

Dr .Murat SOMER for Gulan:

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1- How do you see the future relations between Turkey & Iraq as being an expert?

Historically, Turkey and Iraq always had good relations. As neighbors they have common interests and need each other. The people of Iraq are ethnic and cultural relatives of Turkish citizens. Turkey has many resources and experience to contribute to the economic and political development of Iraq. They can cooperate on energy, environment, security, and education. Stability and prosperity in Northern Iraq is good for Turkey and would help the development of Turkey's Southeast. So I hope that they will have excellent relations in the future and Turkey can contribute to the emergence of a democratic and prosperous Iraq.

Four factors will affect these relations. First, the democratic stability and territorial integrity of Iraq is critical, along with the emergence of a functioning Iraqi state. I hope that Iraqi people can agree on multicultural political institutions that don't exclude or disadvantage any particular group. I hope that they can choose democracy and long-term prosperity rather than short-term gain for their own ethnic or religious group. Kirkuk's status has emerged as a critical question in this context. Second, the developments in the region and in the world are important. The critical factors will be American policies in the region vis-à-vis Iran and Iraq, the ability of regional states to cooperate for common interests, and the rise of ethnic, racist and religious nationalism in the world. Third, the domestic politics in Turkey is important. The upcoming presidential and parliamentary elections undermine the government's ability to take bold steps on domestic and foreign policy fronts. There is also a worrisome abuse of nationalist feelings by some groups, and some rise in the rhetoric of ethnic nationalism. The PKK presence in Northern Iraq feeds defensive Turkish nationalism and undermines more cooperation with Iraqi Kurds. A defensive version of nationalism also undermines further democratization with respect to the Kurdish question within Turkey, which would facilitate cooperation with Iraqi Kurds. Fourth, external support for Turkey's democracy is important. The stronger Turkey's democracy and relations with the EU and the US, the more Turkey can play a constructive role in Iraq's political and economic development.

2- The Iraqi Kurdistan is the only safe area in Iraq, and many turkey companies are investing in there, and it's the only gate for turkey trade in Iraq, but as we know there are some conflicts between these two sides, on Kerkuk & PKK issues, despite this issues turkey doesn't agree to negotiate it with Kurdish leaders, while Mr. Talabany the president of Iraq and head of PUK party, and Mr. Masoud Barzany the president of Kurdistan region and head of PDK, so if turkey refuses to negotiate this issue with krudish leaders, so how he will be able to solve this conflict?

Democracy is about talk rather than the use of force. I think the Turkish government should talk to the legitimate leaders of Iraq, which of course include Mr. Talabani and Mr. Barzani. I

think talk and negotiation should never stop. Turkey was talking to Mr. Talabani and Mr. Barzani and helping them on many fronts even during the 1990s. Now they are not only Kurdish leaders, i.e. heads of the PUK and PDK, but also representatives of the state of Iraq. So they should be treated with even more respect. At the same time, there seems to be a lack of sufficient trust between Iraqi Kurdish leaders and Turkey. There are certain minimum requirements that states can legitimately expect from each other for peace and cooperation. Respect for each other's security and territorial integrity are two of these requirements. Functioning states are supposed to have a monopoly of legitimate violence within their own borders, while also having an obligation to be lawful and respectful of human rights. No state can be expected to tolerate that an armed organization is allowed to operate and attack its security forces from within another state. Thus, from the Turkish state's point of view, Iraqi Kurds, and the US as the occupying force in Iraq, have an obligation to eliminate the PKK threat. The PKK presence in Syria was the reason Turkey credibly threatened to use armed force against this country in 1998. This eventually led to the PKK leader Öcalan's expulsion from Syria and eventual capture. One may also ask what the PKK is trying to achieve politically today. Since 1999, Turkey has come a long way in talking about the Kurdish issue and the democratic recognition of Kurdish culture and identity. There is need for much more improvement, alongside better government and rule of law in the country as a whole. The PKK violence undermines democratization by feeding authoritarian Turkish nationalism and organized groups that are skeptical of liberal policies. In the long run, Turkish Kurds have much to gain from dissociating themselves from violence and terrorism and from representing their interests democratically. Despite all its restrictions, Turkish democracy allows room for Kurds to pursue their interests peacefully. Now that the Kurdish identity is no longer a taboo, Turkish Kurds may have more to learn from Martin Luther King than from the PKK.

3- We count Turkey as great European neighbor, while turkey by it self is a regional super power, so turkey must play a positive role in protecting the democracy experience in Iraqi Kurdistan region, so if turkey plays that positive role this is going to effect the southern turkey people to get to peace, so do you think that turkey will choose to play this positive role?

I am not sure what you mean with this positive role. Turkey is respectful of Iraq's territorial integrity and currently plays an active role in its economic rebuilding. Turkey can do much more. But deeper relations depend on the establishment of more trust and Turkey's domestic politics. Two factors are critical. First, Turkey is a democracy and governments have to win competitive elections to remain in power. Second, Turkey also has highly influential military and security establishments with well-developed instincts for state security. Both the Turkish public and the state establishment are highly concerned about Kurdish nationalism in general and the PKK threat in particular. What are the reasons for these concerns? The PKK conflict caused more than 35,000 deaths since 1984. Turkey is also the heir to the Ottoman Empire, which lost most of its territory through the mobilization of ethnic-national minorities. Given these historical experiences, major portions of the Turkish public are suspicious of pan-Kurdish nationalism in the region. The PKK presence in Iraq and Kurdish ambitions over Kirkuk feed these suspicions and prevent the government from being more trusting toward the Iraqi Kurds. These suspicions can be dispelled in the long run by mutually beneficial relations.

