

## Assessment of Turkey's Foreign Policy in Iraq

By Asos Hoshman – 29 April 2021

This report assesses Turkey's foreign policy in Iraq, especially in relation to the current political developments. It mainly considers the period during which the Justice and Development Party's (AKP) held power in Turkey and its state policy abroad, especially in the Kurdish regions in the north of Iraq. A particular focus will be paid to the recent diplomatic relations and intelligence exchanges between Turkey and Iraq, for which the recent visit of Mustafa Kadhimi to Turkey is thought to be crucial. The report also pays specific attention to Turkey's further attacks on Iraqi territory justified through the presence of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in Mount Qandil. The role of the KRG, especially the KDP and Barzani family, will be closely analysed.

This report argues that Turkey's ambition is beyond attacking the PKK, and rather is to take control over the north of Iraq as part of its long-term ambition, expanding its territorial control over the areas previously ruled by the Ottoman Empire. According to Turkey's belief and the Misak-ı Milli, the National Pact or National Oath of 1920, the Mosul region of Iraq belongs to the country of Greater Turkey. The Frontier Treaty of 1926 between the UK, Iraq and Turkey to an extent finalised the borders drawn between Iraq and Turkey. However, Turkey's recent attacks on the area suggest the renewal of the quarrel. This is evidenced by its raids and attacks on the Kurdish regions, especially in the north of Iraq. Specifically, in 2014 Turkey intensified its assistance to the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria when the organisation attacked Mosul and subsequently the Shengal region and the north of Syria, under the authority of Kurds. Further circumstantial evidence can be considered through its ambition to expand its territory to the north of Syria from 2018 to date, Libya, the Mediterranean Sea and Armenian territory, let alone its movements on the African continent, Afghanistan, Pakistan, etc. Turkey has supported and received support from its associated groups, mercenaries, and radical organisations including ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra. Its attack on Afrin with the support of 16 mercenary organisations in the beginning of 2018, later attacks on the rest of Kurdish controlled areas in Syria in 2019, as well as sending jihadists to assist Azerbaijan in fighting against Armenia over Nagorno-Karabakh – Artsakh are also of note here.

### Background

With the onset of the Arab Spring, Turkey under the leadership of Erdogan embraced a new approach in both its internal and foreign policy. The events in the Arab world paved the way for Erdogan's Muslim Brotherhood to play roles in the post-Ottoman Order in the Middle East, especially in the regions immediately bordering Turkey in Iraq and Syria.<sup>1</sup> While in Iraq the Barzani and Nujayfi families strengthened their relations with Erdogan, following the uprisings in Syria in 2011, Erdogan assisted the opposition groups who were close to Muslim Brotherhood under Turkish instruction within and outside of Free Syria Army (FSA) after 2011. However, Ankara's underestimation of Assad's government and Iran's commitment in the region dragged Turkey into further conflict, especially after the rise of Kurds close to the PKK's ideology who developed the Democratic Autonomous Administration in the north of Syria, on Turkey's border, and who refused to cooperate with Turkey. Hence, for Erdogan, the

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://foreignpolicy.com/2016/10/23/turkeys-religious-nationalists-want-ottoman-borders-iraq-erdogan/>

biggest threats in Syria were the PKK's close ally, the PYD, and its two military wings, the People's Protection Units (YPG) and Women's Protection Units (YPJ), who controlled the Democratic Autonomous Administration. Erdogan's main aim in assisting the jihadists, including ISIS, was primarily to weaken the Kurds before overthrowing Assad. Subsequently, after the establishment of ISIS in April 2013, Erdogan assisted ISIS in intensifying their attacks on Kurds in Democratic Autonomous Administration. While ISIS managed to take control over most parts of the north of Syria by June 2014, by August 2014 they had taken control over Mosul and Shengal, which provided further opportunities for ISIS to open a new offensive line against Democratic Autonomous Administration, especially after KDP withdrew its forces in Shengal and abandoned the Ezidis on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of August 2014. By then ISIS had encircled Democratic Autonomous Administration. At the same time, Turkey was accused of allowing ISIS to launch attacks on Kobane from inside Turkey. Turkey was also accused of assisting ISIS through buying their oil, providing medical treatment to their wounded members such as Abu Muslim al Turkmani, who was Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi's deputy head, and who supervised the attack on Shengal and the genocide of the Ezidis. Simultaneously, in the beginning 2015, Erdogan ordered attacks on the Kurds in Turkey who criticised Turkey's foreign policy. Later Erdogan was found guilty of war crimes for these attacks by the People's Permanent Tribunal in Paris on March 15, 2018.<sup>2</sup>

Since then, Turkey has expanded its territorial control over the Kurdish areas in Iraq and Syria through both hard and soft power. The rest of this paper will focus on Turkey's methods for expanding its influence and control over the KRG and other Kurdish regions in the north of Iraq.

## **Turkey's Increasing Influence in the North of Iraq**

### **Turkey's Influence Through Economics**

It is an undeniable fact that Turkey intensified its cross-border attacks against PKK in the 1990s and assisted the KDP against the PUK during their civil war after 1994. Further facts suggest that, since 2002, the relations between Turkey and the KRG have dramatically improved. The investment law in 2006 was enacted and the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR) of the KRG was established in the same year. The KRG was assured that 17% of the Iraqi central budget would, as a function of their percentage of the total population, be transferred to them by Baghdad. Between 2002 and December 2014, 189 exploration and appraisal wells were drilled. By 2012, the commercial success rate was approximately 55–60 per cent, exceptional by global standards. It is noteworthy that, even before the US led attack in 2003, the Turkish oil company Genel Enerji arrived in the KRG and signed a contract for the Taq Taq field in July 2002. By 2011, it was joined by the Swiss group Addax after it was taken over by the former CEO of BP and changed its name to Genel Energy.

Furthermore, the formal recognition of the KRG in the Iraqi Constitution in 2005 was another factor for the expansion of the Turkish private sector and other foreign companies in the region. Despite a traditional state socialist system, the KRG adopted a neoliberal agenda regarding the ease of doing business in the region. In the new Iraq, opportunities arose for the Kurds to expand their political, economic, cultural, diplomatic and military relationship regionally and internationally. As the immediate neighbour of the KRG, for the first time, a Turkish government delegation visited Erbil in 2008 to formalise a strategic dialogue with the KRG.

