



TURKMEN AREAS WHICH HAVE EXPERIENCED TROUBLED DAYS AND FACING A NEW CRISIS WITH THE REFERENDUM DECISION BY KRG

Erşat Salihî



Erşat Salihî was born in Kirkuk, Musalla District in 1959, where he completed his primary and secondary education. In 1978, Mr. Salihî started his BA at the Faculty of Science in Baghdad. In 1979, he was arrested and sentenced for 10 years with the charge of "taking part in the Turkmen National Movements". Following the end of Saddam's rule, in 2003, he was appointed as the head of the Musalla bureau of the Iraqi Turkmen Front. Between 2004 and 2008, he served as the Syria Representative of the Iraqi Turkmen Front in Syria. In 2008, following the congress of the Iraqi Turkmen Front, he became the provincial head of the Iraqi Turkmen Front in Kirkuk. Mr. Salihî was elected as an MP from Kirkuk in the Iraqi general elections on March, 2, 2010 and also serves as the head of the Iraqi Turkmen Front since May 2011. He was re-elected as an MP of Kirkuk in the general election held in April 2014.

ORSAM: Mister Salihi, welcome to Turkey. We are honored to host you at ORSAM. Iraq and Iraqi Turkmens are passing through hard times. The referendum decision taken by KRG could be considered as the beginning of a new troubled period. Could you comment on the current situation of Iraq and the Turkmen regions?

Ersat Salihi: Iraqi Turks and Turkmen geography which have experienced troubled days and hard times along the history are facing a new crisis with the referendum decision taken by Iraq Kurdish Regional Government. As Iraqi Turks, we have never been involved in the armed struggle in any period of history. We have always been a peaceful society. We gave importance to our educational, cultural, national and spiritual values. Despite all the grievances and injustices we have suffered, we always defend the territorial integrity of Iraq and seek the political unity. Now, we are faced with the danger of being expatriated from our lands and being bred in captivity. The demographic structure of Kirkuk, the heart of Turkmen geography, has been systematically changed since 2003. With the interventions and pressures made from the outside, the

genuine Kirkuk people were forced into exiled and foreign elements were placed in return for them. The Kurds are also the victims of the Arabization policy of Saddam Hussein as Turkmens, however, they are using the same methods today. Today, politique de faite accomplie is implementing in Kirkuk, Tuzkhurmatu, Diyala, Kifri and other Turkmen regions as before implemented in Erbil, which is at least as Turkmen as Kirkuk. However, besides its Turkmen identity, Kirkuk is a small model of Iraq where Kurds, Arabs and Christians live together. So, it is a province which shows the essence of the territorial integrity of Iraq. Trying to change the structure of this city of fraternity will move all the balances in the region. While Kurds claim that Kirkuk is a city of fraternity, they take the unilateral steps with disregarding this fraternity so that they contradict with their claim of brotherhood. Here, we call our Kurdish brothers to take another look at their decision and to cancel the referendum without any delay. We also emphasize this point. The Kurdish Regional Government, whose borders are drawn by the constitution adopted in Iraq in 2005, is trying to move the referendum out of these boundaries by violating the constitution and all kinds of legal rules. We have always given respect to

the regional governance that the Kurds build in accordance with the Iraq constitution. We even joined the KRG Parliament as the Iraqi Turkmen Front. Unfortunately, we did not see the same respect from our Kurdish brothers. Despite being the second largest ethnic group in the Kurdish Regional Government, Turkmen are given minority quotas. Some puppet persons who do not represent the Turkmen society were given duties. How do we live together in Kirkuk under these circumstances? How do we trust Kurds, who ignores us and does not give our legitimate rights? The Iraqi governments, which have been working since 2003, have not given due importance to the Turkmen society and Turkmen are hardly ever given place. If it is given, it was very limited. We have also called the Iraqi government continuously, which is responsible for this. We have demanded that the Turkmen should be represented on the basis of an accurate political position. For centuries, our Turkmen geography is where we live by making no concessions to our language and culture and so it shall be, no doubt. As Turkmen, we are ready to make any kind of legitimate struggle. Hundreds and thousands of Turkmen were martyred while fighting with DAESH. We have shed blood for the lands we see as homeland. As

Turkmen, we do not want anything else but to live in peace in our own regions.

