

**IRAQ: ALLAYING TURKEY'S FEARS
OVER KURDISH AMBITIONS**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In northern Iraq, largely unnoticed, a conflict is brewing that, if allowed to boil over, could precipitate civil war, break-up of the country and in a worst-case scenario Turkish intervention. Tensions in the oil-rich Kirkuk region, where the political ambitions, historical claims and economic interests of the principal communities -- Kurds, Arabs, Turkomans and Chaldo-Assyrians -- clash, have been escalating since U.S. forces toppled the Baathist regime in April 2003. Violence is assuming a troubling pattern. Turkey, with its own large Kurdish population, is watching with growing anxiety. The U.S. and EU need to do more to resolve the Kirkuk question and help Ankara protect its vital interests without resort to increasingly hollow but destabilising threats of military intervention.

The situation has been aggravated by the worsening state of affairs in Iraq and by political actors, especially Kurds, who are seeking to undo the grave injustices that flowed from the ousted regime's policy of Arabisation, returning in numbers and laying claim to Kirkuk as the capital of a future Kurdish region -- or state. Tensions have been contained somewhat by the presence of U.S. troops and a U.S.-engineered interim political arrangement -- a provincial council broadly representative of the four communities -- that, against all odds, has held. But as Washington's attention is increasingly drawn to the instability in the rest of the country, things in Kirkuk might well get out of hand and the communities there find themselves in a violent stand-off.

From Ankara's perspective, chaos or civil war in Iraq, the creation of a Kurdish state in the north with Kirkuk as its capital that would serve as a magnet or model for Turkey's own Kurdish population, or a combination of the above, are nightmare scenarios. At the mercy of forces beyond its control, Turkey is anchoring its strategy in commitment to the political process in Baghdad and, as part of that, a peaceful solution to the Kirkuk question. It also is banking on progress in accession talks with the European Union to reduce any appetite for secession its Kurdish population might still harbour.

But it would be imprudent to rely on these as insurance against the threat of military actions should Turkish national interests seem to be in jeopardy. EU accession is, at best, years away. Public pressures resulting from Ankara's manipulation of the Iraqi Turkoman question and the continued deployment of Turkish troops on Iraqi soil could create a dynamic of their own, possibly precipitating military intervention in Kirkuk. Prospects for success in Iraq's political process are receding in the face of growing Sunni Arab alienation and a spreading insurgency. All in all, heightened threat perceptions could in themselves create an interventionist dynamic that more sober minds in Ankara might be unable to control.

Further improvement of relations between Turkey and Iraq's Kurdish leadership is the best hedge against the risks. Indeed, Turkey has already come a long way, accepting today a federal arrangement for Iraq's Kurds that even two years ago it considered an anathema. Economic ties and trade also have increased. But more steps should be taken, based on mutual interests: Turkey needs good relations with the Kurds to prevent chaos in the north, and the landlocked, vulnerable Kurdish entity, in turn, may have little choice but to rely on Turkey for protection.

Confidence-building measures are required to change the atmosphere, establish mechanisms to head off emerging conflicts and enable Turkey to play a more constructive role in the peaceful solution of the Kirkuk question. These include a mutual halt to inflammatory rhetoric, a lowering of tensions in Kirkuk, in particular through proactive international monitoring, and resolution of the nagging problem of the insurgent Kurdish Workers Party, the PKK (now called Kongra-Gel), remnants of whose forces remain holed up in northern Iraq.

The U.S., which remains Turkey's strategic ally, and the EU have a common interest in encouraging Turkey to play a constructive role. They should work proactively to resolve the Kirkuk question, strengthening relations between Ankara and the Iraqi Kurdish leadership, and promoting investments that would give the Kurdish

population in southeastern Turkey evidence of the benefits it would gain from Turkish accession to the EU. Ultimately, the challenge is, through such measures, to give Turkey the means to exert a positive influence over the course of events in northern Iraq generally and Kirkuk in particular.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To the Government of Turkey:

1. Halt rhetoric that inflames passions over Kirkuk, the Kurds and Iraq's Turkomans.
2. Cease financial support to the Iraqi Turkoman Front.
3. Commit to the peaceful resolution of the Kirkuk question and respect whatever settlement Iraqis agree upon among themselves.
4. Keep open the border crossings with Iraq and the Kirkuk-Ceyhan pipeline.
5. Encourage trade and investment in northern Iraq, working directly with the Kurdish parties where possible.
6. Consider issuing a broader amnesty for the PKK/Kongra-Gel, which would cover the leadership in northern Iraq and not require returnees to inform on their colleagues.

To the Kurdish Leadership in Iraq:

7. Halt inflammatory rhetoric over Kirkuk.
8. Start conditioning the Kurdish public for a compromise solution on Kurdish national aspirations, including an advanced degree of

autonomy within a decentralised Iraq and a special status for the city and governorate of Kirkuk.

9. Relinquish the directorates in Kirkuk over which the Kurdish parties took control at the war's end, and cooperate in an equitable redistribution of power in Kirkuk under the leadership of the governorate council to be elected on 30 January 2005.
10. Support trade and investment with neighbouring countries.

To the United States and European Union:

11. Strengthen relations between the Turkish government and the Iraqi Kurdish leadership.
12. Promote investment in southeastern Turkey.
13. Make the case to the Security Council to:
 - (a) appoint a U.N. Special Rapporteur to monitor the situation in Kirkuk (city as well as governorate) and report quarterly to the Secretary-General on developments and actions that threaten to destabilise the situation;
 - (b) consider, in consultation with the elected Iraqi authorities, appointing a UN Supervisor in Kirkuk with power to impose regulations, introduce multi-ethnic police and courts, and establish other services; and
 - (c) solicit funding from donors to facilitate the Supervisor's task.

Ankara/Amman/Brussels, 26 January 2005

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I. INTRODUCTION

Oil is at the heart of steadily building tensions in Kirkuk, a crisis that could culminate in open conflict between the various communities in the city and surrounding district and could precipitate civil war and intervention by Iraq's northern neighbour, Turkey.¹ While there are serious questions about the precise volume and quality of Kirkuk oil, the region has proven reserves of 10 billion barrels, about 10 per cent of the country's total.² This makes the Kirkuk and adjacent oil fields the second-largest in Iraq after Rumayleh in the south.³

¹ Crisis Group has devoted considerable attention to the question of the Kurds in post-Saddam Iraq, of which the disposition of Kirkuk is the most complex. See, Middle East Report N°10, *War in Iraq: What's Next for the Kurds?*, 19 March 2003; Middle East Report N°19, *Iraq's Constitutional Challenge*, 13 November 2003, pp. 11-17; and Middle East Report N°26, *Iraq's Kurds: Toward an Historic Compromise?*, 8 April 2004.

² According to an oil industry expert, "The Kirkuk fields are Iraq's oldest, and depletion has been significant, given how hard both the former regime and the current interim government have pushed extraction. There are serious questions, therefore, whether Kirkuk can keep producing at the present levels for much longer without serious investment". E-mail communication, 6 January 2005.

³ In late 2004, Iraqi oil production was 2.8 million barrels per day (bpd). A monthly average of 1.8 million bpd was being produced in the southern fields and shipped from the Basra terminals. Al-Jazeera Online, 3 November 2004. Following insurgent attacks against oil wells, pumping stations and pipelines, crude oil shipped from Kirkuk to Turkey and onward, or to the refinery of Baiji for processing and then through the pipeline to Ceyhan on Turkey's Mediterranean coast, was only 300,000 bpd in November, down from 700,000 bpd. Reuters, 17 November 2004. Northern exports had resumed in September 2004 after an interruption of nearly nine months due to sabotage against the Kirkuk-Ceyhan pipeline. Agence France-Presse, 19 October 2004. Today, Kirkuk production is estimated to be 350-500 bpd, down from a pre-war high in the 1990s of 700-800 bpd. E-mail communication from an oil industry expert, 6 January 2005.

The resource dominates the region's economic life, the North Oil Company (NOC) being the largest provider of employment after the local government.⁴ As a result, Kirkuk has been a magnet for migrant labour, as well as a target of previous government programs over the years to bring in Arabs in an effort to shift the population balance and secure the region's loyalty. As part of this "Arabisation" campaign, tens of thousands of Kurdish and Turkoman villagers were displaced from their lands in Kirkuk governorate by one method or another and either forced to move in with relatives in neighbouring towns or, more frequently, driven into vast quasi-urban "collectivised villages" (*mujamma'at*), bleak housing complexes that offered basic health care and education but no access to land.⁵

Kurds were also driven from the town of Kirkuk itself, or if, like the Turkomans, they were permitted to stay, were pressed to change their ethnic designation to Arab, a practice referred to in Baathist parlance as "nationality correction". The governorate of Kirkuk, rebaptised Ta'mim ("nationalisation"), underwent its own process of "nationality correction", with the regime attaching entire chunks of territory in which the population was predominantly Kurdish or Turkoman to neighbouring governorates.⁶

⁴ There is such abundance in Kirkuk that when an international NGO began digging two water wells in 2004 as part of a rehabilitation scheme in the destroyed village of Qara Hanjir, it struck oil. Crisis Group interview with an NGO representative, Erbil, 31 October 2004. Qara Hanjir is about ten kilometres east on the road from Kirkuk to Chamchamal. A sub-district in Kirkuk governorate, it was destroyed by Iraqi forces in 1988 as part of the counter-insurgency campaign against Kurdish rebels.

⁵ Many moved to the surviving district (*qadha*) and sub-district (*nahya*) centres (until the regime razed many of these as well in 1987-1989) or to towns in the three Kurdish governorates. But the vast majority had little choice but to accept land in one of the new *mujamma'at*, which had the advantage of offering schooling for children and basic health services but the distinct disadvantages of rampant unemployment, debilitating distance from urban centres and little prospect of improvement under the prevailing order.

⁶ An analysis of the Ba'ath regime's Arabisation policy can be found in Human Rights Watch, "Iraq: Forcible Expulsion of

II. THE ESCALATING CRISIS IN KIRKUK

A. THE POLITICS OF RETURN

During 2003 and 2004, many internally displaced Kurds and Turkomans (IDPs) seized the opportunity of the regime's removal to return to their places of birth or, if these were destroyed or mined, to the city of Kirkuk, where they have bivouacked in tents for months under conditions of deprivation and squalor.⁷ Not only did most Kurdish villagers lack a homestead to which to return, but few had any appetite for resuming agricultural activities they or their parents had been forced to abandon years, sometimes decades, earlier.⁸ Their rapid move into Kirkuk is now upsetting the city's demographic balance. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) reported in September 2004 that 12,135 Kurdish and 3,925 Turkoman families had moved back to Kirkuk and environs, the majority settling in the city.⁹

Ethnic Minorities", March 2003, at <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2003/iraq0303.htm>.

⁷ According to the IOM, "The majority of the caseload in Tameem [Kirkuk governorate] is composed of IDP returnees from the three northern governorates. ...[A] substantial portion of the returnees have not returned to their place of origin in Tameem, [but] are in the process of return and are currently residing in makeshift accommodation in the main cities (especially Kirkuk) until access to their villages is possible. Hindrances include lack of services in the village, presence of land mines (close to the green line) and in some cases Arabs still residing in their houses/lands. ...In general most of them did not return to their place of origin but remain in transit in Kirkuk city". The majority stay in public buildings, the stadium and military compounds. IOM, "Tameem", September 2004. The term "in transit" should be taken with some scepticism. Aid agencies say those dwelling in tents in Kirkuk have started to build homes (often employing -- in an ironic twist -- cheap local labour of "imported" Shiite Arabs) with the trappings of permanence. Crisis Group interviews in Erbil and Kirkuk, late October - early November 2004.