---

<sup>2</sup> [http://permanentpeopletribunal.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/PPT\\_JUDGMENT\\_TURKEY\\_KURDS - EN\\_FINAL\\_24MAY2018.pdf](http://permanentpeopletribunal.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/PPT_JUDGMENT_TURKEY_KURDS_EN_FINAL_24MAY2018.pdf)

This was followed by a higher diplomatic visit by Ahmet Davutoğlu, then Turkey's Foreign Minister, to Erbil in October 2009. The opening of a consulate general in Erbil soon followed in 2010. In June 2009, both Barzani and Talabani began exporting over 90,000 barrels of crude oil per day from the Kurdistan region to Turkey through Iraq's old established pipeline, hence Iraq also shared some revenues. In the same year, due to a lack of transparency and corruption, the Gorran Party was created by Nawshirwan Mustafa, who had served as Jalal Talabani's deputy. In 2011, the then-Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan became the first Turkish premier to ever visit the Iraqi Kurdish-held region. This was followed by a regular exchange of visits between Erdogan's government and Barzani's family. The political relationship between the AK party under Erdogan's authority and the KRG under Barzani's rule grew dramatically. By 2013, Barzani was officially invited to visit Turkey to assist Erdogan in attracting votes from Kurds in Turkey. Similarly, Iran also became another partner in oil imports and goods exports to the KRG. It politically deployed a divide and rule policy by turning the PUK against the KDP and the KRG against Baghdad. By 2012, a dispute between the KRG and the central government began over the legality of oil contracts, especially between the two ruling families (mainly the Barzanis) and the foreign companies. In the same year, Mr Jalal Talabani suffered a stroke and fell unconscious until he died in October 2017. It must be noted that the KRG, in addition to oil and gas deals, became one of Turkey's largest trade partners, to the extent that by 2013, the trade between the parties reached 13 billion dollars. Eighty per cent of goods sold in the KRG were made in Turkey. The number of Turkish companies active in the region increased from a handful to thousands in a few years.

While Turkish companies had unlimited rights, Kurdish investors abroad had to share their business with Kurdish politicians, at a 51% to 49% ratio, to be able to work in the country. The KRG became a hub for Turkish companies to ship their products to the rest of Iraq and some of the gulf countries. Also, Turkish companies without any restrictions carried out nearly all the construction works. The Turkish companies were prioritised in receiving commercial tenders. It has been claimed that the Turkish Consul knew of the commercial tenders before everyone else, especially the concerning construction sites, and they were asked to be given to Turkish companies. For example, the Erbil airport was made by a Turkish company and it was opened in a public ceremony at which Erdogan attended. Despite the discovery of many faults in its design and structure by a Korean inspecting engineer, as well as the bad quality materials used in its construction, the tender for constructing Duhok airport was offered to the same Turkish company. The border was opened for Turkish citizens visa-free for 15 days and Turkish companies had the right to extend their visas for longer if they wished to do so. This allowed Turkey's temporary skilled workers to travel to the KRG on a regular basis and the long-period workers to apply for visa extensions without hurdles. Hence the import and export between the two sides reached billions of dollars. These commercial trades mainly benefited Turkish citizens, the Barzani family and marginally the people in the KRG.

The dispute between the KRG and Iraq was further intensified when the KRG started sending oil, via its newly constructed pipelines, directly to Turkey in 2013. The Iraqi government began taking legal actions against the KRG. In response, the Minister of Natural Resources, Ashti Hawrami, tried to disguise the name of the buyers, especially the companies owned by Israel, such as Ashkelon, as Iraq and Israel had no diplomatic relations. Some other oil shipments were sent via Malta. This is finally led to an open argument between Maliki and Barzani to the extent that the KRG's budget from Baghdad was halted. The irony was that, in addition to the open trade, secret oil trade continued between Turkey and the KRG throughout the period during ISIS controlled the Mosul region between 2014-2016.

In 2011, the Powertrans company was established in Turkey. A law was enacted to prevent Turkey's oil companies from trading oil with the KRG except for Powertrans. According to an email published by Wikileaks the company was in the name of Berat Albayrak, son-in-law of the president of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. The company was later, in 2014 and 2015, accused of buying oil from ISIS. Although attempts were made to disguise the real ownership of the company, according to World Policy analysis, the equities of the company have been registered in Istanbul, and travelled to Singapore and to the Virgin Islands. It is further revealed that the leaked emails demonstrate the connection between the Turkish Energy minister and Erdogan's son-in-law. There are approximately 30 emails that Albayrak exchanged with Betül Yılmaz - officially the human resources manager of Calik Holding. In almost every conversation between them, the subject is clearly Powertrans, while Yılmaz is constantly asking for his approval in any of the company's staff changes, mentioning, for example, future hirings and wages. The email exchange between Albayrak and Yılmaz lasted for three years, from 2012 until 2015. In another email, dated 9<sup>th</sup> August 2015, Albayrak talks with Ekrem Keleş, who used to work for Calik Holding and is now a member of the staff of Powertrans. The two men discussed the marketing strategy of the company in Northern Iraq. It is claimed that by now there are many contracts between the company and the Barzani family. Some of these contracts have been in effect for as long as fifty years without the details being made public.

In addition to Turkey, Russia established formal relations with the KRG by opening a consulate in the capital city Erbil in 2005. Similarly, the United States, the United Kingdom and Iran had become the main political and economic players in the region.<sup>3</sup> It is important to note that, according to research,<sup>4</sup> the KRG hold reserves of some 45 billion barrels of oil (10th biggest in the world) and is estimated to have between 2.8 to 5.7 trillion cubic metres of natural gas (roughly as much as Algeria). Since 2010, Russia has become involved in oil and gas exploration to the extent that by 2012, the UK, US and Turkey expressed their concern about the rise of Russia's influence in the region. In 2012, following Barzani's visit to Russia and his meeting with Vladimir Putin, the partially state-owned Gazprom Russian oil company signed a contract for exploration and oil production in the KRG. This was followed by multiple other contracts between the KRG and Russia when a state-owned energy company, Rosneft, concluded its contracts in 2017. It is believed that Rosneft invested around 4 billion dollars in oil and gas deals in the KRG.

However, the rise of the KRG slowed down soon after ISIS attacked the city of Mosul. By 2016, the KRG was suffering from severe a political and economic crisis, especially when Iraq halted and cut the 14% KRG budget. Simultaneously, following 2014, oil prices suddenly slumped. In June, the Prime Minister of the KRG, Nechirvan Barzani, participated in the St Petersburg Economic Forum where he met Russian President Vladimir Putin and his Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov to discuss potential oil and gas trade. The year after, on 21<sup>st</sup> February, Rosneft joined Gazprom as a major investor in the Kurdish region by signing a deal worth \$2.1bn for pre-paid oil for 2017-2019. It became the first major oil company to pre-finance KRG oil. However, nearly half of the money went to pay the dispute settlement between the KRG and the Emirati Dana Gas Crescent Petroleum before another hearing took place in the London Court of International Arbitration. Also, the KRG paid an additional \$1bn to the Emirati company and restructured the remaining \$1.24bn it owed.

