

## **The Iraqi Liberation and Turkmen's Hopes and Disappointments**

Dr. Muzaffer Arslan (Nov. 20, 2004)

MR. PRESIDENT,

DISTINGUISHED ATTENDEES AND GUESTS,

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN;

The Turkmen, who are originally from Central Asia and who are also the third largest ethnic group in Iraq, began settling in Iraq thousand years ago and they still inhabit the North and Middle of Iraq, mainly in the provinces of Mosul, Erbil, Kirkuk, and Deyalah. Although the Turkmen population in Iraq has been intentionally suppressed by the government, and, as is the case for the other ethnic groups as well, the real numbers have always been kept as a government secret. It is conservatively estimated that the number of Turkmen in Iraq exceeds two million. They are ethnically of Central Asian and the Turkmen language belongs to the Turkic-speaking group.

After the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the rights of the Turkmen living in Iraq have been deteriorated by the external powers and various Iraqi governments. Following World War I, Iraq was invaded and controlled by the British, a puppet kingdom was established by the occupiers.

On various occasions, the Turkmen were subjected to oppression, including political imprisonments and even massacres. The city of Kirkuk, where the majority of the Turkmen lived historically, experienced several major massacres and many Turkmen were killed. Many others were deported from their homelands and exiled. Major tragedies occurred in 1924, 1946, and on July 14, 1959 and leaders of Turkmen Society were massacred and their cultural riches destroyed. On the other hand, after the Iraqi Baath Party came to the power, the Turkmen have experienced the most gloomy era of their long history in Iraq. They have also lost their basic human rights, security of their lives, and their properties under the cruel regime of Saddam. The panic, fear and uncertainties still dominate the daily lives of Turkmen in Mosul, Erbil, and Kirkuk where their populations are dense. Similar to many other non-Arab ethnic groups in Iraq, the Turkmen suffered terribly for decades by the regime of Saddam.

The Turkmen have always been loyal and lawfull citizens of Iraq with deep roots of their love for their homeland and the rest of the Iraqi population regardless of their ethnicity nor religions. The Turkmen never engaged in any insurgencies against the government until the Iraqi government, viciously and systematically, began to destroy them.

Iraqi Turkmen, by virtue of their social background, urban culture, and tradition, constitute a democratic, secular, and well-educated ethnic group. Iraqi Turkmen want to live in their homelands in peace and harmony without any threat or political pressure. They will never accept to be treated as a minority group within another minority group of Iraq. The Turkmen will firmly continue to oppose any separatist and divisive political and military movements in Iraq regardless of their origins. They believe in democracy in its true sense and they have been struggling politically to achieve their goals of a

democratic, secular and united Iraq. Therefore, the Turkmens will continue to play a more prominent role in shaping the democratic and modern Iraq that will become a respectable member of the international community in the future.

Turkmens believe that it is possible to reach a just and permanent political solution in order to determine the future and fate of the regions populated by the Turkmens in Iraq. It is very crucial that they will not be imposed on any condition and they will participate in these political negotiations with their proportional presence as same as the other players. They want to elect their own representatives through democratic procedures and they will be recognized as an equal partner in the Iraqi balance equation.

Unfortunately, it is still impossible to speak about the stability and peace in Iraq. Anarchy and bloody terror are cost many lives in a daily basis. Iraqi people, whose hopes and expectations raised by democracy and freedom promised by the occupying powers, are disappointed. It is well appreciated that Iraq was freed from its old despotic rulers, but today new forms of oppression are becoming the dominant practice in the country. Iraqi people are anxiously struggling for a better future.

The Iraqi Interim Governing Council, with the directions of the coalition forces, has been favoring the two Kurdish Parties. They were given a leading role in the establishment of the Iraqi Interim Government which was not proportional to their population nor their presence in the Iraqi society. In contrast, the intentional exclusion of the Turkmens from the political process in post-Saddam Iraq caused a deep shock and suspicions for the Iraqi people and the Turkmens. This short-sighted political arrangement between the American Government and our Kurdish brothers was not a practical proposition to implelement. Therefore, the exclusion of Turkmens from the post-Saddam political negotiations backfired and parties did not go anywhere from the getgo. The issue is still at the table for fair consensus and permanent resolution. The Turkmen position on this issue is very clear where any political or military action causing to break down Iraq into its ethnic or religious pieces will not be supportes at all. That is the bottomline the Turkmens cannot compromise. The Turkmen position is compeletly agreed almost by all the players in the region including the United States, Turkey, and other American allies in the region. The most sensitive challenge is to achieve this common goal by bringing in all the ethnic and religious groups of Iraq, regardless of their past positions on the issues, for a just and long lasting settlement.

The Turkmens clearly convey their message to the United States and their Kurdish brothers. First of all, everyone playing a role in the political process must read the old history of the region thoroughly. They should digest the similarities and differences of all ethnic and religious groups in Iraq. They should also remember that all of the Iraqi people, regardless of their denomination, suffered from the brutalities of the past governments. They must also accept the fact that they will continue to live together for years to come under a democratic, secular and unified Iraq. They have to identify their common values and goals. They have to spell out their concerns and realistic expectations. They must be frank to each other and should not use any external power, including the United States of America, for their short term political and economic benefits. They all must recognize the

fact that, in today's world, no unjust solution will last long. The fact is that everyone on the table is as smart as the others and no one should waste their time and energy trying to outsmart the other party. Turkmens sincerely believe that there will be a just solution to all issues involving Northern Iraq under these fundamental principles of partnership.