⁸ In the words of one aid official, "a lot of villagers, after spending twenty-odd years in *mujamma'at*, are no longer rural. Their rural livelihoods no longer exist, and they are no longer wedded to an agrarian life. Instead they are seeking schooling for their children, water and health care. The de-ruralised population has grown addicted to the bare-bones collective towns that the regime built for them". Crisis Group interview, Erbil, 31 October 2004.

⁹ IOM, "Tameem", September 2004. Using an average family size of six, it is possible that as many as 72,810 Kurds and 23,550 Turkomans have moved into Kirkuk over the past year. In a number of cases, displaced Turkoman and Kurdish

The return of the displaced has not been free of political manipulation, and this, along with usurpation of the city's administration and its security apparatus by the two principal Kurdish parties -- the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) -- is a main factor in current tensions in Kirkuk, including between Kurds and Turkomans, both victims of the previous regime. Non-Kurdish residents claim the PUK and KDP have encouraged displaced Kurds in the Kurdish governorates, or even in Iran and Turkey, to move to Kirkuk regardless of their original place of residence, in an effort to increase Kurdish numbers ahead of a census, elections and a possible referendum on the area's disposition.¹⁰ The Kurdish parties, by contrast, claim they have sought to prevent a mass return to Kirkuk, assert that most if not all returnees are original inhabitants of the town or governorate, and pledge to send any non-Kirkukis back to their temporary homes elsewhere.¹¹

villagers have sought to return to their lands, and some reconstruction has taken place with the help of nongovernmental organisations where there was no property dispute. As one indicator of the rapid influx of IDPs, ration cards in the governorate (not Kirkuk city) increased by 200,000 in 2004. A Western diplomat attributed this to the feverish rebuilding of some sub-district centres (*nahyas*), such as Shwan, a Kurdish town on the road from Kirkuk to Taqtaq and Koysinjaq. Crisis Group interview, Kirkuk, 3 November 2004.

¹⁰ A Turkoman member of the governorate council and the Iraqi Turkoman Front claimed that "only 400 Kurdish families were expelled from Kirkuk city during Saddam's time", and the Shorja neighbourhood "was never destroyed". (A Crisis Group analyst visiting Kirkuk in a different capacity in April 1991 witnessed bulldozers levelling Shorja neighbourhood.) He alleged that the vast majority of Kurds entering Kirkuk are not originally from the city; some, he said, are from Kurdish villages in the governorate but others are from Syria, Turkey and Iran. Crisis Group interview with Khidr Ghaleb Kahyeh, Kirkuk, 2 November 2004. Crisis Group was not in a position to verify these allegations. Anecdotal evidence suggests, however, that some returning Kurds did arrive from Iran, perhaps were even born there, but may legitimately claim Kirkuki provenance. In one case, a Kurd in his twenties said he was born in a Kurdish refugee camp near Kermanshah in Iran, where his family had settled following expulsion from Jinglawa, a Kurdish neighbourhood in Kirkuk, in 1974. Speaking fluent Kurdish and Farsi but no Arabic, he said he was returning to Jinglawa to rebuild his family's home in its original location. Crisis Group interview, Kirkuk, 1 November 2004.

¹¹ Crisis Group interview with a Western diplomat, Kirkuk, 3 November 2004. See also, Human Rights Watch, "Claims in Conflict: Reversing Ethnic Cleansing in Northern Iraq", New York, August 2004, at <http://hrw.org/reports/2004/iraq0804/iraq0804.pdf>.

Both sides may have a case. On the one hand, a degree of political manipulation was evident from the reverse process of resettlement at the close of summer 2004. When schools opened and Kurdish IDP families realised their children could not continue their education due to a shortage of classroom space, teachers and furniture in Kirkuk, many pragmatically packed up their meagre belongings and moved back to Erbil or Suleimaniyeh. Around the same time, it was announced that the national census scheduled for 12 October 2004 had to be postponed indefinitely, obviating the immediate need for the Kurds' physical presence in Kirkuk.¹² "See", say non-Kurdish Kirkukis: "The Kurds were directed by the parties to come to Kirkuk only in order to be registered in the census and not because they really want to live here".

On the other hand, both Kurdish returnees living in dire conditions in Kirkuk and internally displaced Kurds remaining in the Kurdish governorates have complained bitterly of what they consider Kurdish leadership failure to provide political, logistical and humanitarian support for their long-desired return to Kirkuk and to expel "imported" Arabs; this suggests at least a degree of restraint by the Kurdish parties, whose actions have been monitored closely by representatives of the international community.¹³

The return of displaced Kurds and Turkomans has mostly not led to property disputes with Arab

occupants.¹⁴ Many Kurds in Kirkuk were renters, not owners. Those who were expelled more often than not saw their homes demolished, or they were able to give them to relatives. Kurdish villages were almost invariably razed (including schools and mosques, while wells were dynamited). Only in some cases were Arab settlers moved in, who built simple homes that were destroyed by returning Kurds in April 2003 and after. When the former regime confiscated Kurdish properties in Kirkuk, it usually did so to build public facilities, including Baath party offices; again, there is not necessarily a property dispute in those cases but a problem of returning to a home that no longer exists. The majority of "imported" Arabs moved into new neighbourhoods;¹⁵ where Arabs obtained (legally or otherwise) properties that originally belonged to Kurds or Turkomans, they often acknowledged the weakness of their claim after the regime was ousted and agreed to vacate (sometimes under pressure).¹⁶

The relative insignificance of property disputes has reduced the role of institutions such as the Iraq Property Claims Commission (IPCC), a mechanism established by the occupying powers to dampen anger in Kirkuk.¹⁷ Meanwhile, the political and humanitarian problems associated with the steady return of tens of thousands of Kurds -- a highly inflammatory issue that is dangerously raising tensions -- has yet to be fully recognised and addressed.¹⁸

¹² A Western diplomat asserted that Kirkuk's presumed population of 800,000 (no exact figures are available), includes 100,000 indigenous and 200,000 "Arabisation" Arabs. Before November 2004, some 50,000 of the latter are thought to have left. At the same time, he said, an estimated 100,000 Kurdish IDPs returned to Kirkuk, camping out over the summer until schools started and it was announced that the census would be postponed; at that point, some 30,000 returned to Suleimaniyeh and Erbil (see below). Crisis Group interview, Kirkuk, 3 November 2004. Crisis Group was not in a position to verify these figures.

¹³ Dr Nouri Talabany, an unaffiliated Kurdish expert and original inhabitant of Kirkuk, claims that if the Kurdish parties had not moved into Kirkuk in April 2003 and asserted control, the Kurdish IDPs would have come in much bigger numbers, and the problems would have increased. "This is why", he said, "the IDPs and other Kurds in Kirkuk are so unhappy about the parties. They want the imported Arabs out". Crisis Group interview, Erbil, 3 November 2004. A former official of the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) said that the PUK and KDP "deserve some recognition" for the fact that Kurdish IDPs who have returned are "perhaps a fraction of the overall IDP population". E-mail communication, 7 January 2005.

¹⁴ Crisis Group interview with an international aid official, Erbil, 2 November 2004.

¹⁵ These Arabs are locally known as the "ashra-t-alaaf", meaning "10,000", because of the subsidy of 10,000 Iraqi dinars (about \$30,000 at the time) they received from the regime, in addition to a plot of land, to build a house and settle in Kirkuk. Figures denoted in dollars (\$) in this report refer to U.S. dollars.

¹⁶ "Nothing is keeping 'Arabisation' Arabs in Kirkuk", one Western diplomat asserted, "because they lost their jobs and benefits. Today they are just waiting to receive compensation and resettlement". Crisis Group interview, Kirkuk, 3 November 2004.

¹⁷ IPCC effectiveness is hobbled by the fact that it has moved, in the words of a Western diplomat, "at a glacial pace". Crisis Group interview, Ankara, 27 October 2004.

¹⁸ This concern is raised in particular by international aid organisations active in Kirkuk. One problem is the absence of a mechanism to deal with land grabs by returnees. According to the IOM, "Local initiatives to distribute land to returning Kurdish IDPs have commenced, albeit in an unstructured method which angered Turkmen and Arab families in the region. As a result, an IDP committee with representation from all groups has been set up in Kirkuk and

B. THE THREAT OF COMMUNAL CONFLICT

Growing Kurdish supremacy in Kirkuk manifests itself in the re-naming of streets and institutions (Saddam Hospital, for example, is known in Kurdish as Azadi Hospital), the flying of the Kurdish flag, the seizure of public and Baath party buildings by Kurdish parties and organisations, and other symbolic and conspicuous measures that are deeply resented by non-Kurdish residents.¹⁹ Politics is dominated by the Kurdish parties and other Kurds through their representation -- non-Kurds say *over*-representation -- in institutions such as the governorate council, administrative directorates, IPCC, and the committee on IDPs, and Kurdish officials have made public their intent to take control of Kirkuk and incorporate it into the Kurdish region.²⁰

Still, the situation has been relatively calm -- a deceptive calm, perhaps, given the dramatic demographic and institutional changes taking place, but aside from largely peaceful demonstrations, a few car bombs and a disturbing number of assassinations of party and government officials, Kirkuk has escaped the extreme turbulence that has characterised many other parts of Iraq. Credit has been given, paradoxically, to the communal make-up of the area and the composition of the governorate council.²¹ Kirkuk has remained quiet, explained a local Chaldo-Assyrian police officer, because its Kurds, Arabs, Turkomans and Chaldo-Assyrians balance each other out and also because,

will be advocating for locating and distributing land to IDP returnees". IOM, "Tameem", September 2004.

¹⁹ A Turkoman expatriate in Turkey complained that Kurds had defaced and damaged two Turkoman statues in Kirkuk, were changing street and building names from Arabic to Kurdish and were putting up Kurdish flags. "This feels like occupation", he said. Crisis Group interview, Ankara, 28 October 2004. A Turkoman member of the Kirkuk governorate council insisted that the Azadi Hospital remains the Saddam Hospital. He accused the Kurdish parties that entered the city in April 2003 of "looting, vandalising institutions (including schools), confiscating properties, seizing the police and governorate buildings, and then taking control of the governorate council". Crisis Group interview with Khidr Ghaleb Kahyeh, Kirkuk, 2 November 2004.

²⁰ Hamid Afandi, the KDP's minister of peshmerga affairs in Erbil, was quoted as saying: "We are ready to fight against all forces to control Kirkuk. Our share is very little. We'll try to take a larger share". He complained that U.S. forces had thwarted Kurdish ambitions in Kirkuk. Richard A. Opiel, Jr., "Kurds seek to maintain a fragile autonomy", *International Herald Tribune*, 3 January 2005.

²¹ See Crisis Group Report, *Toward an Historic Compromise?*, op. cit., pp. 8, 11.

according to a Chaldo-Assyrian politician, there are no "Wahhabis" among its Arab population.²²

The Christian Chaldo-Assyrians play a pivotal role in reducing tensions. Considered non-threatening by the three larger, competing, communities, they have mostly remained on the sidelines, keeping a low profile and mediating when called upon.²³ "When the groups in Kirkuk cannot agree on something, they agree that a Christian should represent them", said a Western observer.²⁴ The seven Chaldo-Assyrians on the governorate council vote with whatever community threatens to be a minority on an issue, thus preventing controversial -- but also important -- decisions from being taken. When Arabs and Turkomans unite in the council, for example, the Chaldo-Assyrians tend to side with the Kurds. "We don't want to change the status quo", asserted one politician. "We will seek to maintain it at all cost. Kirkuk is a bomb about to go off and we don't want to be the trigger -- or the victims".²⁵

Opposition to the Kurdish bid for hegemony in Kirkuk has been defused by internal rifts within rival communities. Some Turkomans, for example, are represented by what they refer to as four "nationalist" parties united under the umbrella of the Iraqi Turkoman Front (ITF), a creation of Ankara that incorporates mostly (not exclusively) Sunni Muslims. It is eyed with suspicion by many Kirkuki Turkomans, who doubt the nationalist credentials of an organisation set up by a foreign power (see below). Although some Shiite Turkomans have joined the ITF, others have founded

²² Crisis Group interviews, Kirkuk, 2-3 November 2004. The "Wahhabis" are a fundamentalist strand of Sunni Islam originating in Saudi Arabia that has helped fire the anti-occupation insurgency in Iraq.