---

<sup>3</sup> See <https://www.oxfordenergy.org/wpcms/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Kurdish-Oil-and-Regional-Politics-WPM-63.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <https://thelawreviews.co.uk/title/the-oil-and-gas-law-review/iraqi-kurdistan>

Foreseeing its consequences, the KRG under the leadership of Barzani still held an independence referendum on 25<sup>th</sup> September 2017. Only a week before that, on 18<sup>th</sup> September, the KRG announced, it had signed a contract with the Russian company to develop a gas pipeline project with the capacity to export 30 billion cubic metres a year via Turkey to Europe. Soon after on the 16<sup>th</sup> October 2017, three days after Hashd al-Shahbi or Popular Mobilisation Forces (PMF) stormed into Kirkuk, the KRG announced that it had sold its 60 percent share in the company that runs the region's oil pipeline to Rosneft as part of a major pipeline project worth \$1.8bn. However, the KRG's reliance on Russia's support for its referendum proved to be not as effective as expected. The KRG media were claiming that Russia is mediating between Erbil and Baghdad, but thus far Russia had limited political sway in Iraq, and this was proven when the Iranian-backed PMF captured the city of Kirkuk without the US's objection.

### **Turkey's Influence through Turkmen**

After the US led attack on Iraq in 2003, Turkey began further tightening its relations with the Turkmen in the north of Iraq. Turkey began providing diplomatic, political, and financial support to the Turkmen, especially the Sunni Turkmen. By now Turkey has also provided military training and equipped them with weapons. Turkey receives the Turkmen representatives on regular basis. For example, in August 2020, Turkey's Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu received Aydin Maruf, regional minister for ethnic groups of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in northern Iraq and also an executive board member of the Iraqi Turkmen Front. The agenda for their meeting included the developments in Iraq, bilateral relations with the KRG, and the Turkmen's current situation. Cavusoglu reiterated Ankara's support for the Turkmen via his Twitter account, posting: "[We] will always stand by our Turkmen brothers & sisters." Maruf was appointed to the new KRG Cabinet at Ankara's explicit request, as a sign of Prime Minister Masrour Barzani's positive approach toward Turkey.

This is part of Ankara's special attention to bolstering its ties with the Turkmen in Central Asia who live mainly in Turkmenistan, northern Iran and Afghanistan, as well as in Middle Eastern countries such as Lebanon, Iraq and Syria, where they reside along with large Arab and Kurdish populations. By now, the Turkmen have become one of the main pillars of Turkey's Iraq policy. Ankara, which has long presented itself as the guardian of Turkmen minorities beyond its own frontiers, is trying to place its kin at the centre of its influence on politics in Iraq. One of the main ways Turkey achieves this influence is by playing "big brother" to ethnic or religious groups that it perceives as its kin.

However, Turkey's intervention and its relations with Turkmen have led to tensions between the groups. Turkey uses them, rather, for its own agenda and not the promotion of a coexistence policy in the region. The Turkmen have been accused of trying to increase Turkey's foreign policy against Iraq's national unity and give further justifications for Turkey's influence in Iraq, especially in Kirkuk and Erbil. The Turkmen have even established armed units directly related to the prohibited organisation 'Grey Wolves' which has been recently banned in France. This was well reflected when the MHP party leader, see picture below which shows the hand sign of the Grey Wolves, publicly announced the right of Turkey to interfere in Kirkuk because the Turkmen flag was lowered.<sup>5</sup> Also, recently the head of the Turkmen Front in Kirkuk,

---

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/lowering-turkmen-flags-in-kirkuk-gives-turkey-right-to-intervene-mhp-leader-155912>

Arshad Salhi, who is the head of the Human Rights Committee in the Iraqi Parliament, showed his allegiance to the Turkish ‘Grey Wolves’ organisation as a response to Turkey’s support.



The same concern also relates to Syria. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan considers the Syrian Turkmen to be natural allies. Even though the Turkmen didn’t experience the harsh oppression inflicted on other ethnic groups in the initial stages of the Syrian conflict, they joined the opposition ranks aiming to topple the regime. An armed Turkmen group who were supported by Ankara — known as the Syrian Turkmen Brigades — although not very efficient, was established in the fight against the regime.

Turkey has further expanded its influence in the Kurdish region through other members of Turkmen groups such as Muna Qahuachy who is the deputy of the KRG parliament in Erbil, and Aiden Maarouf, the Minister for Components Affairs in the KRG and an Iraq-Turkmen Front Executive Committee Member. The latter was paid a special visit by Turkey’s Minister of Defence Hulusi Akar and Yash Guler, Turkey’s Chief of Staff, on 19/01/2021.

Despite Turkey’s support, the Turkmen have been unable to establish themselves as a strong political force. However, although they are relatively weak in power, their presence serves as a significant tool for Turkey to exert its influence in both Iraq and Syria.

### **Turkey’s Influence Through the Nujaifi Family**

Turkey's involvement in Iraq has further been intensified, since 2003, through the Nujaiifi family, the ruling authority in Mosul, mainly made up of Sunni groups. The relations between Erdogan and the Nujaiifi family developed to an extent that they acted as one front against the leading authority in Iraq. With the help of Turkey, in the beginning of the turmoil in Syria in 2011, the relations between Barzani and Nujaiifi were also developed. This was simultaneous with the withdrawal of US forces in Iraq in 2011, the deterioration of Maliki's relations with the US administration and Masoud Barzani, the then KRG's president. Also, the relations between Maliki, who led a Shiite government in Iraq, and the representatives of the Sunni community in the government of Iraq deteriorated. For example, in 2011, Tariq Hashmi, a leading Iraqi Sunni politician who later became the vice president of Iraq, was accused by Maliki of terrorist activities. Soon after, al-Hashmi fled to Barzani's area of territorial control in the KRG in the North of Iraq and then to Turkey.<sup>6</sup> The Central Criminal Court of Iraq convicted him and sentenced him in absentia to death, on 9<sup>th</sup> September 2012. Since then, he has been living in Ankara. He has been assured by Turkey that he will not be extradited.<sup>7</sup> Barzani was accused by Maliki of assisting Turkey in interfering in Iraqi affairs.<sup>8</sup>

One theory that can explain Turkey's special relations with the al-Nujaiifi family is that Nujaiifi's ancestor was closely aligned with the Ottoman rulers of Mosul. Therefore, they are still regarded<sup>9</sup> as Turkey's closest ally in Iraq alongside the Barzani family. The al-Nujaiifi are Sunnis and actively supported Saddam's government in the past. As a family, the Nujaiifis, in revenge against the Shiite's rule in Mosul and Nuri al-Maliki's government in Iraq, were accused of contributing to the rapid advance of ISIS and fall of Mosul on 11/06/2014. They were also accused of promoting Turkey's agenda. Turkey, through its military bases in the KRG – mainly in the KDP controlled area – engaged in training and arming Hashd al-Watani, a predominately Arab Sunni militia led by the Nujaiifis. Atheel al-Nujaiifi, the former governor of Mosul (Ninevah province), mobilised and created the Hashd militia who worked closely with the KDP forces. Nujaiifi, after the fall of Mosul, lived in Erbil, the KRG capital and a KDP dominated area. Later the Shiite dominated government in Iraq charged him with corruption and alleged complicity with ISIS. He was also accused by the Iraqi government of spying and espionage for collaborating with Turkey during the fall of Mosul. He was sentenced to prison in absentia. It is important to note that Nujaiifi had always been against the Kurdish question in Iraq, however with the rise of ISIS in Iraq the two allies of Turkey became close allies themselves. Some Middle East experts described the new Nujaiifi-Turkey-Barzani alliance as a “marriage of convenience.”<sup>10</sup>