Can you evaluate the damages that the DAESH terrorist organization gave to the Turkmen regions and the desire of Turkmen to return their houses?

The most suffered side in Iraq from DAESH terrorist organization was Turkmen. Hundreds of thousands of Turkmen have been displaced because of the terrorist organization, which stab the Turkmen regions. Our people want to return to Talafar, whose population is entirely Turkmen. In this regard, we also demand a serious support from Turkey. In this regard, our cooperation with the Iraqi government is continuing. We also thank Turkey, who has hosted around one hundred thousand Turkmen from Talafar besides twice as much Iraqi people. As an Iraqi politician and a Turkmen deputy, I am also saying that while we need to focus on these issues at this time, unfortunately we are debating the issue of Kirkuk because of the efforts of creating an artificial agenda. We are brought back to the brink of a war while we are about to get rid of the DAESH trouble. I believe that the Iraqis and especially our Kurdish brothers should question this; they must fol-

Turkmen geography is where we live by making no concessions to our language and culture and so it shall be, no doubt. As Turkmen, we are ready to make any kind of legitimate struggle.



low peace and stability closely as we do. The Turkmen's ties with Turkey have always been strong. We have never paid our ties with Turkey to the danger of Iraq's territorial integrity. Due to this strong bridge between Iraqi Turkmen, we always work for a spacious and the neighboring state of Turkey and we will continue. Today, however, we need more support from Turkey than ever. Neighboring countries and everybody should deal with this problem. No one should keep himself away from this subject. My another call will be to the international community. Achieving stability in Iraq will benefit all countries. Iraq is a treasure that will contribute the world heritage with not only its underground resources but also its cultural and historical richness. All

the countries which have contributed to Iraq's fight against DAESH must show the hardest reaction to and take serious steps against this unjustified referendum that may be the source of new conflicts today. As Turkmen, we do not want to pay a price more. We call for everybody to act wisely. I am sure that someone will criticize us when we talk about them today. Why do the Turkmen want Iraqi territorial integrity? Yes, wanting the territorial integrity of Iraq is a matter in our nature. We are nationalists and patriots. When we call Kirkuk, only Kirkuk should not be understood; Talafar, Erbil, Tuzkhurmatu, and Diyala also come to our mind because Kirkuk is the heart of Turkmen regions. Definetly, this province is having importance for this re-

gion. It is also a leading place for both Turkish existence and Turkmen existence. Let us not forget that Iraqi Turkmens and Kirkuk provide the territorial integrity of Iraq. Kirkuk is the pulse of the Middle East. Today, if the project in Iraq is realized, the map in Syria will be put into pressure. If we pay attention to Syria, the Turkmen lands are in serious danger again. The dweller of Talabyad in Syria and Talafar in Iraq are relatives. The ties of tribal structures are interconnected. When the DAESH came to the region, Turkmens from Telabyad went to Turkey. Sunni Arabs went to Rakka. After that, the region was delivered to YPG. In this context, our fear is experiencing a similar process in Talafar. Because the same process took place in Sinjar and its region, which is under our nose. First, DAESH, then PKK was placed. The Iraqi government is seriously talking to us about this issue. Therefore, we want the territorial integrity of Iraq. We are criticized. Our nationalism and defending the territorial integrity of Iraq are beneficial to everyone. Nobody can escape from this. Iran and Turkey may also be affected by the developments in the region. Syria is already in trouble. I have another point to highlight. Saudi Arabia can also be affected by these developments. They want to weaken this region and divide it.

After the instruction of the Governor of Kirkuk Najmiddin Karim, the decision was taken by the Kurdish members of the Kirkuk Provincial Assembly, the KRG flag was flied on public buildings in Kirkuk and crisis were emerged. What would be the reflections of this flag crisis in Kirkuk today?