²³ "Kirkuk is an area of conflict between two major groups, Kurds and Turkomans, each claiming Kirkuk as their own", explained a Chaldo-Assyrian party official. "The Turkomans and Arabs are ganging up, and the Christians are watching. The conflict over Kirkuk is nationalist in character; the Christians are not part of it". Crisis Group interview with Dr. Srood Mattei, public relations official at the Erbil branch of the Assyrian Democratic Movement, Erbil, 2 November 2004.

²⁴ Crisis Group interview, Kirkuk, 3 November 2004.

²⁵ Crisis Group interview with Srood Mattei, Erbil, 2 November 2004. The late January 2005 elections may end this artificial arrangement that, against all odds, has survived for the past year and a half. Pragmatic, respected and independent leaders such as the governor, Abd-al-Rahman Mustafa, a Kurd, are unlikely to win a vote dominated by the parties. Crisis Group interview with a former official of the Coalition Provisional Authority, Amman, 23 September 2004, while the Chaldo-Assyrians, currently over-represented on the council, can expect the elections to "deal them a body blow". Crisis Group interview with a Western diplomat, Kirkuk, 3 November 2004.

their own political parties; their spiritual leader is Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Husseini al-Sistani, from whom they appear also to take their political cue.²⁶

The Arab "community" suffers from a sharp divide between Arabs indigenous to the area -- the Hadidi, the Obeid and the Jbour -- and those who were settled there by the Baathist regime. The former are Sunni Muslims, the latter predominantly Shiites from the south.

Native Kirkukis unanimously call on "imported" Arabs to surrender ill-gotten properties, and many agree they will have to "return to their places of origin", wherever these may be and regardless of whether they still have homes (in most cases, they appear not to) but they differ on the means and timetable by which they should leave. The Kurds are adamant they must go sooner rather than later, possibly with compensation and transportation provided, but certainly ahead of local elections, a census and a referendum.²⁷ Many indigenous Arabs and Turkomans, on the other hand, are willing to let the "imported" Arabs stay, pay rent (or buy property if they are able), provide cheap labour to fuel the building boom all hope is soon to come and, last but not least, vote so as to minimise Kurdish dominance.²⁸

Because of these schisms that cut across religion and ethnicity, the recent past has seen some tentative moves toward formation of alliances that seem odd on the surface, for example between the ITF (indigenous Sunni Turkoman proxies of Ankara) and representatives of the "imported" Shiite Arabs who otherwise have support from no one.²⁹ Non-Kurds share a fear of political marginalisation and absorption as minorities within a Kurdish entity, but so far their internal differences have kept them from forging strong coalitions.³⁰

The Kurds' moves to seize control -- de facto if not de jure -- are not limited to the city but extend throughout most of the governorate, which has re-assumed its original name "Kirkuk".³¹ Their objective is to undo the gerrymandering of the previous regime and revert to the pre-1975 boundaries, thereby maximising the Kurdish population of the governorate. This drive is most evident in the buffer zone separating the city from the Kurdish governorates of Erbil to the north and northeast and Suleimaniyeh to the east and southeast, a virtual no man's land that was emptied of its Kurdish population by the previous regime. Here non-Kurds (and the central government in Baghdad from a distance) have observed what they consider an alarming de facto shift of the "Green Line" southward and westward, including into Kirkuk governorate, as Kurdish IDPs return to rebuild their original villages.

The Green Line is the ceasefire line that divided regime-controlled Iraq from the Kurdish-held areas between October 1991 and April 2003. It marked off the territory in which the Kurdish parties established the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) following elections in May 1992. The uncontested re-settlement of these villages by Kurds who until recently were in temporary housing in Erbil or Suleimaniyeh governorates has de facto extended the KRG's authority. Non-Kurdish Kirkukis see this as deliberate and a stepping stone for absorption of Kirkuk city and the rest of the governorate into a future KRG-run entity called Kurdistan.³²

Moreover, PUK leader Jalal Talabani has consistently argued that the authority of the KRG should extend well beyond Kirkuk, into Diyala governorate, where, in the area of Khanaqin, the local branch of the PUK has been accused of "reverse ethnic cleansing" for expelling hundreds of Shiite Arab families in 2003.³³ It is these unilateral actions affecting the demographic balance that are driving up tensions in the region, compounded by the inflammatory rhetoric of the Kurdish parties, which creates expectations among the Kurds, and the attempts

²⁶ See previous Crisis Group reports on Iraq for discussion of the immense political power the avowedly non-political Sistani enjoys. Although no reliable figures are available, local sources indicate that some 40 per cent of the Turkoman community may be Shiites. The Shiite-based Turkoman Islamic Union joined the largely Shiite-based United Iraqi Alliance, which received the blessings of Ayatollah Sistani, ahead of the January 2005 elections.

²⁷ Elections to a new Kirkuk governorate council are scheduled for 30 January 2005.

²⁸ An expatriate Kirkuki Turkoman, for example, told Crisis Group: "We can live with the Arabs. They can stay as long as they surrender their ill-gotten properties". Crisis Group interview, Ankara, 28 October 2004.

²⁹ Crisis Group interview with a Western diplomat, Kirkuk, 3 November 2004.

³⁰ On 28 September 2004, an ad hoc coalition of fifteen political parties and organisations convened a "popular conference" in Salah al-Din governorate under the slogan

"Kirkuk for All Iraqis" and issued ten recommendations aimed at rolling back the progressive Kurdish take-over of Kirkuk. The organisations included Sunni Turkoman- and Sunni Arab-based parties, as well as tribal groups.

³¹ IOM, "Tameem", September 2004.

³² That said, the Kurdish IDPs who are returning to areas across the Green Line (as defined by its status in March 2003) are not permitted to vote for a new Kurdistan National Assembly in January 2005, even if they continue to consider the KRG their primary authority. Original and returning residents of Makhmour, for example, a sub-district centre in Erbil governorate that remained under the previous regime's control until April 2003, can vote for a new Erbil governorate council but not in the KRG elections.

³³ See Human Rights Watch, "Claims in Conflict", op. cit.

to manipulate the voting in Kirkuk governorate in advance of the elections.³⁴ The surface calm Kirkuk has enjoyed compared with other parts of Iraq, therefore, may well end. "The Kurds have the power to change the demographic balance in Kirkuk and make it the capital of an independent Kurdistan. They want to take the oil", said an angry local politician.³⁵ A Western diplomat in Ankara warned that:

The Kurdish leadership is playing with fire. Impetuous actions could set off a time bomb. A Kirkuk take-over would give a quantum leap to Kurdish ambitions. Either by design or as an unintended consequence, the Kurds could be precipitating an ethnic conflagration that could lead to the fracturing of Iraq and the emergence of a Kurdish state.³⁶

III. TURKEY'S THREATENING POSTURE

The changes in Kirkuk have set off alarm bells in Turkey, a country with its own large Kurdish population. Already in the run-up to the war in March 2003, Turkey was increasingly anxious over a looming Kurdish move on Kirkuk, made more likely by the Kurds' alliance with the U.S. and the fact that its own parliament had just blocked assistance to the U.S. in opening a northern front against Saddam Hussein.³⁷ Ever since, Turkish policy on Kirkuk, northern Iraq and the Kurds has largely been reactive.³⁸ Yet, Turkey knows it stands to lose much if the situation were to veer out of control.

A. VITAL INTERESTS AND SHIFTING RED LINES

When modern Turkey was constructed out of the Ottoman Empire's wreckage, it was forced to surrender all claims to its former "vilayet" of Mosul, which the ascendant British power, aware of the area's natural riches, attached to the new state of Iraq.³⁹ The result was not only that Kirkuk's oil wealth accrued to Iraq but also that the Kurdish nation -- to which a state was promised in the 1920 Treaty of Sèvres and then denied in the Treaty of Lausanne three years later -- was further partitioned.⁴⁰ Today, some 12 to 15 million Kurds live in Turkey, mainly the southeast, while an estimated 5 million live in Iraq, primarily in

³⁴ The Kurdish parties reportedly made their participation in the national elections conditional on the guarantee of having a majority in Kirkuk -- accomplished by giving displaced Kurds originally from Kirkuk but not currently living there the right to vote in the local elections -- and on the appointment of a Kurdish governor in Kirkuk. E-mail communication from a former official who remains involved in discussions on the political transition in Iraq, 18 January 2005; a recent report gives the number of such displaced Kurds approved to vote in the local elections as some 72,000, "Kirkuk Parties Upset at Kurdish Returnee Vote", Institute for War and Peace Reporting, 25 January 2005, at http://www.iwpr.net/index.pl?archive/irq/irq_99_7_eng.txt.

The Kurdish parties reportedly made these demands on the basis of the continued presence -- and voting power -- of "Arabisation" Arabs in Kirkuk, an unfair legacy of the past in the Kurds' eyes. In response, a number of Turkoman and Arab politicians in Kirkuk condemned the inclusion of "commuter voters" in the elections and threatened a boycott. See Edmund Sanders, "Vote stirs ethnic rivalries in Kirkuk", *Los Angeles Times*, 17 January 2005.

³⁵ Crisis Group interview with Khidr Ghaleb Kahyeh, Kirkuk, 2 November 2004.

³⁶ Crisis Group interview, Ankara, 27 October 2004.

³⁷ The Turkish Parliament voted on 1 March 2003 not to allow 60,000 U.S. troops to transit Turkey in order to open a front in northern Iraq. The decision greatly displeased Washington and, said a Turkish commentator, led to "a situation in which Turkey has no role in northern Iraq today. Turkey made itself irrelevant". Crisis Group interview with Can Paker, chairman of TESEV (the Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation), Istanbul, 26 October 2004. As evidence of the decline of Turkish influence in Iraq, a Western diplomat noted that Iraq's interim prime minister, Iyad Allawi, has yet to visit. "He already twice cancelled a trip. To Iraq, Turkey is irrelevant". Crisis Group interview, Ankara, 28 October 2004.

³⁸ "Turkey has no strategy to deal with the various possible scenarios in northern Iraq", said a Western diplomat. "It is all reactive". Crisis Group interview, Ankara, 28 October 2004.

³⁹ For a brief synopsis, see Charles Glass, "Diary", *London Review of Books*, 16 December 2004, at: <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v26/n24/glas01.html>.

⁴⁰ See Kerim Yildiz, *The Kurds in Iraq: The Past, Present and Future* (London, 2004), pp. 10-14. For a concise history of the Kurds, see David McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds* (London, 2000).

the north, their aspirations for statehood undiminished even as their expectation of realising it has dimmed.