### **Turkey's Influence Through ISIS**

Turkey was accused of assisting ISIS throughout ISIS' attack on Mosul, the subsequent fall of Shengal and the genocide against the Yazidis. Turkey bought the oil ISIS stole in Mosul for 3 percent of the market value. Each barrel was sold to Turkey for 10-15 dollars. As a result, ISIS managed to earn more than 50 million dollars a month. Turkey was also accused of providing

---

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.opendemocracy.net/bill-park/turkey-kurds-iraq-syria-new-regional-dynamic>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/iraq/9533574/Iraqi-vice-president-al-Hashemi-rejects-murder-conviction.html>

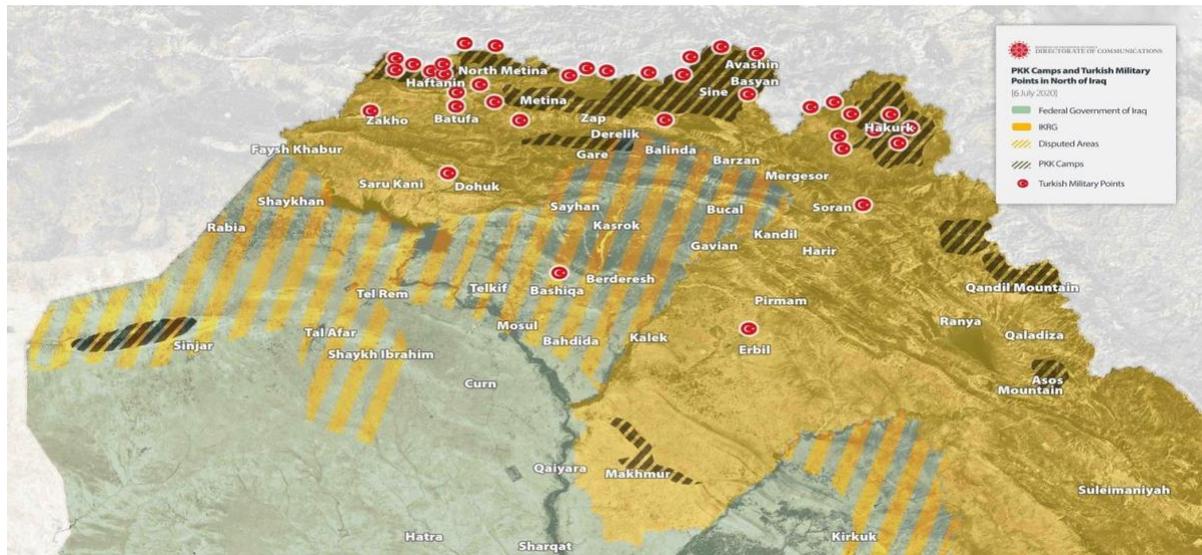
<sup>8</sup> [https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/pubs/PolicyFocus122\\_CagaptayEvans.pdf](https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/pubs/PolicyFocus122_CagaptayEvans.pdf) ; <https://www.opendemocracy.net/bill-park/turkey-kurds-iraq-syria-new-regional-dynamic>

<sup>9</sup> WikiLeaks 'Ninewa: Bio of Likely Incoming Ninewa Governor Atheel Al-Nujaiifi' (15 March 2009) <[https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09BAGHDAD680\\_a.html](https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09BAGHDAD680_a.html)> accessed 17 November 2017

<sup>10</sup> Fache, Wilson 'What is Turkish army really doing in Iraq?' Al-Monitor (6 September 2016) <<https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/09/turkey-iraq-what-turkish-army-doing-in-mosul.html>> accessed 23 October 2016

ISIS with access to Turkey and acting as a backyard of the organisation. It has been claimed that had Turkey stopped assistance to ISIS, the fall of Mosul and the massacre in the Shengal region would have been impossible. It is believed that Turkey's assistance directly led to the rise of ISIS. The support offered included oil trade, facilitating foreign fighters, procuring weapons, providing humanitarian aid and letting ISIS access Turkey freely. Researchers such as Ahmet Yayla, David Phillips and Nafeez Ahmed have extensively documented the relations between Turkey and ISIS.

At the time of the genocide Turkey possessed 20 military bases and multiple MIT offices in the north of Iraq and the prominent Sunni community in the region were in contact with Turkey. Currently the number of Turkey's known military bases and intelligence offices in the north of Iraq are around 60 as can be seen in the map below.

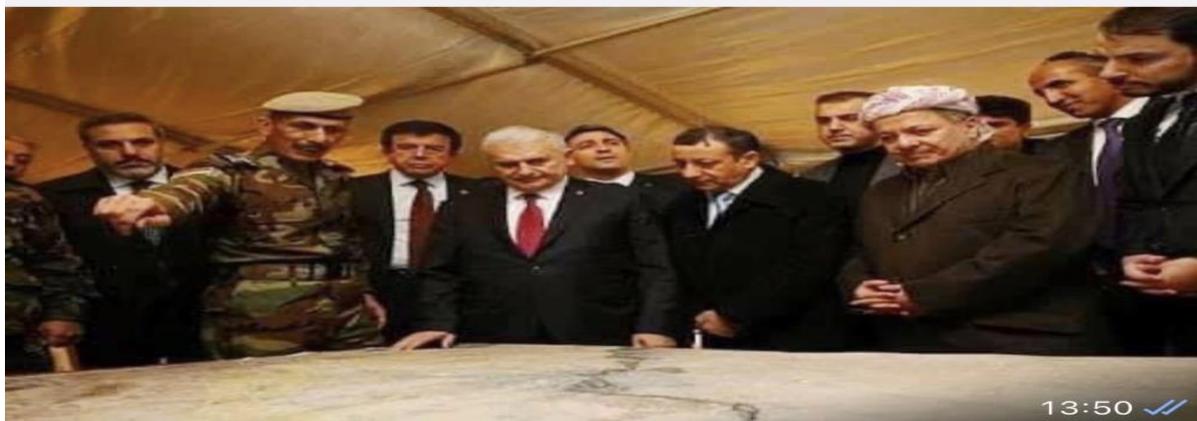


Map of Turkey's military bases in Northern Iraq. The number might have increased since the publishing of this map in 2020.