In Kirkuk, when the problem of DAESH was about to end, the flag crisis emerged with a unilateral decision taken by the governor of Kirkuk. They enforce illegally to fly the Kurdish flag on public buildings. We criticized. Your critics are useless, they said. When we ask what to do, they replied that you should issue a decision from the parliament. We made this decision issuing from the Iraqi parliament. The Iraqi parliament said that flying the Kurdish flag on public buildings of Kirkuk is illegal. They did not accept this decision. They said you should apply to the court. We got the decision from the court. The decision that waving the Kurdish flag in that area are illegal is issued. Then, they told us that we do not recognize the decision of the court. This is an incomprehensible situation. Unfortunately, we had a second critical event before this matter resolved. The government decided to launch an operation on September

Hawija region, which is fifteen kilometers south of Kirkuk and is still under the control of the DAESH. While the Iraqi army saved Talafar and Mosul was preparing for Hawija operation on September 23, the letter stated the referendum decision on 25 September is brought to the government.

23 to rescue the Hawija region, which is fifteen kilometers south of Kirkuk and is still under the control of the DAESH. While the Iraqi army saved Talafar and Mosul was preparing for Hawija operation on September 23, the letter stated the referendum decision on 25 September is brought to the government. Therefore, this date is not a coincidence. The Kurdish parliament has no authority to vote on referendum. There would be no legitimacy of a decision taken between two parties. According to Article 140 of the Iraqi Constitution, the so-called controversial regions are certainly not within the Kurdish region. The Kurdish region is already clear and it is the place composed of three provinces. Unfortunately, all of these has happened to the contrary of us. The Iraqi parliament rejected the referendum decision. We do not accept referendum decision. We must agree on legal grounds. We fear that if this referendum takes place in disputed regions, there will certainly be an internal conflict and Iraqis and Kurds will be suffered most in the internal conflict. We do not want the Kurds to be suffered. While there are disputes within the Kurds regarding the referendum decision, how will the others accept this referendum? According to Kurds' claims,

we do not have a common administration with the Iraqi government. Besides the president is from Kurds, four to five ministers are Kurdish, and their deputies are also the Kurdish. They have 60 deputies at Baghdad. What do Turkmens have in common with Erbil? What do I have in Erbil? The control over disputed areas is in Kurdish government's power. What do I have in Kirkuk? There is a governor involved in some corruption. He has done financial and administrative corruption. He has established control over the county council of Kirkuk. There is no democratic system at all. The governor came from US by bringing an experience from there, and we were glad when he became governor. Unfortunately, hundreds of corruption files have been submitted to the commission in Kirkuk. Unfortunately, these files were confirmed too late. Two days ago, Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi's office came to the Iraqi parliament and the Iraqi parliament decided to take him out of office yesterday. I am underlining that the removal of governor from the post is in no way relevant to the referendum decision, to Kurdish nationalism or to the flag decree. His files are only about corruption. He may apply to the court. We can also apply. The one who is right

will prove himself in court. We do not want this region to return the zone of fire again. Especially, we have faith. We are the ones who defend the integrity of the land.

Kurdish groups have put a serious pressure on Kirkuk. Especially after 2003, a demographic policy is implemented in Kirkuk. Would you evaluate the demographic change in Kirkuk and the influence of Turkmens on Iraq?

According to official records based on food cards, there has been a large population change in Kirkuk in 15 years and the population of Kirkuk rose from 850,000 to 1,650,000 in 2003. Along with this increase, there was also a demographic change. Therefore, if any referendum or election takes place, the outcome will be strictly biased. We demand and defend the protection of our collective life and territorial integrity, which does not harm our national identity. We also want to establish good relations with everyone, especially neighboring countries. Iraq is going through a sensitive period. The territorial integrity of Iraq is a matter of concern to all neighbors. Iraqi Turkmens are also the cement of this unity, namely Iraq. Therefore, DAESH at-

tacked the Turkmen regions at first; invaded Talafar at first, then attacked Yazidis in Sinjar and then Christians and others. The first thing is that the Turkmen geography and the Turkmens become a target. Iraq is experiencing a serious chaos. Today, we are going to both Turkey and Iran and send our delegations. The aim of our visit to both countries is not making them to interfere with our internal affairs, but is enlightening everyone about the truth. Unless the truth is known to the people of Turkey, Iran or Arab countries, everyone will surely pay for this fact in the future. In short, we will certainly not accept the tension in these regions. Agreements will be within the Referendum. The Kurdish delegation came. I met with them in Baghdad. We told them not to postpone the referendum, cancel it. At the same time, we also said the central government. If the northern Iraqi government has taken the referendum decision and they come back Baghdad again to negotiate, we cast doubt on it. Because you made your decision, you want to withdraw from Iraq. After that, if you ever come back and negotiate with Baghdad, the negotiation will certainly be made over us, we are concerned about this issue and we have good dialogue with the Iraqi government.