The presence and role of the Iraqi state on its southern border and the frustrated nationalist ambitions of the Kurds straddling that border have been the twin strategic engines driving Turkey's approach to developments since 1991 and especially since early 2003. As the frontier of Europe and ultimate outpost of NATO, Turkey has looked westward for decades, hoping to be fully integrated into Western institutions. It has not wanted to get mixed up in problems in the Middle East, even as it has sought to expand trade and investment. When Iran and Iraq fought (1980-1988), Turkey was vigilant but neutral.⁴¹

In Ankara's view, Iraq's territorial integrity and strength minimised any threat from powerful regional actors such as Iran or Saudi Arabia. Iraq, explained a Turkish official, has been an "element of balance in the region", keeping other states at bay. Turkey's greatest fear is that Iraq either disintegrates or is dismantled. "Turkey itself has no aspiration to play that balancing role", the official said, though it might be left with no alternative.⁴²

Turkey's nightmare scenario involves either Iraq's descent into civil war, creation of a Kurdish state in the north, or a combination whereby the Kurds would escape the dissolving centre to secure their own region, bring in Kirkuk for reasons of history and economic viability, and establish an independent Kurdistan in fact if not name. The Kurds, however, are not unified, and in Ankara's view the PUK and KDP would likely fight for power in their new entity, creating chaos there as well. Moreover, Ankara fears the emergence of a Kurdish state, however unstable, might encourage Shiites in southern Iraq, who live above the country's largest oil reserves, to declare independence as well. This would revive the spectre of Shiite irredentism that caused much regional tension and instability in the early 1980s and accounted for the massive Arab support of Iraq in its war with Iran.⁴³

A Kurdish state in northern Iraq with Kirkuk as its economic centre would, in the words of one Turkish observer, result in "ten years of instability -- because of oil and because the economic success of such an entity will become a point of attraction for Kurds in Turkey".⁴⁴ "The government is afraid", another analyst said, "that the Kurds of Turkey, some of whom are sympathetic to [KDP leader Masoud] Barzani, will increasingly be inclined toward their Kurdish brethren in Iraq as the latter grow in economic importance via oil exploitation and trade. Prosperity in northern Iraq will contrast with poverty in southeastern Turkey."⁴⁵ The fear, in other words, is that Kurdish success would fan secessionist sentiments among the Kurds of southeastern Turkey.⁴⁶

For all these reasons, a Kurdish state that incorporates Kirkuk is a red line for Turkey.⁴⁷ It remains unclear whether an independent Kurdish state without Kirkuk, i.e., largely along the boundaries of the 1992-2003 KRG, would similarly be considered intolerable.⁴⁸ Turkish red lines have been shifting and may continue to do so as the country increasingly seeks to achieve EU

Turkey, it is better to keep Iraq whole". Crisis Group interview with a senior foreign ministry official, Ankara, 27 October 2004. However far-fetched such a scenario may be, it has widespread currency in the region and harks back to the time of the Iran-Iraq war, when Iraq's strongest supporters were Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Kuwait and other Gulf states, all of which expressed fear Iran would export revolutionary (Khomeinist) Shiite ideology to the region, especially to countries with their own Shiite populations. The latter are a minority in Saudi Arabia (but concentrated on the oil-rich Gulf coast) and a majority in Bahrain.

⁴⁴ Crisis Group interview with Ümit Özdağ, independent analyst and founder of the Centre for Eurasian Strategic Studies (ASAM), Ankara, 28 October 2004.

⁴⁵ Crisis Group interview with Osman Kavala, an independent analyst, Istanbul, 27 October 2004.

⁴⁶ One observer noted, for example, that the emergence of a Kurdish state in northern Iraq "could then lead to irredentist claims on the Kurdish-populated sectors of Turkey, or alternatively, could encourage some among Turkey's Kurds to become more insistent in their demands for independence". Kemal Kirisci, "Between Europe and the Middle East: The Transformation of Turkish Policy", *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, vol. 8, no. 1 (March 2004), at <http://meria.idc.ac.il/journal/2004/issue1/jv8n1a4.html>.

⁴⁷ "Kurdish independence is not a option for Turkey", said a senior Turkish official. Crisis Group interview, Ankara, 27 October 2004.

⁴⁸ A senior advisor to Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the chairman of the ruling Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi) and prime minister of Turkey, suggested an independent Kurdish state in northern Iraq might be acceptable but added that if it included Kirkuk, "that would be a problem" for Turkey. Crisis Group interview, Ankara, 27 October 2004.

⁴¹ Unlike other neighbours such as Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, Turkey did not become a conduit for arms, maintaining a consistently neutral stance.

⁴² Crisis Group interview with a senior foreign ministry official, Ankara, 27 October 2004.

⁴³ In the words of a Turkish official: "If Iraq falls apart, the Kurds will fight for power, causing instability in the north, while in the south, the Shiites will then set up a theocratic state that, by osmosis, will move closer to Iran; this, in turn, will resurrect Iranian rhetoric about spreading revolution among Shiite populations in the Gulf. This would be a problem for Israel, and all of this will lead to chaos. For both Israel and

membership (see below). A previous red line -- a federal arrangement fully integrated within the Iraqi state structure -- was quietly dropped as circumstances in Iraq changed after the war and it became clear Ankara did not have the required influence over developments across the border.

"It is true that a federal solution in northern Iraq is now acceptable to the government", a senior official said. "Our red line was a bit exaggerated. Today our main priority is to maintain Iraq's territorial integrity. This means that in our view federalism is okay". Kirkuk, he added, should have a special status with a mixed administration, arranged constitutionally and approved by popular referendum.⁴⁹ A Western diplomat agreed: "The Government of Turkey has made peace with the notion of a Kurdish entity in northern Iraq but it cannot abide an independent Kurdish state with control over energy resources [i.e., incorporating Kirkuk]. This would pose a mortal danger to the integrity of the Turkish state".⁵⁰

In this context, a statement by KDP leader Barzani in October 2004 that the Kurds would fight for their rights in Kirkuk was seen as particularly provocative in Turkey,⁵¹

⁴⁹ Crisis Group interview, Ankara, 27 October 2004. Before the war, Turkish commentators had been unanimous that "we will never accept a federal Iraq". Crisis Group interview with Bülent Akarcalı, chairman of the Turkish Democracy Foundation and a former minister, Ankara, 3 February 2003. "We only can accept Kurdish autonomy as based on the 1974 constitution", said another; "nothing more than that". Crisis Group interview with M. Faruk Demir, vice president of the Centre for Advanced Strategy, Ankara, 4 February 2003. "There was pre-war rhetoric about red lines", noted a Western diplomat, "but the Kurdish parties did enter Kirkuk and Mosul in April 2003, and the Turks did nothing. There was much joking about this in the Turkish media, because clearly it had all been empty bluff". Crisis Group interview, Ankara, 28 October 2004.

⁵⁰ "This may be an exaggerated vision", he added, "but this is how things are seen by Turkish generals". Crisis Group interview, Ankara, 27 October 2004.

⁵¹ The comment came during Barzani's visit to Ankara and was more nuanced than it has generally been quoted. He said, according to Agence France-Presse, 12 October 2004: "If anyone, if any regime or system wants to continue the Arabisation or oppression of the people of Kirkuk, we will defend their rights and we are ready to fight for them". He also said: "Our position is that the identity of Kirkuk is part of Kurdistan. But it is an Iraqi city. The promotion of co-existence and fraternity has to be a priority for everybody. We are working in that direction". A day earlier, upon arrival, he reportedly said that, "I still think that Kirkuk is the heart of Kurdistan but I am open to debate here". Agence France-Presse, 11 October 2004. Two months later he told a journalist: "Kirkuk is at the heart of the Kurds' identity; we are

where it was interpreted as a declaration of intent to fight for Kirkuk and heralding a move toward independence.⁵² Some dismissed Barzani's pronouncements as pre-election posturing,⁵³ and the Turkish government refrained from destructive counter-rhetoric.⁵⁴ Officials said they had reminded Barzani in Ankara that according to Iraq's Transitional Administrative Law (the TAL), the fate of Kirkuk is to be decided *after* the constitutional process. "We also told him that we have been lucky that so far there have been no ethnic clashes in Kirkuk, that none should be permitted, and that Turkey is committed to this. He promised us there would be none".⁵⁵ At the same time, reflecting perhaps the abiding power of the Turkish military in politics, rumours spread that 20,000 Turkish troops were at the border, ready to pounce should Barzani make good on his words.⁵⁶

very attached to it. For the moment we rely on negotiations but if the Arabs who were settled there do not leave, we will expel them". Quoted in Olivier Weber, "Kirkouk: Main basse sur l'or noir", *Le Point*, 23 December 2004 (Crisis Group translation from French).

⁵² Crisis Group interview with Sami Kohen, a journalist at the daily *Milliyet*, Istanbul, 26 October 2004, who remarked that "Turkey itself has no designs on Kirkuk; it is sticking to Kemal Atatürk's acceptance of the "misak-ı milli" [national boundaries], the post-Ottoman status quo. But it cannot countenance a Kurdish take-over of the city".

⁵³ Barzani was trying to steal votes from Jalal Talabani ahead of the end of January 2005 Kurdish regional elections, said Cengiz Çandar, a journalist with *Tercüman* daily and the TV-8 news channel. Crisis Group interview, Istanbul, 26 October 2004. An aid worker in northern Iraq characterised Barzani's statement as "a lot of grandstanding intending to gain advantage in negotiations". Crisis Group interview, Erbil, 2 November 2004. This argument, and Barzani's need to resort to such rhetoric, was overtaken by the Kurdish parties' decision in early December 2004 to run a joint electoral slate.

⁵⁴ In the words of a senior foreign ministry official, "Barzani is fuelling sentiments. This could be elections-related but it is dangerous. Kirkuk could be the fuse for ethnic clashes in Iraq, so we are not responding to Barzani". Crisis Group interview, Ankara, 27 October 2004. Prime Minister Erdoğan merely said: "Kirkuk is a city where all ethnic elements can settle. It is not a place where a certain party can claim control. We are in favour of Iraq's territorial integrity. We are against any ethnic group establishing control over another". Agence France-Presse, 12 October 2004.

⁵⁵ Crisis Group interview, Ankara, 27 October 2004.

⁵⁶ For a summary of Turkish press reporting, see Kathleen Ridolfo, "Turkey makes a plan for Iraq", Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 3 November 2004. It quotes the daily *Sabah* as editorialising that "There are national goals and causes that are more important than the EU ... for Kirkuk is in fact not the heart of Kurdistan but rather that of Turkey's Iraq policy". This rhetoric, which followed on the heels of Barzani's statements, was dismissed by *Milliyet* writer Sami Kohen, who pointed out that "until one year ago, Kirkuk was

B. PLAYING THE TURKOMAN CARD

Turkey's influence to counter the Iraqi eventualities it fears is limited, chiefly the threat of military intervention. True, certain lesser actions are conceivable as a way of pressuring the Kurds or punishing them for transgressing the Kirkuk red line. Ankara has a number of tools at its disposal to make life difficult for the Kurds, whose putative state would be landlocked and surrounded by hostile regimes. It has been seeking to mobilise regional opinion pre-emptively, just as it did during earlier anxiety attacks in 1992-1994 until it became clear that the Iraqi Kurdish parties, rather than building a state, were going to fight each other. It could close the border at Khabur to choke off the Kurdish economy, a measure that would be highly effective if Iran and Syria did the same.⁵⁷ It arguably could also shut down the oil pipeline connecting northern Iraq with the Mediterranean.⁵⁸

To increase its options, Ankara has developed a relationship with Iraq's Turkoman community, with whom its people, despite divergent origins,⁵⁹ express a strong national affinity. Although the precise number is not known, this ethnic group of Turkic stock is generally

considered Iraq's largest minority after the Kurds.⁶⁰ Turkomans have a dominant presence as professionals and traders in and around urban centres in the north, from Mosul down to Mandali. In fact, said one observer, "Kirkuk has always been known in Turkey as a Turkoman town",⁶¹ in which the Kurds are considered rural intruders.