### Turkey Influence through Establishing Kurdish Mercenaries

In addition to the KDP, Turkey has also strengthened its influence in the north of Iraq and Shengal region via a newly established army unit called "Peshmerga Roj", especially since the beginning of the revolution in Syria. The "Peshmerga Roj" is an armed group formed in 2012 at the request of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) whose chairman is Massoud Barzani, then president of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Currently they number around 8000 military personnel. The Roj forces are mainly comprised of Kurds in Syria who are opposing the Kurdish authority in Syria. They are joined by Turkmen and Kurds close to Turkey. The members of this group received military training from Turkish intelligence experts in camps in the KRG. They are named "Peshmerga Roj" or "Lashkare Roj". Turkey tries to use the force in Iraq and against the Kurdish authority in Syria by putting them under the umbrella of the so-called Kurdish National Council in Syria (ENKS), part of the so-called Syrian National Coalition based in Istanbul, Turkey. The ENKS acts in the interest of Turkey against the Democratic Autonomous Administration. The Peshmerga Ministry in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq claims that they are not affiliated with it, but sources suggest that they are directed and instructed by the Zervani forces (private forces) of the Peshmerga Ministry affiliated to the KDP. It is claimed that their salary is paid by the KRG while the KRG Peshmerga have not

received their regular monthly salary for the last 7 years. In 2020 only six salaries were paid to the KRG Peshmerga.



The then Prime Minister of Turkey visits the KRG and pays a special visit to the Roj Peshmerga. On November 22, 2014, Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu visited the so-called "Peshmerga Roj" training camp in Başür Kurdistan, and was received by Turkish intelligence officers and Peshmerga officers in Kurdistan.

Davutoglu oversaw the graduation of the first batch at "Diana" camp in Kurdistan and the video was published by the Turkish HABERLER.COM website and DHA News Agency. This group is supervised and directly linked to the Turkish Prime Minister's Office, who at that time was Ahmet Davutoglu. All this confirms the associations.

The Roj forces have been used against the forces called the Shengal Resistance Units (YBŞ), who defended the Ezidis when ISIS attacked Sinjar in August 2014. The latter are the regrouped Ezidis who defended the Shengal region on the first day ISIS attacked their community on 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2014. They received training from the PKK and expanded their organisation through training Ezidi males and females.

### **Turkey's Direct and Indirect Attack on Kurds in Iraq**

Of note here, after the ISIS occupation of Shengal, the PKK and its affiliates in Syria fought alongside other forces in Iraq with the assistance of the US and retook Shengal from ISIS. Since then, Turkey used the KDP to confront the presence of the PKK in Sinjar. This is mainly because Turkey views the PKK as resisting the expansion of its influence in the region. Turkey's attack had led to multiple mass human rights violation in the region as will be further outlined below. After the liberation of Shengal in November 2015, the KDP tried to establish its authority in Shengal again by sending KDP and Roj forces and appointing a mayor for Shengal. Using the Roj forces, Turkey and KDP tried to attack the PKK and their affiliated forces in Sinjar. Nonetheless, the influence of the KDP was further paralysed when Masoud Barzani insisted on holding a referendum on independence on 25<sup>th</sup> September 2017. In response, in October 2017, the government of Iraq alongside the PMF forces expelled the Peshmerga forces from the disputed areas between Iraq and the KRG including Shengal and Kirkuk. Currently, the influence of the KDP has been limited by the PMF.

As a result, the YBŞ and PMF, as well as the Ezidkhan Protection Force (EPF) and other smaller Ezidi armed units, further increased their role to fill the power vacuum. Fearing the influence of Turkey and the KDP, the Iraqi government accepted the YBŞ joining the payroll of PMU, which is funded by the federal government of Iraq. Turkey believes that the YBŞ is part of the PKK, and therefore should be dissolved and leave Shengal. However, the counterargument is that the YBŞ are from Sinjar and cannot leave their homeland.

Further, since the defeat of ISIS in Mosul in 2017, Turkey has increased its bombardment of the Sinjar region, using the alleged presence of PKK fighters as a justification. In one of the attacks in 2017, five members of the Peshmerga belonging to the KDP were killed and nine wounded. Turkey claimed that it had attacked the Peshmerga by accident but demanded that the PKK withdraw. Commentators believe that Turkey's attack on the Peshmerga was to incite the Peshmerga against the presence of the PKK, as the Minister of the Peshmerga called the attack "unacceptable" but blamed the PKK for being there and also demanded the group withdraw from Sinjar. Since then, Turkey has repeatedly attacked the Sinjar region. Even in August 2018, in a drone attack, Turkey assassinated an Ezidi leader alleging he was a PKK leader. By March 2018, the PKK withdrew its forces from Sinjar. However, Turkey continued its airstrikes through 2018, 2019 and 2020, killing tens of civilians and YBŞ fighters.

Turkey further expanded its air strikes on Makhmour refugee camp near Shengal and killed many civilians. The Iraqi government accused Turkey of violating Iraq's sovereignty. The international media reported that Turkey never bombed Shengal when it was under siege by ISIS and the bombardment began once the Ezidis began returning to their homeland. While ISIS was carrying out a genocide in Shengal, Turkey did not attack ISIS, while Sinjar is only 60 km away from Turkey and Turkey has the second largest army in NATO. The media further accused of Turkey of turning blind eye to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi living near Turkey's border

when he was targeted by the US with the help of Kurdish forces in Syria, and his family escaped abroad via Turkey. Even the ISIS members who fled Raqqa to Turkey trafficked the Ezidi women they had kidnaped through Turkey.<sup>11</sup>

Furthermore, with the issue between the PKK and the KDP in the case of the Zina Warti area - which marks the border between KDP and PUK controlled areas in KRG - during the turmoil of April 2020, the Roj name appeared once again as it did in 2017 when it attacked the Kurds in the Khana Sor district of the Sinjar region. In those attacks, a number of unarmed PKK fighters who had intervened to stop the clashes in the area were killed by aggressors of the Roj forces. The Peshmerga Roj also targeted journalists such as Nojian Aran, who was shot in the head and consequently died on March 23 from her injuries. Since then, Turkey has intensified its raids on the KRG region and has perpetrated multiple human rights violations and international crimes. For example, Turkish forces bombed the Mexmûr camp on 15<sup>th</sup> April 2020 and as a result, three women from the camp lost their lives with large crowds of Kurdistan Democratic Party affiliated Peshmergas in the Zina Warte area.

Further, Turkey has increased its pressure on the KRG to fight the PKK in the Qandil mountains. Recently, throughout 2020, the KDP has taken military reinforcements to the Qandil area with the aim of provoking the PKK forces. The forces were mainly composed of Roj fighters. The KDP forces also assisted by stationing their forces in two other locations and inciting the escalation. The Roj forces were sent and attacked the PKK. However, in a suspicious occurrence, a few of their personnel were harmed and one of them died as the result as the result of a mine explosion on their return to their bases. The PKK confirmed that they had not attacked the Roj forces or laid down mines. To further justify the attacks, the PKK was accused of threatening the stability of the KRG. In reality, the PKK was only accused by Turkey and its affiliated groups. However, under Turkey's pressure, US officials claimed that the PKK is at fault. The US administration had issued a statement condemning the PKK and describing them as a threat, while the facts suggest that the US and the PKK are on the same side against common enemies, namely ISIS and their supporters. The US consulate in Erbil posted (below) on Facebook that a Peshmerga commander was killed by the PKK. However, it was later revealed that he was a member of the Roj Forces and he was killed in unknown circumstances, not by the PKK. The facts suggest that the PKK has tried to avoid any war between Kurds despite all the provocations.