We emphasize it again that Iraq's new constitution ought to be democratic, respectful of the United Nations and international laws, protecting individual and ethnic rights of all the people of Iraq. It has to bear the characteristics that would enable Iraq to reach the level of modern civilisations, and would open up new horizons and opportunities for the Iraqi people in the coming years. Therefore, the new constitution has to be based on mutual recognition and fairness between all ethnic groups and peoples of Iraq. respect for the individual and clashes to erupt by categorising the Iraqi people into strict groups. It must cultivate the co-existence of different people under the same government and state. Otherwise, Iraq is extremely vulnerable to crumble in a very short time that will be almost impossible to put the pieces back again. The Turkmens cannot accept any scenario that will politically divide the country based on ethnic lines that will lead to permanent divisions of Iraq. The Turkmens are expecting new creative approaches agreed by all the participants of the Iraqi problem with extraordinary patience and mutual understanding in order to succeed in this historic transformation.

Drafting a new Iraqi constitution and its implementation bring great responsibilities to our Arabs, Kurds, Turkmens, Assyrians, Caldeans, and all of the groups in the country. All Iraqis ought to learn from their past problems and mistakes and do not repeat them again.

At this point in time, we call our brothers and sisters in Iraq, including The Interim Government, to work hand in hand to rebuild the country and its future where every Iraqi citizen, regardless of his or her ethnicity or religion, will be protected and will prosper. Let's all understand the fact that dividing Iraq into three regions based on unjustified and unfair ethnic borders is not a viable solution for the future. Let's re-approach the issue of restructuring the country with a fresh start and accomodate the rights and expectations of all involved.

We, the Turkmens, want to play a more prominent role in the restructuring of a free, just, peaceful, and stable Iraq. The Turkmens want to live in a Democratic and united Iraq.

The principles that are crucial for the Turkmens and the entire Iraqi nation during this restructuring of modern Iraq are highlighted as follows:

1. The territorial unity of the existing Iraq.
2. Free and open representation of all Iraqi people in a democratic government.
3. Equal rights to all people of Iraq regardless of their background, ethnicity, religion, sex or race.
4. Protection of human rights and the rights of all ethnic and religious groups.
5. Establishment of an efficient and free enterprise based economy instead of a war-based economy.

6. Mutually respectable and good relations with all other countries including Iraq's neighbors in the region.

I would also like to summarize very important issues and concerns of Turkmen people in Iraq as follows:

1. Turkmen people are the third largest nation in Iraq . They are about 13 % of the entire Iraqi population. As a contrast, their representation in the Iraqi Interim Government is limited to only one seat. That is not acceptable and Turkmen demand their fair representation in the Iraqi political system as soon as possible.
2. Kirkuk City Council has elected a Mayor of the city without taking into consideration of the Turkmen majority in the governorate. Turkmen will never compromise their political and cultural rights in this historic Turkmen city. Turkmen position about Kirkuk must be clearly understood by all parties involved.
3. The Kurdish groups of PDK and PUK are attempting and planning to impose their powers to change the demographics in Kirkuk City, and in other Turkmen areas in Northern Iraq. All of these illegal procedures are taking place in spite of Turkmen's opposition and complaints to the Coalition Forces, and to the Iraqi Interim Government. Again, we remind our brothers and sisters that trying to outsmart the other side is the worst attitude for any partnership. Turkmen cannot be underestimated.
4. The municipal workers and officials are being continuously brought into Kirkuk from Arbil and Sulaimaniya and they are being appointed to the local government positions that should be taken by the original people of Kirkuk.
5. The United Nations and The Coalition Forces should not to allow the Kurdish Parties to impose any illegal policies on Turkmen cities and villages such as changing the names of the governmental offices and institutions in order to claim Turkmen homelands as a part of the Kurdish region in Northern Iraq.
6. The Interim Government and The Coalition Forces in Kirkuk do not pay enough attention to non-Kurdish people of the city in order to create policies that are consensus based. The policies, orders, and decisions issued by the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) cannot be implemented in Kirkuk. We reiterate the fact that Kirkuk is the independent province where all loyal nationalities of Iraq live together peacefully.
7. Kirkuk is the most important testbed for a modern and unified Iraq. If the status of Kirkuk cannot be resolved peacefully, it is not a brainer to expect the civil war in Iraq.

Let's hope that the people of Iraq will find the best possible resolutions for their ethnic and national problems. Let's hope that a democratic and unified Iraq will take its place in the modern world in the near future. Let's hope that the justice and peace will prevail in Iraq and in the entire region. Let's hope that the history will not repeat itself and the bloodshed in the region will stop soon. Thanks again for your attention and interest in the Turkmen People of Iraq. Give your unconditional support for a democratic and unified Iraq.