We demand and defend the protection of our collective life and territorial integrity, which does not harm our national identity. We also want to establish good relations with everyone, especially neighboring countries.

KRG seems to have an expansion strategy. Especially at the post-DAESH period, this situation has become very apparent. How do you evaluate the KRG's politics?

The northern Iraqi government wants to make anywhere has an oil well a Kurdish region. Al-Kut is in the south of Iraq and has nothing to do with the Kurdish region. Mandali is the Arab and Turkmen region in Diyala. The provincial council of Diyala has taken a decision against the referendum. The provincial council of Salahaddin also rejected the referendum decision. Some will certainly benefit from such an internal war; but everyone will get hurt and this will get a fight to the region. The Kurdish, Turkmen, Arab war will take place in this region again and the re-

gion will be divided. Who will benefit from the division of the region? We never preferred an armed conflict; we do our best in legal ways. We urge the Kurdish politicians to dismiss the referendum as soon as possible. The Kurds will suffer more than we do. I hope they will do it as soon as possible. Another criticism we have received is that Turkmen are divided. In reality, only Turkmen are the ones who use the message of unity in Iraq. Since the Turkmen live scattered in different regions, we are going to election from various lists. The Turkmen have deputies in the Dawa Party. We have never distinguished between Turkmen deputies. At last, Turkmen came together and established a coordination committee; so the decisions taken at this moment are central decisions. All Turkmen deputies are informed of my



visit here. They also agree with my statements here. The Turkmens have facilitated the unity now. Nobody would say that as an excuse. We have a common idea about the future of Kirkuk, Talafar, and Tuzkhurmatu. I go to Barzani's side and get a project from there, and then I come and go to the PUK delegations. There are three suggestions offering me from Talabani's party. I get proposals from three wings, however, which one do I agree with? Then, I go to Gorran and they offer different suggestions. I am also going to Islamic parties; they are all different. There is an Erbil ... There is a Sulaymaniyah ... There are two administrations in Sulaymaniyah. Islamists in Halabja, both Gorran and PUK in Sulaymaniyah... Well, which one should I deal with? Say your project, then, we can come and negotiate at the table. Nonetheless, nobody can get anywhere by force of guns. There are also methods we use. We have spoken with European countries. Fortunately, they have detected violations of human rights. The murder of dozens of Turkmens in Kirkuk is not an ordinary matter. Tuzkhurmatu, with a population of 80,000, has been given 2,000 Turkmen martyrs since 2003. What does it mean to kill 2,000 people in a province with a population of 80,000 with terrorist acts and assassinations? This means that leave

this land or go to Karbala or Turkey. At Talafar, which has a population of 400,000 to 500,000, there is currently no local of Talafar. Some are in South Iraq, some in Kirkuk, or Ankara or Istanbul. So, who's behind this? They wanted to take this nation from their geography and bring others to their places. I would like to state here as an Iraqi deputy that, first of all, we have vowed to the territorial integrity of Iraq. We will defend it, and we will pay for it; but the Iraqi government must now be with us to a degree. We have to be represented in the Iraqi government, in the ministries, in the duties. When we are in it, different methods have emerged; our safety hang by a thread. I underline that at any moment everything would happen. We said Mr. Haider Abadi that the security of our people hang by a thread, we will solve our problems as much as possible in Iraq with political masses, political groups and the parliament of Iraq; but we have said that if we do not find any solution in Iraq, we certainly would have different solutions.