---

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.ipost.com/middle-east/turkey-carries-out-airstrikes-against-yazidi-areas-of-iraqs-sinjar-631514>



Currently, the “Peshmerga Roj” have been used against the PKK by heading to the regions controlled by the PKK. This has been reinforced by Turkish air strikes on such areas which led to the deaths of many PKK fighters (guerrillas).

It is believed that the Roj forces are directly instructed or ordered by Turkey. For further clarification, Riad Salaheddine, a defected officer from the so-called “Peshmerga Roj”, confirmed in an interview the Turkish support for this group, and said, "several parties visit the Peshmerga Roj and Turkey was visiting the groups in public. Some of the parties were participating in the group’s training.” During his meeting, he stressed that the support received by the so-called “Peshmerga Roj’ was “strong,” which the KRG could not provide, adding that, "... support came from ambiguous parties. When I with my colleagues conducted further research, we were sure that this support was coming from Turkey."

Recently, the issue of returning the “Peshmerga Roj” to Syria has been raised several times, particularly in the Kurdish National Council-Democratic Society Movement agreements at the beginning of the Syrian crisis (Hewler I, Hewler II and Dohuk Agreements). Turkey wants to use the Roj force as a condition for the agreement that is ongoing between the Kurdish parties in Syria, namely between the ENKS and the current authority of the Democratic Autonomous Administration. The authority argues that Roj forces should become part of the current Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). However, Turkey requires the Roj forces to be independent, which the Democratic Autonomous Administration finds unsuitable for fears of a civil war, especially as it was between the Kurds in 1994 in the KRG. Democratic Autonomous Administration claims that the Roj Forces have never participated in defending Democratic Autonomous Administration when it was under attack by ISIS. They sided with Turkey, KDP and ISIS against the Democratic Autonomous Administration.

Furthermore, Turkey has used the Roj force in Libya too. Turkey was accused of recruiting and training thousands of Syrian mercenaries inside Turkish territory and sending them to Libya to fight alongside the Accord Government. The Libyan National Army spokesman Maj. Gen. Ahmed al-Masmari noted at a press conference last week that there was a Syrian Kurdish mercenary fighting alongside Turkish mercenaries and said that he was called "Shaker Farman Saleh Bonjoq" from the Tirbespiyê area in the northeast of Syria. The spokesperson also

revealed that he was trained by the so-called "Peshmerga Roj" in the KRG region. According to his family, Shaker was displaced to the KRG at the beginning of the Syrian crisis and moved to Turkey in 2015. Although the family denied this information, it confirmed the presence of three of its members within the so-called "Peshmerga Roj."

### **Turkey's Influence via Muslim Brotherhood Affiliated Groups in Iraq**

Turkey is also trying to expand its position in the north of Iraq through political parties and religious preachers. One of the main political parties that is directly promoting Turkey's interests in the region is the Kurdistan Islamic Union, which is also affiliated to the Muslim Brotherhood. Further, another well known Islamic preacher is Professor Ali Qaradakhi, who is the Secretary General of the International Union of Muslim Scholars (IUMS, current headquarters in Doha, the capital of Qatar, headed by Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi). Also, another Islamic figure is Dr. Muhammed Bazyani, who is the head of the Reform and Development Party. These parties and political figures participate in the elections in the KRG and publicly support Turkey's policy in the region.

### **What is behind Turkey's Ambition**

Turkey has not hidden its ambition that Greater Turkey, according to the Misak-ı Milli, should include the Mosul and Aleppo Willayet as it was during the Ottoman's rule before 1918. Turkey, especially since the Syrian uprisings in 2011, has tried to increase its influence in the region directly and indirectly. Directly through increasing its forces in Iraq and Syria, and occupying territories. Indirectly, implicitly and explicitly through proxies, including terrorist groups and others, as outlined above. Subsequently, a discriminative policy has been practised against the groups that do not agree with such policy.

Such discrimination and assimilation can be shown through an example here. Following its occupation, Turkey is trying to further reinforce its foreign policy by allowing the Iraqi Sunni community to settle in the villages of Kurds, Christians and Ezidis. A new decree has been issued by the council of Ras al-Ain (Serekaniye), under the control of Turkey's associated groups, on 28<sup>th</sup> of December 2020 stipulating that the local government will offer identification cards for Iraqi refugees living in Ras al-Ain (Serekaniye) to settle in the village. It was reported that, "[T]here are many cases of people who had previously worked with ISIS and Al-Nusra now being settled in Serekaniye; they are also given new identifications as well as houses that are confiscated from their displaced owners." The new demographic changes come after launching a new "Peace Spring" Operation on 9<sup>th</sup> of October 2019 forced out tens of thousands of vulnerable people from their ancestral land.<sup>12</sup> This is the third operation after the Operation Euphrates Shield on 24<sup>th</sup> of August 2016 and Operative Olive Branch cross-border military operations conducted by the Turkish Armed Forces and Syrian National Army (SNA) in Afrin. The area is now occupied, over two hundred thousand of people were forced out of their ancestral land, and families of jihadists and Turkish backed forces have been settled. These settlements are dividing the Kurds again by creating a new barrier between the Kurds beginning from Afrin and leading all the way to Iraq's border, where it is adjacent to the Shengal region then to Mosul and Kirkuk.

Similarly, in Iraq, Turkey, as mentioned above, has employed multiple soft and hard policies to expand its control over the north of Iraq. Turkey has been trying convincing Iraq to open

---

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.kurdistan24.net/en/story/23713-Turkey-allows-Iraqis-to-receive-ID-cards-in-Kurdish-Arabic-town-in-Syria>

new economic routes through Fishkhpour, otherwise known as the Ovakoy Project. Turkey is claiming that it is trying to connect Iraq to European countries, which benefits European trade with Iraq, potentially amounting to 70 billion dollars annually. The project first came into existence as the result of Turkey's disappointment when the KRG conducted the referendum on 25 September 2017. This Fishkhpour route was viewed by Turkey as an alternative route to connect Iraq to Turkey instead of through the KRG.<sup>13</sup> However, Turkey has also established a train route to China. The first train departed in December 2020 and reached China in 12 days. While this is a good justification that Turkey can use to convince the Europeans to support this project, it seems that the project more benefits China than Europe.



The Ovakoy route, shown with the blue dotted line, reaches Mosul via Tel Afar. The project, which is planned as a highway and a railway, starts from Şırnak in North Kurdistan, goes from Duhok province of Southern Kurdistan to Telafer, Xurmatu and Mosul in the west of Sinjar and from there to Baghdad.

In the past, Turkey has been successful in using the migration card to lure the EU countries to pay Turkey to stop migration. While Turkey receives money from the EU, Turkey still earns money from traffickers run by Turkey's National Intelligence Organisation (MIT) sending migrants to Europe and taking advantage of Syria families to recruit mercenaries, paying them to fight in Libya, Syrian and Azerbaijan. Thus, the EU money indirectly funds activities against Turkey's interest and national security. It is yet unclear whether this time Turkey can lure the EU countries regarding the Ovakoy project.