Throughout the twentieth century, Turkoman unease over Kurdish urbanisation fuelled by the oil economy has been compounded by class resentment. After all, explained a Turkish journalist, the Turkomans, were the masters during Ottoman times -- senior military officers, urban traders and professionals -- whereas the predominantly rural Kurds were servants and foot soldiers.⁶² Kurds came to the towns initially as maids, guards and cleaners, remembered a prominent Turkoman elder: "They were the servants, the Afro-Americans of northern Iraq. They began to settle in the towns, and migration increased as the government bombed their villages".⁶³ In a move experienced as particularly hurtful by some, the British mandate authorities in 1926 changed the language of education from Turkish to Kurdish, "the language of the servants".⁶⁴

not even on the map" in Turkish policy debates. Crisis Group interview, Istanbul, 26 October 2004.

⁵⁷ Despite the signs of progressive Kurdish usurpation of power in Kirkuk, Iran has remained quiet. Turkish analysts attribute this to its perception that Turkey is doing the heavy lifting. Crisis Group interviews, Istanbul, 26 October 2004. Moreover, as a diplomat pointed out, while Iran also "would not accept a Kurdish take-over of Kirkuk, it does not have the Turkoman issue [see below] as a way in". Crisis Group interview, Ankara, 28 October 2004.

⁵⁸ If the Kurds take Kirkuk, predicted one commentator confidently, "Turkey will close the Kirkuk-Ceyhan pipeline". Crisis Group interview with Ümit Özdağ, Ankara, 28 October 2004. Others are doubtful: "The United States will never permit Turkey to close the border", declared a European diplomat. "Turkey's margin of manoeuvre in northern Iraq has been much reduced". Crisis Group interview, Ankara, 28 October 2004. He attributed this to the parliament's decision in March 2003 not to give the Americans passage across its territory during the war, but on the positive side he noted that this same decision also had drawn Turkey closer to Europe.

⁵⁹ Whatever their common ancestry, Iraq's Turkomans are said to hail from Central Asia, not Turkey, arriving as soldiers and employees of previous empires in areas that today are in Iraq. They settled in an arc stretching from the northwest (around Mosul) to points east of Baghdad, where they became senior military officers, craftsmen, traders and administrators in urban centres that dot vast fertile agricultural plains, mixing in with Kurdish, Assyrian and Arab populations. Turkomans have long had a strong presence in towns such as Mosul, Tel 'Afar, Kirkuk, Erbil, Altun Kupri, Daquq, Tuz Khurmatu, Taza Khurmatu, Kifri, Khanaqin and Mandali.

⁶⁰ Extrapolating from questionable sources (no reliable ones are available), Turkoman writers generally calculate a population of no more than 2 million Turkomans in 2002, 8 per cent of the Iraqi population. For example, see Ershad al-Hirmizi, *The Turkmen and Iraqi Homeland* (Istanbul, 2003). Other Turkomans put the number much lower, no more than 1.25 million. Crisis Group interview with Jawdat Najar, head of the Turkoman Cultural Association, Erbil, 6 June 2003.

⁶¹ Crisis Group interview with Osman Kavala, Istanbul, 27 October 2004. The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* and serious scholarly studies such as Hanna Batatu's seminal *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq* (Princeton, 1978) describe Kirkuk of the 1950s and 1960s as a predominantly Turkoman city with Arab and Kurdish populations.

⁶² Crisis Group interview with Cengiz Çandar, Istanbul, 26 October 2004.

⁶³ The British mandate authorities and successive Iraqi governments bombed Kurdish villages throughout the twentieth century as part of an effort to subdue an on-again off-again insurrection fuelled by what Kurds perceived as repressive and discriminatory government policies and by the "original sin" of statehood promised then denied.

⁶⁴ Crisis Group interview with Ihsan Doğramaçi, a Turkoman native of Erbil and founder of Bilkent University, Ankara, 27 October 2004. The language change he referred to was in the Kurdish regions. In Kirkuk, by contrast, Turkish was replaced by Arabic as the primary language of education and government. In 1950, in the dying years of the monarchy, use of Turkish in schools was banned. In 1970, the young Baath regime extended new cultural and language rights to Turkomans, then reneged (by Revolution Command

In the eyes of many observers, Ankara has used the Turkomans as its main entry point to protect vital interests in northern Iraq, manipulating Turkoman anger and anxiety over Kurdish encroachment to stir up emotions inside Turkey in support of military intervention. Turkey began paying attention to the Turkoman question only about ten years ago, after the Gulf War, a Turkish journalist said; at that point it "became ideological material for the right-wing in the country".⁶⁵ In the words of a Western diplomat, "It is not that Turkey's concern for the Turkomans is fabricated, but it is manipulated. They were silent about the Turkomans throughout the Saddam era and Arabisation. They never even made private démarches. Today, however, the issue resonates with the public and there is real pressure".⁶⁶

Ankara's principal instrument for raising the Turkoman question has been the Iraqi Turkoman Front (ITF), an organisation established by its security services in the mid-1990s and funded by the Turkish government.⁶⁷ The ITF has sought to gather Turkomans under a single umbrella by giving voice to their fears and by calling on Turkey to intervene.⁶⁸ According to a prominent member: "We want Turkish forces to enter Kirkuk because the Kurds will not withdraw. How can we ever accept that what is ours is taken from us? They will

Council decree 89) barely a year later, reverting to the Arabic curriculum and suppressing Turkoman cultural rights. Al-Hirmizi, *op cit.* See also, David McDowall, *op. cit.*, p. 172, for a brief discussion of the problematic implementation of Kurdish minority (including language) rights in the 1926 Anglo-Iraqi Treaty.

⁶⁵ Crisis Group interview with Murat Yetkin, Ankara representative of the daily *Radikal*, Ankara, 29 October 2004.

⁶⁶ Crisis Group interview, Ankara, 27 October 2004.

⁶⁷ The ITF was established in May 1995 and became a coalition at the International Turkoman Congress in Erbil in November 2002, incorporating four other Turkoman parties. Ihsan Doğramaçi, a wealthy Iraqi Turkoman businessman, educator and politician living in Ankara, told Crisis Group that he had given inspiration to the ITF's founding and established a foundation for Turkish government funds to be channelled to it. Crisis Group interview, Ankara, 27 October 2004.

⁶⁸ Some commentators have invoked the Cyprus parallel to question the wisdom of the government's approach to the ITF. According to Sami Kohen, leaders of the Turkish Cypriot community, whose nationalism had been stirred by the inflammatory rhetoric of Greek Cypriot leaders prior to partition, worked to build support for intervention within Turkey. The Cyprus lobby played an important role in Turkey's decision in 1974 to send troops to protect the island's Turkish minority, setting the basis for Turkey's international isolation on the Cyprus question and vastly complicating its quest to join the EU. Crisis Group interview, Istanbul, 26 October 2004.

never pull out of Kirkuk voluntarily, but if Turkey intervenes, the Kurds will run."⁶⁹

Given its foreign provenance, the ITF's role in northern Iraq has been controversial, not least among Iraqi Turkomans;⁷⁰ in Turkey, by contrast, the public does not appear aware of the government's role in fomenting trouble in northern Iraq, or perhaps does not care.⁷¹ For the Turkoman community, official Turkish sponsorship presents a conundrum. Unlike the Kurds, it has neither its own militia nor a dominant foreign power such as the U.S. to guarantee its safety,⁷² so it looks to Turkey as a protector of last resort.

At the same time, it acknowledges that the ITF is easily dismissed as foreign and that this taint carries over to the Turkoman population as a whole. "We need Turkey for protection", said an independent Turkoman activist. "But if we become a branch of the Turkish government, we

⁶⁹ Crisis Group interview with Khidr Ghaleb Kahyeh, Kirkuk, 2 November 2004. The ITF's supporters in Turkey seek a status for the Turkomans at least equal to that which the Kurds are expected to negotiate for themselves in the permanent Iraqi constitution. "If the Kurds get their own region, then so should the Turkomans", said one. "A solution that excludes the Turkomans is not a solution". Crisis Group interview with Ümit Özdağ, Ankara, 28 October 2004.

⁷⁰ Even many ITF members are rumoured to be dissatisfied with their own party. "Many ITF officials do not think like the ITF", said an independent Turkoman activist. "They want the salary [that party officials draw], and they also want to do something for the Turkomans, and there is currently no alternative." Crisis Group interview, Ankara, 28 October 2004. In fact, the only real political alternative at the moment appears to be the Turkoman Islamic Union, which as a Shiite-based coalition is less attractive to the predominantly Sunni membership of the ITF. Some Turkoman activists are thinking of establishing a Turkoman party representing a "third way", but these plans have yet to come to fruition. It should also be kept in mind that to the Turkomans in Kirkuk in April 2003, the ITF was a newcomer that had to prove itself. Until then, it had survived only in Erbil, where its activities were circumscribed by the KDP, and in Turkey, where it was cut off from its main sources of potential support.

⁷¹ According to Cengiz Çandar, the ITF was created and is tightly controlled by the Turkish Special Forces. "The fact that it is not an autonomous organisation but one that is subordinate to the Turkish military is an open secret to those who follow developments in the region, but it may not be obvious to the Turkish public". Crisis Group interview, Istanbul, 26 October 2004.

⁷² Additionally, Washington was not particularly pleased with the way the ITF dealt with the crisis in Tel 'Afar in September 2004, when it denounced the U.S. assault on the small Turkoman town as an attempt at ethnic cleansing carried out in cooperation with Washington's Kurdish allies. Crisis Group interview with a Western diplomat, Ankara, 28 October 2004.

will have no credibility in Iraq.⁷³ The chairman of the Kirkuk provincial council, Tahsin Kahyeh of the Turkoman Islamic Union, expressed concern that Turkey's sponsorship of the ITF might create the dynamic for military intervention, which he said he opposed: "I am against Turkish military intervention. We Iraqis have to solve our own problems. If Turkish forces enter Iraq, then so will Syrian and Iranian troops. We do need Turkish support but nothing more than that."⁷⁴

C. THE EVOLVING INTERVENTION DEBATE

In Turkey itself, sending troops across the border is generally viewed as a legitimate response to an impending or actual Kurdish take-over of Kirkuk that would -- in Turkish eyes almost by definition -- threaten the rights of its Turkoman population. In fact, the very construction of a Turkoman "issue" is rendering military intervention more likely, as popular mobilisation in Turkey in defence of Turkoman rights may generate the kind of pressures that the government, or the military, would be hard pressed to ignore.

Intervention also remains an option because Turkey has forces inside Iraq whose very presence and proximity to Kirkuk diminish the prospects for a negotiated solution and could lead to a military showdown. Diplomats say that 1,500 to 3,000 Turkish Special Forces are deployed in northern Iraq but that little is known about their mandate and activities.⁷⁵ Turkish soldiers entered the north in March 2003 but remained on the border,

ostensibly to prevent fleeing Kurds from crossing, as they had sought to do in 1991. Reportedly, some of these troops are now based near Mosul, Kirkuk and Tel 'Afar, and they could be reinforced should developments require.

Unsurprisingly, this presence has inflamed passions.⁷⁶ In a July 2003 incident that proved intensely embarrassing to Ankara, several Special Forces members were arrested by Kurdish police in Suleimaniyeh on suspicion of planning to assassinate the governor of Kirkuk. After that public relations debacle, the government wrested some control over policy in northern Iraq from the military,⁷⁷ but Turkey continued to pursue a military foothold in the north. A fresh opportunity arose in October 2003 as security in Iraq deteriorated and the U.S. looked to neighbouring states to contribute troops to a stabilisation force. Turkey's offer to send 10,000 was ratified by parliament but triggered angry denunciations by Kurdish leaders, including interim Foreign Minister Hoshiyar Zebari and other members of Iraq's Interim Governing Council, who accused it of designs on the oil fields of Mosul and Kirkuk.⁷⁸

During the events in Tel 'Afar in September 2004, where U.S. military action aimed at suppressing insurgents led to the death and displacement of civilians, Turkish forces in the area stayed on the sidelines despite the uproar in Turkey over the perceived "ethnic cleansing" of the town's Turkoman population.