Currently, the Turkish public is divided between two views. One view favors a more liberal nationalism, more democracy and rule of law, and more rights for ethnic-cultural diversity, and integration with the EU. Another, more defensively nationalist group opposes all of these with the fear that a more liberal democracy and the EU polices have been undermining the

country's sovereignty and unity. The Turkish public is torn between these two views. It has to choose either less national autonomy but more freedom and prosperity, or more national autonomy but less democracy and prosperity. The upcoming elections will be an important turning point, and as I said more support from the EU would help.

Similarly, of course it is up to Iraqi Kurds themselves, but it seems to me that Iraqi Kurds are facing two choices. I think that they have come a long way in the last decade. They may try to achieve more now, despite the opposition of their neighbors. Alternatively, they may try to protect what they have and build trust with their neighbors, by focusing on goals for which there is support from neighbors, such as economic development.

4- Turkey keeps many troops on his border between Iraq, and its about to enter Iraq in blaming the presence of PKK, so do you think that International Community & EU will accept it?

Border security is one of the major responsibilities that nation states have toward neighboring states. The PKK poses a real threat to Turkey's security. Turkey, Iraq, and the US have been trying to resolve this problem through dialogue. However, if this fails and Turkey uses military force, the US and the EU may find little justification to object because they recognize the PKK as a terrorist organization.

One should also note that Turkey has pursued a peaceful foreign policy and has not resorted to military expansionism since the foundation of the republic in 1923. In 1926 it gave up its claims on Mosul (and Kirkuk), in favor of a unified Iraq under the British mandate, in order to prevent a new war with Britain. During the first Gulf War, President Özal favored the military takeover of Northern Iraq but the military opposed it. Finally, in 2003 the Turkish Parliament did not approve the war in Iraq although this could have allowed the Turkish military to control major portions of Northern Iraq. In all of these cases, the choice was made in favor of peace although the country had enough power to use military force. There are many people in Turkey who push for a military "solution." But I don't think that Turkey would seek a military adventure in Iraq as long as there is sufficient cooperation from Iraq and the US over the issues of the PKK and Kirkuk.

5- How do you see the future relation between Turkey and Iraqi Kurdistan region?

Historically, Turks and Kurds prospered whenever they joined forces by overcoming narrow ethnic nationalism and focusing on broader goals and ideals. Today, these broader goals could be regional security, economic development and democracy. To move toward that goal, more Turks and Kurds should try to empathize with each other and try to understand each other's position. I think it is perfectly understandable that Iraqi Kurds want more freedom and prosperity for their future, especially given how much they have suffered in the past. It is also appreciable that they are trying to be realistic while pursuing these goals, although some times the Kurdish leaders' rhetoric suggests otherwise (at least the way it is reported in Turkey). I don't see why Turkey should not be supportive of these goals. Prosperity and the development of democratic institutions in Northern Iraq, which also protect the interests of the Turkmen and other ethnic-cultural groups, are good for Turkey. While respectful of religion and tradition, the majority of Turks and Kurds seem to share the ideal of secular and pro-West modernization.

Why does Turkey oppose Iraqi Kurdish statehood and why does the status of Kirkuk emerge as a major question? First, it is unlikely that Iraq can be divided into separate states peacefully like the former Czechoslovakia. A full-blown civil war may destabilize the whole region. Second, if Iraqi Kurds seek to achieve independence and to control Kirkuk, this creates a security dilemma for Turkey, even if Iraqi Kurds had perfectly good intentions. An Iraqi Kurdish state would be a landlocked state. Hence sooner or later it may seek to expand and to support secessionism among Turkish Kurds. I think this is not necessarily true. But this concern can only be eliminated in the long run, with the establishment of good relations, dialogue, and more economic interdependence between Turkey and Iraq over years.

As for Kirkuk, I am worried that a referendum is not an appropriate way to resolve this question because it will inevitably create winning and losing groups. This may further destabilize Iraq, for both cultural-historical and economic reasons. Culturally, the reality is that multiple groups including the Turkmen and Kurds have legitimate claims to the historical ownership of this city. In the short run it is attractive for each single group to try to control the city but in the long run the most stable and peaceful strategy seems to be to run Kirkuk with a multiethnic government under a special status. In this way no group would feel to be the loser. Economically, all the Iraqi people may legitimately claim that they are entitled to benefiting from Kirkuk's natural resources. In the short run controlling these resources may create economic and political benefits for whichever group succeeds in doing so. However, in the long run, it may turn out to be a nemesis rather than a blessing. This is the path many failed and ethnically divided states in sub-Saharan Africa tried to follow. Oil has been a disadvantage for the establishment of democratic regimes in many developing countries. It makes states dependent on the easy oil revenues and careless about their people's wellbeing. For a democratic and prosperous Iraq, the difficult but prudent strategy seems to be to make sure that economic resources are used for the benefit of all Iraqis. By contrast, under a special, multiethnic status, Kirkuk can contribute to the stability of Iraq. It would give an incentive for all groups to respect Iraq's integrity and the authority of the federal government, in order to be able to benefit from its resources.

For good relations between Turkey and Iraqi Kurds in the long run, we need leadership and foresight on both sides. The real goal should be to build economic and political institutions which would give rise to new generations who would be more preoccupied with regional cooperation over issues such as education, global warming, and human rights, rather than security dilemmas. Democratic nationalism should be seen as a means to achieve this goal. Many of the mutual fears and misperceptions may disappear in the long run. Until then it may be better to focus on goals for which there is regional support, such as mutually beneficial economic development and stability, rather than passionate ethnic-national goals.