Turkey's sensitivity on Kirkuk has recently been expressed by all decision-makers and authorities. What do you think about Turkey's policy on Kirkuk? What is your ex-

Tuzkhurmatu, with a population of 80,000, has been given 2,000 Turkmen martyrs since 2003. What does it mean to kill 2,000 people in a province with a population of 80,000 with terrorist acts and assassinations?

pectation from Turkey if the referendum takes place?

I will tell it like it is. For a while, we also criticized Turkey. I criticize when appropriate. If our rights and our law is not protected, we criticize not only Turkey, but all. When my people lose blood and noone come to the help of them in spite of our declaming, I had criticized all no matter who is. Yes, we are talking to anyone who knows humanity. That is why, if Turkey has a policy of his own, a Turkish official will tell that. We do not discuss anyone's red or blue line. Nonetheless, when the Iraqi Turkmen hang by a thread in a serious way, they absolutely ask for help from all. Turkey has its own policy in the region; they interpret it themselves. I do not analyze this; but today, the region is going through a complicated process, the balances are breaking down. Therefore, the red line for us is the red line for everyone. If there is no the red line, Iran, the Arab states, the US and others would not look seriously on this issue. We are talking to European countries, in particular France and Germany; we are in constant communication with all. We tell them: "The groups you help bear arms. You train them, you give them weapons, but these weapons will threaten us in the future." For this

reason, this red line is valid for not only Turkey but also everyone. What does the YPG / PKK have in Kirkuk? What does Salih Moslem have in Kirkuk? He should come and see the governor of Kirkuk; pose in front of Iraqi flag. Unfortunately, all of these red lines have been violated here. That's why, everyone felt danger today. When we said that in 2004, they treated us as extreme. When the temporary Iraqi Constitution was written in 2004, special status was given to Baghdad and Kirkuk. However, this feature was removed in 2005, since the Kurds had a lot of pressure on the administration in Baghdad. Here, we live the danger of it, otherwise, we are not excessive. Nonetheless, extreme policies are implemented against us. I was at Turkish Radio and Television (TRT) a while ago and there I said: They should not leave us with two choices; we are still declaring to our Kurdish brothers. The administration in Baghdad was slowly becoming aware of our cause. They were not aware of it before, unfortunately. If the referendum takes place, there are two options. We do not wish those two options to happen. We declare them when it is appropriate. We have used our administrative force more effectively than our military force at this time. After we bring three issues in the parliament,

184 deputies backed us as 8 deputies. This is an advantage. Somebody have won by their military power, however, we have achieved this success by using our legal power and by telling our oppression. Nonetheless, if someone uses military force against us in the future, we have an another option. There was, of course, the Iraqi government, democracy and a parliament. Although Turkmen are underrepresented in parliament, believe that the majority is not the matter, but it is how much you give your effort. There are 60 Kurdish deputies against 8 Turkmen deputies, but our political willingness is so strong that, thank goodness, we have been able to make the three decisions we want to pass in the Iraqi parliament. That is why, it is very important for us to ensure the territorial integrity of Iraq. Everyone has to respect our sensitivity.

We can call Kirkuk as the key of Iraq, which is the key of the Middle East. What does Kirkuk mean for Turkey? How do you evaluate the population change in Kirkuk? How is the situation of the Iraqi Turkmens?

We know how important Kirkuk is. However, this geography is important for the Kurds because of its oil and gas

reserves. Today, KRG certainly were not give importance to Kirkuk without the oil wells in it, and would never take it under the definition of a Kurdish region. It is indisputable that Kirkuk is a Turkmen city both geographically and historically. It is unnecessary that a man possessing his hometown is repeatedly declare that it is mine. However, the Kurds say that Kirkuk is a Kurdish region. Kirkuk is important not for only Turkey. I remember, Barzani came to Ankara in 2004, when I was then an ITF Syria Representative - and propagated Kirkuk's annexation to the northern Iraqi territory. Then, he said the same thing in his meeting with Esad in Damascus: "Kirkuk is a Kurdish region." At that time -in Syria- we gave a declaration: "Kirkuk is the city which is responsible for the stability of the Middle East." I have received so many criticisms for this statement such as "this person is not a politician" and "what Kirkuk has something to do with the Middle East?". Thankfully, it is seen today how my statements in 2004 are accurate. This is why we say that Kirkuk is a sensitive issue not just for Turkey but for everyone. The Crisis Group's finding that "Kirkuk is a bomb, it can explode at any moment." stems from this same situation. It should not be supposed that Turkey will not be affected by Kirkuk.