These experiences suggest that the political cost of a Turkish expeditionary force in Iraq, ostensibly to protect Turkomans but in reality to prevent emergence of a Kurdish state, would be high and that the force would meet stiff resistance from battle-hardened

⁷³ Crisis Group interview, Ankara, 27 October 2004. The current government in Turkey, which is based on the Justice and Development Party, is reportedly not as close to the ITF as its predecessor, a coalition government that included strong nationalist elements.

⁷⁴ Crisis Group interview, Kirkuk, 2 November 2004. A Turkoman native of Kirkuk, Tahsin Kahyeh, also said: "There are historical ambitions toward Kirkuk, but we call it our city. We want Kirkuk to be for everyone, not dominated by any one group. Kirkuk governorate and Baghdad should have a special status in Iraq with a shared administration. This will guarantee that our rights are protected. But if Kirkuk is placed within Kurdistan, our rights will be violated....The Turkomans and Arabs of Kirkuk are anxious about their future. We want everyone to gain their rights but not at the expense of the rights of others....We need to emphasise the importance of living together [*ta'ayush*]".

⁷⁵ Crisis Group interview, Ankara, 28 October 2004. Agence France-Presse reported on 13 September 2004 that "Turkey keeps several thousand soldiers in northern Iraq". Turkish officials have suggested that at least 1,000 Turkish troops continue to be deployed in northern Iraq, primarily to fight the PKK. Seb Walker, "Turkish force in Iraq Kurdish zone disbanded", Reuters, 3 October 2004.

⁷⁶ Even before the war, Turkey had a military presence in northern Iraq, incurring resentment more than gratitude for keeping the Kurdish parties apart. On 31 October 1997, after three years of fighting, the KDP and PUK signed a ceasefire in the presence of representatives of Turkey, the UK and the U.S., as part of the "Ankara Peace Process". The agreement called for a Turkish force to enforce the ceasefire and monitor relations between the two Kurdish parties. The Peace Monitoring Force was headquartered in Erbil and staffed predominantly by local Turkoman and Chaldo-Assyrian soldiers trained and commanded by senior Turkish officers. The PMF was a thorn in the Kurds' side, as they saw it as a tool of Turkish intervention blessed with international legitimacy. With the war over in April 2003 and the Kurdish parties apparently reconciled, the latter declared there was no longer any justification for the PMF. Turkey had no option but to dissolve this small force in October 2004.

⁷⁷ Crisis Group interview, Istanbul, 27 October 2004.

⁷⁸ "Pragmatism prevails, so far", *The Economist*, 9 October 2003.

Kurdish fighters. Moreover, fundamental changes in Turkey's international profile, especially its growing relationship with the EU, would appear to militate against increased military involvement: Unless the U.S.-backed interim Iraqi government were to ask Turkey to intervene (an unlikely prospect), a decision to send troops across the border would anger its U.S. ally and jeopardise burgeoning EU ties.

Still, the presence of Turkish forces and the manipulation of the Turkoman factor give threats of military intervention a sense of looming reality by creating their own dynamic. There are many questions: if things in Kirkuk go wrong from Turkey's perspective, could the military resist powerful public pressures? Would the anticipated ramifications of an independent Kurdish state in northern Iraq with Kirkuk as its capital be of greater consequence to Ankara than the price it would have to pay for unilateral military action -- including international isolation and forfeiture of years of investment in prospective EU membership? Would the military leadership or civilian government decide which of Turkey's interests was more vital?

The government has cultivated a posture of studied ambiguity that leaves all options on the table. Some dismiss the talk of intervention as bluff and point to Turkish paralysis when the Kurdish parties' entered Kirkuk in April 2003. A diplomat commented:

Turkish adventurism is a thing of the past. Turkey knows it will not be tolerated. Previous threats of intervention in northern Iraq proved all to be bluff. There is much more civilian control over the military than in the past, and the military is regaining faith in Turkish politics. The military may have its own thoughts but not its own policy vis-à-vis Iraq.⁷⁹

Likewise, a gathering of Istanbul-based analysts maintained that "the right-wingers' call for Turkish intervention does not reflect the view of the Turkish military", and Turkey will "talk intervention" at every turn but realises full well that the cost of actually intervening would be too high -- "it would prove to be another Cyprus".⁸⁰

But this confidence is not universally shared, and government rhetoric continues to give rise to conflicting, at times worrying assessments, reflected, for example, in the contradictory appraisal of a respected Turkish commentator who insisted "there will not be military intervention" because "the majority in Turkey, including the military establishment, understand the risks", before warning that "if the Kurds seize Kirkuk and proclaim it the capital of Kurdistan, then the Turkish army might intervene, despite the obvious costs". There are very strong feelings in society and the military, he said. "There would be hesitation, but the military might be pushed into it".⁸¹

A Western diplomat concurred that the military may think it can get away with playing down the fate of a small predominantly Turkoman town whose status is otherwise uncontested (Tel 'Afar), but it could never ignore the "alien" take-over of a "Turkoman city" so laden with symbolism and rich in resources as Kirkuk.⁸²

Extreme actions might well trigger extreme reactions, even some that, on their face, would not appear rational and could harm Turkey's long-term interests. The government, according to a commentator, would do everything in its power to protect the Turkomans of Kirkuk if the Kurds moved to take over the city and would be "willing to bear the cost of its actions, just as in Cyprus..."⁸³ Declared a Western diplomat: "Self-inflicted damage is something the Turks are capable of".⁸⁴

D. THE INTERNATIONAL DIMENSION

Divided about what it might have to do in northern Iraq and aware of the dangers, Turkey has found the U.S., the only power able to help negotiate a peaceful solution to the Kirkuk question, infuriatingly passive. To Turkey, Washington's policy in northern Iraq has been the absence of policy. Preoccupied with the crisis in the rest of the country,⁸⁵ beholden to the Kurds for war-time

fully from the "mess" it created by intervening in Cyprus, they say, and with EU membership in prospect, the stakes today are much higher.

⁸¹ Crisis Group interview with Sami Kohen, Istanbul, 26 October 2004.

⁸² Crisis Group interview, Ankara, 28 October 2004.

⁸³ Crisis Group interview with Murat Yetkin, Ankara, 29 October 2004. Although the road is open to resolution of the Cyprus question, the process has been long and extremely painful for Turkey, and the conflict endures.

⁸⁴ Crisis Group interview, Ankara, 27 October 2004.

⁸⁵ Said an analyst: "The Americans are resistant to pressure concerning the Kirkuk question, for example to become a more forceful mediator. In Iraq, they are looking for a way to get out". Meeting, Istanbul, 26 October 2004.

⁷⁹ Crisis Group interview, Ankara, 28 October 2004.

⁸⁰ Meeting, 26 October 2004. The Cyprus parallel, invoked to warn against the ITF's role in stirring up Turkish support for Iraq's Turkoman population, also presents itself to many anti-interventionist commentators as the nightmare scenario Turkey should wish to avoid: Turkey has yet to extricate itself

assistance and hesitant to put a brake on the KDP and PUK whose secular ideology may be the only way to contain the growing Islamist trend among Kurds, the U.S. has not pursued a proactive approach to reducing tensions in Kirkuk (after establishing the governorate council in 2003).⁸⁶ This has meant the Kurds can make changes on the ground without serious resistance. When confronted with visible manifestations of Kurdish intentions, U.S. authorities in Kirkuk have sought without much success to reassure the other communities that changes such as substitution of Kurdish names for Arabic ones are temporary and reversible.⁸⁷ They have, through the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), allocated at least \$50 million for Kirkuk IDP issues,⁸⁸ but they lack an overall plan. At the moment no serious U.S. action on Kirkuk is envisioned.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ A former CPA official disputed this, saying Kirkuk had been very much on the occupation authority's radar, and officials on the ground had spent "incredible amounts of Coalition time ... discussing Kirkuk and the various options for keeping the place calm", facilitating dialogue between the communities, negotiating short-term agreements to land disputes and putting pressure on the Kurdish leadership to stop excesses in Kirkuk by reining in party activists. "Putting together the Council, refreshing it, and keeping it together also took a lot of diplomatic effort behind the scenes". After the transfer of sovereignty in June 2004, the U.S. and UK established embassy branches (consulates) in Kirkuk "in order to ensure international oversight of developments on the ground". E-mail communications, 7 and 12 January 2005. At the end of his tenure, in June 2004, CPA administrator Paul Bremer announced establishment of the Kirkuk Foundation, intended as a forum for community and political leaders "to develop a common vision for the Province of Kirkuk" and "help set the conditions for long-term peace and stability in the Province". Speech by L. Paul Bremer III, Kirkuk, 22 June 2004. Bremer allocated \$100 million for this purpose (half from KRG oil-for-food funds, half from the Development Fund of Iraq), but the decision was caught in the early transfer of sovereignty -- suddenly moved up from 30 June to 28 June -- and rejected by the interim government, which kept the funds. Crisis Group interview with an Iraqi involved in the Kirkuk Foundation, Amman, 7 December 2004. In January 2005 Iraq's deputy prime minister, Barham Salih, announced the release of \$100 million, which he said were earmarked for development projects in Kirkuk. Agence France-Presse, 19 January 2005.

⁸⁷ Crisis Group interview with an independent Turkoman activist, Ankara, 28 October 2004.

⁸⁸ Crisis Group interview with an international aid worker, Erbil, 2 November 2004. USAID has allocated \$50 - \$70 million for emergency needs and reintegration of IDPs and other vulnerable groups in northern Iraq, particularly Kirkuk. The grant is to be administered by USAID's Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) with support of its Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) working through NGO partners.

⁸⁹ Sources in Washington say there is awareness of the issues but no consensus over whether the U.S. should have a strong

Turkey distrusts U.S. motives in Iraq -- many Turks believe the war was aimed at safeguarding its oil supplies⁹⁰ -- and privately accuses it of dithering and double standards. As summed up by a Western diplomat:

Turkey fears that the U.S. will wake up to the Kirkuk problem when it is too late. Turkey was a key component of Operation Northern Watch⁹¹ but now it is outside everything. And the government cannot understand why Washington, with all its talk of a war on terror, has taken no action against the PKK, some 1,500 of whose fighters may have crossed into Turkey since June. Now the government has nothing to sell to Turkish public opinion. Its hand may be forced by the notion that it cannot rely on the Americans, given their inaction on the PKK, the Tel 'Afar operation and, if anything, a belated recognition of the importance of Kirkuk and its Turkoman population to Turkey.⁹²

policy on Kirkuk or leave the matter to the Iraqis to solve. E-mail communication, October 2004. Moves do seem afoot to change Washington's policy toward reversing Arabisation. U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage declared in Ankara in January 2005: "There are things that have to be corrected in the transitional administrative law...to redress these wrongs for *all* those who are dispossessed", quoted in *Daily Star*, 4 January 2005, emphasis added. This is an apparent reference not only to the Kurds and Turkomans but also to the "imported" Arabs in Kirkuk, who stand to become expulsion victims without due process in the absence of effective international oversight. The relevant article (58) in the Transitional Administrative Law (TAL), Iraq's interim constitution, outlines steps to "remedy the injustice caused by the previous regime's practices in altering the demographic character of certain regions, including Kirkuk". (The TAL is available at: <http://www.cpa-iraq.org/government/TAL.html>.) The article is ambiguous, open to conflicting interpretation and might lead to violations of the rights of the "imported" Arabs, just as the U.S. is trying to mend its severely frayed relations with the Sunni Arab community in Iraq. A Western diplomat in Iraq told Crisis Group that U.S. failure to question article 58 would be tantamount to accepting it in the eyes of many, and the U.S. could "not be seen to be endorsing ethnic cleansing" of Arabs from Kirkuk. Crisis Group interview, Amman, 8 December 2004. Tinkering with the TAL, however, could open a Pandora's box of claims over other disputed articles and even lead to the document's demise -- if it is not abandoned altogether by the incoming national assembly after the 30 January 2005 elections.