Turkey has tried hard to lobby for this project and convince the Iraqi government. Following the recent visit by the Minister of Iraqi Foreign Affairs Dr Foad Hussein in December 2020 to Turkey, he has discussed the implementation of the Şingal agreement and the steps that must be taken, including the dissolution of the YBŞ and the opening of the Fishkhpour – Ovakoy border crossing point to boost trade between Baghdad and Ankara. The Turkish Consul in the KRG stated that the project aims at extending economic trade with the Gulf countries too.<sup>14</sup> Also, in return, Turkey will provide Iraq with security arrangements and will discuss water issues outstanding between Iraq and Turkey, specifically the Tigris river and building a new dam near the Mosul region.<sup>15</sup>

Geo-strategically, the project connects Turkey to Baghdad via Shengal – Mosul – Kirkuk, where Erdogan's government believes that the area should have been included in Greater Turkey, or Turkey's ambition to revive the neo-Ottoman Empire. The Mosul region was once

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2017/10/turkey-iraq-new-flash-point-ovakoy.html>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.rudaw.net/english/business/03072019>

<sup>15</sup> <https://twitter.com/Iraqimofa/status/1340323403874635778/photo/1>; Turkish sponsored media <https://www.yenisafak.com/en/world/turkeys-ovakoy-border-crossing-with-iraq-must-be-opened-urgently-3258563>

within the territorial control of the Ottomans and Turkey still exercises its influence in the region through the Barzani and Nujaifi families, the Turkmen in Tel Afar, certain Sunni Arab tribes and their Baathist members.

Also, the Ovakoy agreement is a route that passes through the Shengal region and connects Mosul to Turkey. When Turkey failed to achieve such an aim via ISIS' advancement towards the region as well as the Kurdish regions in the north of Syria, Turkey found diplomatic negotiations as an alternative approach for achieving this aim. In late 2020, the president of the KRG, Nechirvan Barzani, visited Turkey and met Erdogan as well as Hakan Fidan, head of the Turkish intelligence service MIT. After his return, the agreement between Iraq and the KRG was signed on the 9<sup>th</sup> October with the active support of UN representatives. The aim was for the KRG to regain authority, or at least increase its influence, in Shengal and to dissolve the Êzîdî self-defence forces and self-administration. The agreement does not allow for the return of Peshmerga forces to Shengal but mentions a new civil administration of the district which may allow the KDP to regain some of its influence. The agreement also calls for all current forces in Shengal to leave and be replaced by Iraqi forces. This would eventually allow Turkey to gain further influence in the region via the KDP. Recently, Iraqi forces entered Shengal and started replacing the YBŞ and PMF fighters. Mr. Barzani called the agreement the result of "months of hard work and negotiations" between Erbil and Baghdad. He promised that it would, "help to allow the people of Shengal, including Ezidis and others who suffered so appallingly [...] to return to their ancestral homes in safety and with dignity." Yet, as a result of the agreement, YBŞ members, representatives of the Shengal council and the population have been under constant attack.

In addition to the economic profit, Turkey has multiple other political objectives. By implementing such a project, Turkey's main aim of dividing the Kurds in Iraq and Syria is met. This is through empowering and populating the region with its associated groups, mainly Turkmen and the Sunni Arabs who once joined ISIS in 2014. Hence, the assimilation of the groups that Turkey finds incompatible with the new policy strategy, such as the Kurdish authority in Syria, the Êzîdîs and the other groups mentioned above. Also, Turkey aims at empowering the Turkmen in Kirkuk and Tel Afar who had served Turkey's interest during the Ottoman Empire, and they have mainly populated the two sides of the road connecting the centre of the Ottomans in Anatolia to the Mosul region and Kirkuk.

Nonetheless, this project has been rejected on multiple occasions by the Shiite leading authority of the Iraqi government. Both Haidar al Abadi and Adil Abdul Mahdi, who have become Iraqi prime ministers since the rise of ISIS in 2014, did not agree to go ahead with this project. It is not likely that Kadhimi can make the wishes of Erdogan come true. Nechirvan Barzani has been working hard since then, and he visited Kadhimi in April 2014 for the same reasons again.

One reason is that the Iraqi Shiite led government also wants to expand its relationship with China through open water ways from Basra's international port, Shat al Arab. The Iraqi government tried to improve its economic relations with China in the past several years but it has failed for various political and economic reasons. As Iraq is a divided country and many neighbouring and international powerful states try to increase their influence through their proxies in Iraq, the attempts to renovate the Basra port have failed especially after the Korean engineer who designed the renovation project was found dead in Faw, a town near Basrah, under suspicious circumstances. This is the second death of South Korean company directors

in the past few years.<sup>16</sup> Whether Kadhimî's new initiation of the Grand Faw Port Foundation can be successful is a matter for which we must wait and see.

Further, Turkey is trying to market the project to the US and its allies claiming that, Iran's presence would be limited in Iraq, Hashd al-Shaabi would be weakened and it will serve as a sword destroying the Shiite crescent. This is the same idea as when it aided and assisted ISIS in 2013-2017, which led to multiple international crimes on the one hand, but on the other hand it destroyed the plan to topple Assad from power by focusing on the revival of the Ottoman Empire and supporting jihadists who committed multiple international crimes against the less powerful communities. The recent threat by Erdogan that one night the Turkish army will suddenly land in Shengal has been very controversial, and the 1<sup>st</sup> of April is the deadline for the Iraqi government to dissolve the YBŞ and self-administration of Shengal supported by the PKK. However, the recent event shows that the agreement is a dead end. The Shiite led government has not addressed Turkey's concern but rather deployed more military as a reaction to Turkey's threat.

### **The Consequences of the Turkish Minister of Defence's Recent Visit to Iraq and Erbil**

Turkish Defence Minister Hulusi Akar, along with the country's Chief of General Staff General Yasar Guler, visited Erbil, the capital of the KRG in northern Iraq, late on Monday, 18<sup>th</sup> January 2021. During the meetings, the two sides discussed regional security; "We must further strengthen our cooperation and stand together resolutely against the PKK terrorist organisation," Haka said.

On 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2021, after Friday prayers, Turkey's President Erdogan hinted at a looming operation against the PKK in Iraq's Sinjar, saying, "We can come suddenly one night," using the same sentence he used during previous Syria offensives. On this day too, Turkey carried out a very extensive attack on the Kurdish villages in the north of Iraq and killed hundreds of livestock and destroyed the houses of villagers. Previously, these attacks were condemned by Baghdad because of the aerial bombardment of border villages. Turkey's drones have even been used in areas of Sulaymaniyah, several hundred kilometres from the borders of Turkey, and have killed civilians. Many human rights organisations have raised concerns about Turkey's real aim of attacking civilians.

This visit of Turkish military officials was arranged in August last year, but it was delayed due to Turkey's attack on the Iraqi army. In August last year, Ankara's military action both from the air and ground was widely condemned by Baghdad because of the aerial bombardment of the border villages and the death of two senior Iraqi border officials.

