adequately experienced, strongly cooperating with the occupation authorities and they had enlarged international support. On the other side the largest Iraqi Shiite groups were inexperienced and had strong relations with Iran. Accordingly, the Kurds obtained a greater role in the Iraqi politics and administration. They hold strong positions in the Iraqi government, military system and they have complete control on the Kurdish region. The strong Kurdish authorities could influence the drafting of the Iraqi constitution. Federal power was almost equaled to that of central government. Kerkuk issues were imposed by the Kurdish actors in the constitution. The Kurdish actors developed inflexible attitude. They threaten to occupy Kerkuk if the referendum is not realized, they violate the oil law, prohibit the hoist of the Iraqi flag in the Kurdish regions, they keep Pashmarga militia as an army, they restrict the entrance of the Iraqis into the Kurdish region, they interfere with the administration of the non-Kurdish regions where they dominated management and frequently threatened to withdraw from the government. As a consequence of the aggressiveness and rigidity of Kurdish policy, no Iraqi political group could show opposition until few months ago. Firstly, the minister of oil started to criticize the Kurdish administration and few other Iraqi politicians supported him. **For the first** time all the political groups in the Iraqi Parliament started to object the Kurdish party's impositions in the Kerkuk issues, even the Shiite Coalition group asked for independent status for Kerkuk. Lastly, the fifteen Mosul parliamentarians strongly condemned the Kurdish hegemony in Mosul.

The disagreements between the Iraqi government and Kurdish regional authorities further increased when the Iraqi envoys to Turkey to discuss the PKK problem included only the Kurds from the Iraqi government and not from the regional Kurdish authorities. This resulted in rejection of all the treaties which have been made between Turkey and the Iraqi government by the Kurdish regional authorities, which further destabilized the region and increased the possibility of Turkish intervention into northern Iraq

Economical stability in the Kurdish region

Much is said about the economical flourishing in the Kurdish region of Iraq, the Kurdish authorities and the pro-Kurdish western politicians waging campaigns about the 'flourishing democracy and economy' in the Kurdish regions.

Unfortunately, the agricultural and industrial infrastructures in the Kurdish region are almost completely absent.³ Almost all the farmers left toward the cities during the civil war in the Kurdish region. No attempts are made to encourage them to return and cultivate their lands. No agricultural projects are instituted. Today, almost all the agricultural products are imported from the neighboring countries, even tomatoes and potatoes. The supermarkets of the Kurdish region are almost completely provided with exported goods. The construction fabrics and the materials imported from outside the Kurdish region. Electricity is imported and given only for few hours to the houses. No agricultural and industrial products are exported from the Kurdish region. The Kurdish region lives on the taxes, the income of frontier border and the 17% sum from the Iraqi budget, from which the other Iraqi not-ruling communities are unfairly deprived.

The appearance of first Cholera cases in Kerkuk, which was well known for its cleanness, where almost completely administered by the Kurds particularly the Kerkuk directorate of Health points to the failure of the Kurdish administration.

Many campaigns have been waged in the west exaggerating Kurdish sufferings in Iraq; this has lead to the development of inflated unhealthy sympathy toward the Kurdish case. Today, the Iraqi Kurds export their inflated sufferings to the west to obtain different important types of supports.

Similar campaigns are organized on the fragile stability in the Kurdish region. This strengthens the above mentioned campaigns which collect further moral, political and financial support from the west to the Kurdish region. The results are:

- √ The suppression of the other communities by the Kurds is not noticed by the west.
- √ Increase of the abstention and rigid attitude of the Kurdish actors toward the Iraqi government and neighboring countries, which threaten the unity of Iraq and peace in the region.
- √ Encourage the Kurdish actors to claim more lands.

American Policy in the North

The Kurdish oriented American policy was developed on 3 bases:

- √ The Turkish refusal to participate in the occupation had seriously angered the already agitated American administration,
- √ The full co-operation of the Kurdish authorities with the occupation and
- √ The close relation of Shiites groups with Iran.

This Resulted also in:-

- √ Marginalization of the Turkish role in Iraq
- √ Ignoring the threats toward Turkey
- √ Suppression of the Iraqi Turkmen
- √ Not taking any precautions against the PKK

- √ Indirectly providing PKK with arms
- √ The anti-Turkey American policy has been clearly seen during the attack on the Turkish military office in Suleymaniya by the Americans and the putting of sacks on the heads of the Turkish officers.

Reviving of the PKK

It is well known that the PKK used violent methods to realize its goals and that it did not differentiate between the victims. This made the PKK to be categorized under the terrorist groups.

Several factors lead to revive the PKK, which was almost disappeared after the capture of its leader, particularly in the Kurdish region in the north of Iraq; to be used against Iran if needed and against Iraq if things went wrong and penalize Turkey for not holding the responsibilities as strategic partner. After the occupation the PKK armed with American weapons, started to set up camps, organized armed trainings, opened offices in the cities, hoisted PKK flags on the buildings, and PKK members moved freely in the region. All this could not have been realized without the approval of the Americans and of the Kurdish regional authorities.

Turkey

It seems that Turkey seriously wishes to join the European Union; this means that Turkey has accepted to adopt the two major policies of the Union: the liberal economy and Human rights principles. No doubt Turkey is a democratic country and almost the only in the Islamic world. Currently, Turkey approved important legislations on the rights of minorities, the minority rights still need to be improved.

Turkish intervention

Turkey's patient policy against PKK's attacks in the last several years has brought the country important international support. The seriousness of Turkey to attack the PKK in the Iraqi Kurdish region made the USA abandon its delaying policy about taking true measures to prevent PKK to attack Turkey and **not** removing it from the north of Iraq. Another reason for keeping the PKK in that region is to prevent the Religious Insurgents and less possibly Iran from establishing presence, in the area.

It should be known that the regions which the PKK holds in north of Iraq as headquarters are high mountainous regions, which are very less populated and which far from the areas administered by local Kurdish authorities. This means that there is no possibility of interfering with Kurdish administration.

Several billions Dollars worth of economic relations between Turkey and Iraq, particularly, with the Kurdish region is another factor which prevents Turkey to easily worsen present relation with Kurdish authorities. The large and poor population in the east of Turkey depends greatly on the trade with Iraq. The worsening economy in that region will certainly increase PKK activities.

One of the very clear principles of Turkish policies toward Iraq is to avoid being drawn into the Iraqi chaos, which they describe as a quagmire. They feel that this will influence badly their relations with Arabic countries and cost the lives of Turkish soldiers and bring about huge financial costs.

For the time being it becomes very clear that the intervention is going not to happen mainly because the Turkish government is convinced that PKK attacks will be stopped and that large infantry militarily intervention in the region is not suitable in winter.

Note. SOITM believes that the Turkish possible interference against PKK in Iraq is **intervention** and not **invasion**, therefore, the term 'intervention' is used instead of 'invasion' in the SOITM presentation.

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