⁹⁰ Gareth Jenkins, "Turkish parliament votes to send troops to Iraq", *Al-Ahram Weekly*, 9 October 2003.

⁹¹ Operation Northern Watch was the successor to Operation Provide Comfort (1991-1996), the effort by the Gulf War allies to enforce the no-fly zone above the 36th parallel in Iraq. See http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/northern_watch.htm.

⁹² Crisis Group interview, Ankara, 28 October 2004.

The Tel 'Afar operation did much to fray relations. When U.S. forces launched their air and ground assault on 9 September 2004 to root out insurgents, Foreign Minister Abdullah Gül publicly condemned the "excessive use of force against civilian populations" and threatened that if the operation continued, Turkey would "end its partnership on all areas concerning Iraq".⁹³ While the operation incited domestic emotions, these never built up sufficiently to force Ankara's hand.

In light of the assault on Tel 'Afar, however, Washington's inaction on the PKK has hurt all the more in Turkey, opening it to criticism of a double standard in pursuit of an ostensibly anti-Turkish agenda. The U.S. has long considered the PKK a "terrorist" organisation and has supported Turkish efforts to defeat it militarily, including through major infusions of military hardware, despite gross violations of human rights committed by Turkish troops in the country's southeast.⁹⁴ After the capture of its leader Abdullah Öcalan in Kenya in February 1999, the PKK became a much less effective fighting force and soon sought refuge among the Kurds of northern Iraq, where it remained, isolated and contained, in virtual exile and observing a unilateral ceasefire.⁹⁵ In June 2004, however, renamed Kongra-Gel (Kurdistan People's Congress), it denounced government failure to take promised conciliatory moves, declared the July 2003 amnesty unacceptable and abrogated the ceasefire.⁹⁶ Soon PKK fighters were observed trickling back into Turkey to conduct insurgent activity.⁹⁷

Turkey had counted on the U.S. to match words with action and send troops to defeat the PKK just as it routed the fighters of Ansar al-Islam in the Halabja area in March 2003. In advance of a visit to Turkey in June

2004, President George Bush promised assistance to the Turkish and Iraqi governments to crack down on the organisation, declaring: "We will work together to deal with the PKK. We're after terrorists and once we declare a group a terrorist group, we mean it".⁹⁸ But the U.S. has not made good on its promises. Whatever the reason -- concern about destabilising one of the few peaceful parts of Iraq, belief that the rebels are relatively harmless for now, need to deploy elsewhere in Iraq⁹⁹ -- this has further stoked theories about Washington's motives. A commentator asked rhetorically:

Will the Americans harm Turkey's interests? They have been doing so over the past two years. The Americans want Iraq's oil and they want a secular Shiite state in the south and a Kurdish state in the north. They don't care about the middle state for Sunni Arabs, but in effect there will be three Iraqs. Is this paranoid? I do not think so. There is a government in the United States that thinks in ideological and religious terms, and the possibility of partitioning Iraq has been raised publicly.¹⁰⁰

In the longer run, Turkish leadership is counting heavily on EU membership to resolve its Kurdish predicament -- in both Turkey and northern Iraq. Its candidacy, for which the U.S. is a staunch advocate, received a major boost on 17 December 2004 when the EU voted to open accession negotiation (on 3 October 2005).¹⁰¹ Although

⁹³ Agence France-Presse, 13 September 2004.

⁹⁴ See Human Rights Watch, "Weapons Transfers and Violations of the Laws of War in Turkey", New York, November 1995, at <http://www.hrw.org/reports/1995/Turkey.htm>. Human Rights Watch also documented serious abuses by the PKK.

⁹⁵ It is estimated that some 5,000 PKK fighters are based in the Qandil mountain range on the border with Iran east of the town of Qala Dizeh in Suleimaniyeh governorate, their movements controlled by the PUK.

⁹⁶ In July 2003 the government adopted a partial amnesty for PKK militants wishing to return to Turkey. It excluded senior commanders and required those turning themselves in to provide information on those remaining behind. Of the 3,350 fighters who took advantage, 2,410 were already in Turkish detention. The majority of those in the mountains ignored it. E-mail communication from a Turkish researcher, 10 January 2005.

⁹⁷ There has been "an up tick in PKK activity" in south eastern Turkey since June 2004, said a Western diplomat. Crisis Group interview, Ankara, 27 October 2004.

⁹⁸ "Bush Pledges To Help Turkey, Iraq Against PKK Kurd Rebels", Dow Jones, 25 June 2004.

⁹⁹ General John Abizaid, head of the U.S. Central Command, stated after a meeting of Turkish, Iraqi and U.S. officials in Ankara in early 2005, that, "our troops have a lot of work to do [in Iraq] along with the Iraqi security forces, and we agree that, over time, we must deal with the PKK". Quoted in Susan Sachs, "US won't aid Turks' quest against Kurds", *International Herald Tribune*, 13 January 2005. Iraq's deputy foreign minister, Hamid al-Bayati, likewise suggested that, "We discussed military measures but...we are now at a stage of trying to secure the election [in Iraq]....Then we will have future meetings, but eventually, yes, we will take military actions". Quoted in Sibel Utku Bila, "Iraq, Turkey, U.S. discuss tackling Kurdish rebels", Agence France-Presse, in *Daily Star*, 12 January 2005.

¹⁰⁰ Crisis Group interview with Ümit Özdağ, Ankara, 28 October 2004.

¹⁰¹ Turkey first concluded an association agreement with the European Economic Community in December 1964. It applied for EC membership in April 1987. In January 1996 the European Union and Turkey formed a customs union and three years later, in December 1999, the EU accepted Turkey as a candidate member. In 2002 the EU promised to start membership negotiations once Turkey satisfied a preliminary set of criteria. On 6 October 2004, the European Commission advised the European Council that Turkey had "sufficiently fulfilled" these political criteria and recommended that

those negotiations are open-ended, with no guaranteed result, they are a major psychological reassurance that the impoverished and disaffected Kurds in the southeast may be more likely to turn toward Europe, with its promises of employment, trade and investment, and away from the lure of secessionism fed by their kin's progress across the border in Iraq.¹⁰² The only realistic response the government has to its Kurdish quandary (on both sides of the border), said a close observer, is EU accession, "because this will reduce the nationalist aspirations of the Kurds in Turkey".¹⁰³

But EU membership, should it occur, is many years away; even its increased prospects will do little to prevent chaos in northern Iraq should the Kurdish parties withdraw from the central government in Baghdad (either because constitutional negotiations collapse over irreconcilable differences about federalism and Kirkuk, or because the central government itself collapses under the weight of the insurgency). Such a move would almost certainly be accompanied by a power grab in Kirkuk, which would likely trigger a civil war between the local communities. Moreover, the old KDP-PUK rivalry might then well degenerate into a fight over spoils. In the final analysis, Ankara remains dependent on U.S. goodwill and good sense, the strength of Iraq's governing institutions during the transitional period and, last but not least, its own good relations with the Iraqi Kurdish leadership.

accession negotiations be opened, leading to the decision on 17 December 2004 to do so. Turkey is not expected to enter the EU before 2015 at the earliest. See websites of the Delegation of the European Commission to Turkey, <http://www.deltur.cec.eu.int/english/eu-turkey.html>, and the Embassy of Turkey in the U.S., <http://www.turkishembassy.org/governmentpolitics/foreignrEU.htm#5>.

¹⁰² Opinion polls in Turkey indicate that 87 per cent of its Kurdish population support EU accession, against 78 per cent of its Turkish-only-speaking population. Cited in Michael Emerson and Nathalie Tocci, "Turkey as Bridgehead and Spearhead: Integrating EU and Turkish Foreign Policy", *Turkish Policy Quarterly* (Fall 2004), p. 184.

¹⁰³ Crisis Group interview with Osman Kavala, Istanbul, 27 October 2004. Another observer agreed: "Accession is the key because then the Kurds of Turkey will stop looking at northern Iraq as a model". Crisis Group interview with Murat Yetkin, Ankara, 29 October 2004. Again others have disparaged this notion: "No one is going to invest in the south east. All of this has been tried. The Kurds of Turkey will have to move west [to Istanbul]; that's where their future lies". Crisis Group interview with Ümit Özdağ, Ankara, 28 October 2004.

IV. NAVIGATING A WAY OUT

At the mercy of forces it cannot control, Turkey is anchoring its strategy toward the Iraq crisis in commitment to the political process in Baghdad,¹⁰⁴ including a negotiated solution to the Kirkuk question between all Iraqi stakeholders. It also banks on progress in accession talks with the EU to reduce its Kurdish population's appetite for secession. Still, it would be foolhardy to assume away the possibility of military intervention should there be another wrong turn in Iraq and the country disintegrate or Kurds seek to take over Kirkuk as a stepping stone to an independent state.

If anything, the experience so far in post-Saddam Iraq suggests the wrong course is at least as likely to be taken as the right one. Stabilisation is receding in the face of growing Sunni Arab alienation and a spreading insurgency. Washington's attempt at nation-building has been fraught with debilitating misjudgements, which have undermined the legitimacy of the enterprise.¹⁰⁵ Rising bitterness among Iraqi Arabs over perceived Kurdish arrogance and Kurdish anger over a perceived betrayal by parties that in exile had promised support for federalism but changed their mind in power augur poorly for negotiations over the status of the Kurds and Kirkuk.¹⁰⁶ The international community remains deeply divided over Iraq, its involvement in economic and political reconstruction lacklustre, uneven and hobbled by insecurity.¹⁰⁷ Those who feel themselves at the losing end, especially the city's Arabs and Turkomans, consider that the dramatic changes in

¹⁰⁴ For example, Foreign Minister Abdullah Gül expressed strong support for elections in Iraq in January 2005 and underlined the need for them to be as inclusive as possible, certainly not leaving out the Sunni Arabs. See "Turkey, U.S. and Iraq to discuss tackling Kurdish PKK rebels", *Daily Star*, 4 January 2005.

¹⁰⁵ See Crisis Group Middle East Report N°34, *What Can the U.S. Do in Iraq?*, 22 December 2004.

¹⁰⁶ Bitterness is particularly evident among Islamist Shiite leaders, who have referred to the Kurds as "un-Iraqi" in their demands for geographic federalism. E-mail communication from a former official who remains involved in discussions on the political transition in Iraq, 18 January 2005. A senior member of the Shiite-based United Iraqi Alliance, to the contrary, expressed a degree of optimism about negotiations with the Kurds over a federal solution, which he insisted would have to be administrative, not geographic, in nature, but added that, "only the United States can influence the Kurds". Crisis Group interview, 20 December 2004.

¹⁰⁷ See Crisis Group Middle East Report N°30, *Reconstructing Iraq*, 2 September 2004.