Since the Zina Warte issue in April 2020, as indicated above, Turkish attacks have intensified but have failed to convince all of the parties to attack the PKK. This has been described by Turkey as the continuation of Operation Eagle Claw. Hence soon after Zine Warte, Turkey attacked the PKK in the Haftanin region, which lasted for months.

Also, beginning on 25<sup>th</sup> October 2020, the KDP began deploying special troops from the Leşkerî Gûlan, directly affiliated to Prime Minister Masrour Barzani, to the guerrilla areas of Gare and Metina. This troop deployment was accompanied by a large number of heavy weapons and armoured vehicles. The troops were stationed in the Deşta Nehlê and Çemankê areas. Despite warnings from the HPG, KDP units advanced into guerrilla territory. On 4<sup>th</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.rudaw.net/english/business/03072019>

November 2020, the situation escalated when KDP units attacked the guerrilla camp near the village of Bêbadê. The guerrillas defended themselves with the least possible intensity and continued to rely on a political and democratic solution. The guerrilla command called for dialogue and warned against escalation.

It was claimed that Turkey has used mercenaries from Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (formerly the Al-Nusra Front) and the Turkestan Islamic Party, after the United States removed the latter from its list of terrorist organisations on 20<sup>th</sup> November 2020, to attack the PKK in the north of Iraq under Turkish pressure. This an attempt to assimilate the Kurds by settling mercenaries in the areas of the KRG and the other side of the border in Turkey populated by the Kurds. This is the continuation of Turkey's attempt to form an umbrella for its proxy Uighur, Chechen, Uzbeki and Tajiki mercenaries who participated in the battles to occupy Idlib, al-Bab, Jarablus, Afrin, Girê Spî and Serêkaniyê in northeast Syria, in addition to their use as proxies in Libya and Karabakh, under the name of Turkmen, for the purposes of dividing the Kurds across the borders of Turkey, Iraq and Syria.

Turkey's last attempt to expand its territorial control came when Turkey launched the military operation against the PKK in northern Iraq's Gara region, some 35 km (22 miles) south of the Turkish border, on 15<sup>th</sup> Feb 2021. Turkey used multiple fighter jets, several helicopters and hundreds of Turkish special forces. Turkey claimed that the operation aimed at rescuing Turkish officials who have been kidnapped by the PKK and kept in a cave in Gara. However, instead of rescuing them, Turkey used prohibited weapons that killed the guards of the prison and the prisoners. Turkey accused the PKK of shooting the prisoners in the head before the arrival of the Turkish army. However, the PKK claimed that Turkey killed the prisoners by using prohibited weapon and took the bodies back to Turkey. However, the US's first statement regarding the allegation that the situation requires investigation led to anger within Turkey's officials, mainly in Erdogan's cabinet. Erdogan criticised the US administration for not believing Turkey's statement that the PKK had kidnapped and shot the prisoners.

Turkey's recent attack which started on 24<sup>th</sup> April 2021, the day President Biden recognised the Armenian genocide, is controversial and problematic. Turkey has launched military attacks on the Kurdish populated areas with the use of chemical weapons. Turkey justifies its attack with the fact that PKK bases exist in those areas. However, using chemical weapons and foreign fighters from Syria challenges the legitimacy of these attacks. History shows that Turkey's attacks on the Kurdish regions in the north of Syria led to assimilation and the settlement of foreign fighter's families. By now hundreds of thousands of Kurdish people from the north of Syria have been forced to leave their ancestral land and families of jihadists have been settled instead. The continuation of such attacks and the silence of the KRG, as well as the international community, while Turkey explicitly and implicitly carries out international crimes contradicts the values and principles underlying human rights.

### **Final Remarks,**

- While Turkey uses the PKK as an excuse to attack Iraq, this report shows that Turkey has established multiple channels of influence that have increased its control over Iraq, especially in the areas Turkey considers to be former Ottoman territories, such as the Mosul region. Turkey's ambition in Iraq is coextensive with its aims to increase the presence of its companies in Iraq. Turkey uses every means to achieve this aim, as it does in the north of Syria, Libya, Afghanistan, Kashmir, the Caucas region, the Mediterranean Sea or even in the EU. Recently, Turkey sent a special agent to assassinate an Austrian politician, Berivan Aslan, because she was originally Kurdish.

- Turkey is trying to use the same policy against Iraq as it did against Syria in 1998. Turkey uses the right of its control over the Euphrates water and the presence of the PKK as diplomatic tools to achieve its foreign policy aims in the region.
- Turkey even tried to claim that the PKK assisted Armenia during the Azerbaijan and Armenia conflict. However, no PKK members were found in Armenia fighting against Azerbaijan and there is no PKK in Libya or Greece where Turkey is called an aggressor. Instead Turkey sent jihadists to assist Azerbaijan against Armenia in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.
- Turkey's attack on the region does not end with fighting the PKK, but its aim is to eliminate any groups resisting its foreign policy in the region. Turkey uses organisations such as Ahrar al Sham, the ISIS remnants and its other mercenaries who are very violent and subsequently eliminates the groups that do not swear allegiance to its authority. This will result in mass human rights violation in the region, as occurred against the Ezidis in 2014, in Afrin and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.
- Although this might be considered a new plan to limit Iran's influence and the Shiite crescent in the region, especially in the Shengal area, this should not be at the expense of Ezidis and Kurds, who were also attacked by ISIS in 2014 when the KDP withdrew its forces and the Baathists as well as certain local Sunnis joined ISIS. Turkey supported ISIS while genocide continued against the Ezidis, the YBŞ and the Kurds in Syria were the main forces resisting courageously against ISIS.
- Now, as the 100th anniversary of the Lausanne Treaty is approaching, Turkey's ambition to achieve the dream of the Misak-ı Millî (National Pact) to incorporate Mosul and Kirkuk, directly or indirectly through its associated groups, is the matter of consideration. In addition to the above political objective, Turkey can practically divide the Kurds and for the first time draw a line between the Kurdish population in Turkey, Syria and Iraq with the groups settled by Turkey.<sup>17</sup> This plan can separate Shengal from Kurds in Syria, who protected the Êzîdîs, Christians and other communities from ISIS, destroy the groups and self-administration set up by Êzîdîs to defend themselves, incorporate Mosul and Kirkuk in its economic or possibly political zone and surround the Kurds. This will also reinforce the project of building a wall between the Kurdish administration in Iraq and Syria and the Kurds who live across Turkey and Syrian borders. Also, the recent attack that began on 24<sup>th</sup> April 2021, with the use of foreign fighters, further allows Turkey to settle the families of such jihadists in the Kurdish ancestral lands across the borders of Turkey and Iraq. This foreign policy strategy results in mass human rights violations, instability, insecurity and mass migration to Europe. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the international community to halt Turkey's invasion directly and through its proxies, including the Kurds who serve such foreign policy for material gains.

---

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2020/07/turkey-iraq-kurds-fear-pkk-operations-lead-turkish-presence.html>