Kirkuk are getting little attention. This perception may give rise to further anger, violence and chaos.¹⁰⁸

Turkey needs stability in Iraqi Kurdistan (whatever its eventual status), and the only way it can facilitate this is to work closely with the Iraqi Kurdish leadership to promote trade and funnel investment to the region. Such an arrangement would be based on mutually compatible interests: Turkey needs good relations with the Kurds to prevent chaos in the north; a landlocked, vulnerable Kurdish entity may have little choice but to rely on Turkey for protection.¹⁰⁹ Faced with the choice between a chaotic north or a stable entity controlled by the Kurdish parties (even if independent), Turkey would opt for stability, predicted a Turkish commentator.¹¹⁰

To some Turkish businesspeople, investments in northern Iraq make sense because the expectation is that oil will give Iraqi Kurds, unlike Kurds in Turkey, the ability to pay off loans.¹¹¹ Iraqi-Turkish economic cooperation has increased over the past year, and Kurds stand to gain, given their presence on the border. In November 2003 Turkey and Iraq signed an electricity cooperation protocol¹¹² and in August 2004 they discussed water sharing and opening a second border crossing,¹¹³ while concluding the first post-war contract

for export of northern crude oil from Kirkuk.¹¹⁴ Over 1,000 Turkish firms are active in Iraq, primarily in construction and transport, with Turkish trucks bringing in tons of goods for the U.S. military. Bilateral trade is believed to have reached \$2 billion in 2004 and expected to be \$5 billion in 2005.¹¹⁵ With construction of the new airport terminal and control tower in Erbil near completion, the KDP and Turkey started negotiations over flights from Istanbul to northern Iraq.¹¹⁶ Turkey's relations with the two Kurdish leaders, Masoud Barzani and Jalal Talabani, have become, if not warm, at least business-like, sometimes even cordial, despite the rhetoric and conflicting viewpoints.¹¹⁷

Given relative tranquillity in Kurdish areas and the economic boom underway, there is potential for significant expansion of relations but more could be done. Businesspeople complain that too little investment has flowed to the Kurdish region.¹¹⁸ "If Turkey realises it is better to have a federal Kurdish entity on its border than chaos, they are not acting on this insight. The only Turk interested in northern Iraq is Kursat Tuzmen, the minister of foreign trade", said a diplomat who attributed reluctance to develop more intimate political and economic relations to a history that has made it difficult

¹⁰⁸ In the words of a Turkoman native of Kirkuk, an accomplished professional: "I am a peaceful man but now I have started to change my mind. We are talking with all sides, but there have been no positive actions. Disappointments will turn to hatred and then lead to terrorism. We all hated Saddam, but at least there was security". Crisis Group interview, Ankara, 28 October 2004.

¹⁰⁹ "We told Barzani [in October 2004]: 'You can only come to us for protection, just like in the past'", said a senior foreign ministry official. Crisis Group interview, Ankara, 27 October 2004. A Western diplomat agreed: "The Kurds will need Turkey. They will inevitably be thrown back to the Turks for protection if they declare a state, because separation will be ugly in Iraq". Crisis Group interview, Ankara, Istanbul, 27 October 2004.

¹¹⁰ Crisis Group interview with Sami Kohen, Istanbul, 26 October 2004. He added that debate is beginning in Turkey over whether its interests would be served better by being "the midwife of Kurdish independence in northern Iraq" rather than by blocking it. He indicated, however, that this was still a debate on the margins, made possible only by movement toward EU accession, and that some would like to see the Kurds fight each other as evidence for their argument that a Kurdish state would not be viable and therefore an uncertain bet for Turkey. He also made clear that those favouring a proactive Turkish role in Kurdish statehood could only succeed if the debate remains an internal Turkish one and the notion is not seen as a Western imposition.

¹¹¹ Crisis Group interview, Istanbul, 26 October 2004.

¹¹² Anatolia News Agency, 12 November 2003.

¹¹³ Agence France-Presse, 17 August 2004.

¹¹⁴ Negotiated by Iraq's State Oil Marketing Organisation and Turkey's state oil refiner Tupras, it involved the sale of 2 million barrels of Kirkuk crude per month from September through December 2004. *Lloyd's List*, 31 August 2004. A tug of war is developing in the Kurdish region over who has the authority to sign oil deals -- the Kurdish parties or the central government through its State Oil Marketing Organisation (SOMO, an agency under the Ministry of Oil). Woodside Petroleum, based in Australia, signed a six-month agreement with SOMO effective from 12 November 2004 to study the Taqtaq oil field east of Kirkuk. Analysts see it as a response by the Iraqi government to a contract signed between Det Norske Oljeselskap, a Norwegian company, and the Kurdistan Regional Government in July 2004, permitting DNO to explore an area north of the Taqtaq field. The DNO agreement prompted the interim government to send out a message that all oil and gas contracts must be negotiated with it in order for companies to be considered for future contracts. The issue of control over mineral resources is to be decided during the constitutional process. E-mail communication with an oil industry expert, 21 December 2004.

¹¹⁵ The source is Turkey's foreign trade minister Kursat Tuzmen, quoted by Agence France-Presse, 17 August 2004.

¹¹⁶ *Turkish Daily News*, 11 November 2004.

¹¹⁷ This is a point argued by Cengiz Çandar, "Turkish-Kurdish Rapprochement Despite the Americans", *Turkish Daily News*, 23 June 2004.

¹¹⁸ Crisis Group interview, Istanbul, 26 October 2004. The primary investors so far, this source lamented, have been Israelis, who have shown a greater willingness to take risks.

for Turkey to countenance the Kurds as equal partners: "Turkey will have to walk through its Kurdish shadow".¹¹⁹

For a qualitative improvement in relations, a number of steps will have to be taken by both sides to change the atmosphere and establish mechanisms to head off emerging conflicts.

First and foremost, both should halt inflammatory rhetoric, which, even when it has a domestic political purpose, nourishes suspicions and may create its own dangerous dynamic.¹²⁰ Secondly, Turkey should cease financial support of the ITF. This would reduce the likelihood of using the Turkoman issue to justify military intervention, and thereby reduce the likelihood of intervention itself. It would also allow the ITF to develop roots in the Turkoman community untainted by foreign association. The Kurdish leadership should exercise greater restraint in Kirkuk, principally by handing control of local government over to the governorate council that is to be elected at the end of January 2005 and by conditioning its people for an eventual compromise solution.¹²¹

The interests of both also would be served by appointment of a UN special rapporteur for Kirkuk. The Kurdish leadership favours a smooth return of Kirkuki Kurds to their places of origin and is wary of the international community's involvement, which it suspects of siding with the Iraqi government in seeking to block an advanced degree of Kurdish self-rule. Ankara fears Kurdish expansionism under the guise of IDP return and worries about the rights of the ethnic Turkoman population.¹²² The situation cries out for international

oversight; a U.N. rapporteur could help reduce tensions by listening to all sides and monitoring Iraqi government actions to rectify past injustices, provide housing, schooling and health services for returning IDPs, promote economic development and build non-sectarian institutions, especially police.¹²³ Contingent on decisions during the constitutional process, an expanded UN brief could be considered, possibly a supervisor with power to impose regulations, introduce multi-ethnic police and courts, and establish other services, backed by donor funding.¹²⁴

The international community itself would benefit from a high-level neutral monitor in Kirkuk, as it needs better information about daily developments to forge policy. For now, it faces the unenviable choice, stemming from inertia, of either endorsing "reverse" ethnic cleansing -- by failing to block steady Kurdish pressure on Kirkuk's other communities, especially "imported" Arabs -- or ratifying past ethnic cleansing -- by failing to facilitate IDP return and reverse the other practices associated with Arabisation. With timely on the ground information, it could explore a middle course involving accommodation of rival demands that is based on the rule of law, due process and protection of human rights.¹²⁵

Finally, Turkey, which now anticipates negotiations over EU entry, might consider ways of alleviating pressures in the southeastern part of the country by offering a broader amnesty to PKK fighters that would have to include the insurgent leadership in northern Iraq and should not require those who surrender to inform on comrades.¹²⁶ Removal of PKK/Kongra-Gel fighters

¹¹⁹ Crisis Group interview, Ankara, 28 October 2004.

¹²⁰ Dialogue between the government of Turkey and the Kurdish leadership "could yield a win-win situation", said Sami Kohen of *Milliyet*, "but for this to succeed, the rhetoric must stop". Crisis Group interview, Istanbul, 26 October 2004.

¹²¹ In April 2004, Crisis Group called on the Kurdish leadership, inter alia, to start preparing the Kurdish public for a compromise solution on Kirkuk and Kurdish national aspirations in line with what senior officials had indicated to Crisis Group was acceptable, to relinquish control over the directorates in Kirkuk and to cooperate in an equitable redistribution of power under the leadership of the governorate council and interim government in Baghdad. Crisis Group Report, *Toward an Historic Compromise?*, op. cit., p. ii.

¹²² This concern was echoed by Tahsin Kahyeh, the Turkoman chairman of the Kirkuk governorate council: "There is a big problem with the displaced Kurds coming to Kirkuk. We don't have good figures and while they say they are originally from Kirkuk, we don't know if this is true. This would need to be investigated by an independent committee". Likewise, in the more immediate future, he observed, there is urgent need for an expanded UN role: "The Kurds want Arabs out and displaced Kurds in before the elections, and there are lots of

fears of fraud -- that people will be allowed to vote who are not originally from Kirkuk. This means that the UN will need to play a significant monitoring role". Crisis Group interview, Kirkuk, 2 November 2004.

¹²³ Article 58(B) of the Transitional Administrative Law anticipates a possible UN role in Kirkuk, though in a more limited fashion than described here, by calling on the organisation to appoint a "distinguished international person" as arbitrator in the event the Presidency Council is unable to agree unanimously on a set of recommendations on redressing the previous regime's manipulation of administrative boundaries and is unable to agree on a neutral arbitrator itself.

¹²⁴ A former CPA official invoked a similar mechanism designed for the city of Brcko in the former Yugoslavia and warned that if such an arrangement was not put in place in Kirkuk, "there will be a big massacre." Crisis Group interview, Amman, 23 September 2004.

¹²⁵ A subsequent Crisis Group report based on ongoing research in Kirkuk will discuss the specifics of such an approach.

¹²⁶ This suggestion was made by Osman Kavala, an independent analyst who works with an organisation in Diyarbakir in south eastern Turkey, Anadolu Kültür, to promote cultural exchange and reconciliation. See

from the destabilising equation in northern Iraq would enhance confidence between Ankara and the Kurdish parties and could set the stage for full withdrawal of Turkish forces.

The U.S., which remains Turkey's strategic ally, and the EU both have an interest in dissuading the government from counter-productive actions in northern Iraq and encouraging it to play a constructive role in an increasingly volatile situation. They should do so by working proactively to resolve the Kirkuk question, strengthening relations between the government in Ankara and the Iraqi Kurdish leadership, and promoting investment in southeastern Turkey (so as to give the Kurdish population material evidence of the benefits it stands to gain from Turkish accession to the EU). In so doing, they would send a powerful signal to Turkey that they are fully committed to addressing its legitimate security concerns. This would give the government the confidence it needs to develop strong political and economic bonds with the Kurdish leadership in northern Iraq and, through that relationship, be in a position to exert a positive influence over events in Kirkuk. That would protect vital Turkish interests much more effectively than the increasingly hollow, but persistently destabilising, threat of military intervention.

Ankara/Amman/Brussels, 26 January 2005

APPENDIX A
MAP OF IRAQ



The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

APPENDIX B

ABOUT THE INTERNATIONAL CRISIS GROUP

The International Crisis Group (Crisis Group) is an independent, non-profit, multinational organisation, with over 100 staff members on five continents, working through field-based analysis and high-level advocacy to prevent and resolve deadly conflict.

Crisis Group's approach is grounded in field research. Teams of political analysts are located within or close by countries at risk of outbreak, escalation or recurrence of violent conflict. Based on information and assessments from the field, it produces analytical reports containing practical recommendations targeted at key international decision-takers. Crisis Group also publishes *CrisisWatch*, a twelve-page monthly bulletin, providing a succinct regular update on the state of play in all the most significant situations of conflict or potential conflict around the world.

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A Time to Lead: The International Community and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, Middle East Report N°1, 10 April 2002

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