Today, KRG certainly were not give importance to Kirkuk without the oil wells in it, and would never take it under the definition of a Kurdish region.

Remember that when I say Kirkuk, I mean all Turkmen regions. How population figures and population rates increase is systematically evident everywhere. In Kirkuk, the population before 2003 was as follows: 400,000 Turkmen and 400,000 Kurdish and Arab out of 850,000 population. After 2003, the population was brought to Kirkuk under the name of immigrants. Well, if the Kurds from Kirkuk had been immigrants during the Saddam era, the Turks were also emigrated with them to Erbil, and Sulaymaniyah. However, after 2003, is it reasonable to put 500,000 population on 850,000 population? There was neither a prosperity nor a life that would make this increase reasonable. Neither the population of Dhraq nor of Sulaymaniyah and Erbil increased in the same period. For example, according to the Iraqi Ministry of Commerce, a citizen hold a wheat field in Sulaymaniyah is coming to Kirkuk and purchasing a plot of land to have an identity in Kirkuk. There are also those who are brought from neighboring nations; nobody could deny. The Kurdish, brought from both Syria and Turkey, are settled in the Askari District, which opened as a new region in Kirkuk, and all of them were given identification cards and were allowed to participate in the elections. Population growth has been realized

in Kirkuk in a very different way. Everyone has to set their target in their own region and geography. For example, when I try to set a Turkmen city on Basra, it could not be realized. The Kurdish presence of our Kurdish brothers is in Erbil, Sulaymaniyah and Dohuk. I just said it. If you looked at Erbil 50 years ago, it was a Turkmen city. We also have our mistakes, we do not forgive ourselves. If we had given more importance on our national identity, we would not have been so weak such that. If we were not pursuing sectarian divisions, there would not be a problem between us and our brothers from Talafar. Let's talk about the truth. Turkmens are not well represented in the north of Iraq. There are also Turkmens in Erbil and Sulaymaniyah. Leave us to choose this Turkmen, and make their a deputy. You can not go anywhere by bringing in a puppet Turkmen. Unfortunately, the KRG's current policy is to ensure non-Turkmens to represent Turkmens. It would be wrong that one said I am Turkmen in Istanbul, Ankara or Baghdad. There was a law of autonomy in Erbil, Sulaymaniyah and Dohuk during Saddam era; but a group of Kurds close to Baath were settled by Baghdad and they were used as puppets. Let's not do what Saddam did. Let's everyone represents himself freely; let's Turkmen could choose a

Turkmen. In the Dohuk region, 16,000 votes were released for the Turkmen in the 2009 elections; but there are not so many Turkmen there. The Kurds gave him their votes to elect a puppet Turkmen as a deputy. They gave orders to your military units, saying that you should vote this person. Unfortunately, the Turkmen do not have enough power in northern Iraq at this time. It is absolutely necessary to defend the rights and laws of the Turkmen in that region.

Can an internal conflict be expected in Kirkuk as it is in Talafar?

A sectarian conflict between the Iraqi Turkmen has occurred only in Talafar. I am ashamed to say that I am Sunni; I do not state whether I am Sunni or Shia. I am a Turkmen member of parliament from Kirkuk. Nonetheless, I believe that if the Iraqi election law allows now, if there is a change, if I nominate myself, I can get votes from the south and Basra. Despite being a Sunni in Kirkuk, I took the votes of all my Shia brothers. Tuzkhurmatu, Bashir, Tisin, Daquq are all residence of our Shia brothers. Well, why did they all vote for me? It is because that we did not think of a sectarian problem. Therefore, they look at us differently in Baghdad. Of course, we have mistakes; I can not deny it. My brothers in

Talafar are the people who live with the tribal structure. They were chosen Talafar intentionally to bring the al-Qa'ida terrorist network in advance. I was in Syria in 2004, I know how many people live in Syria, who are they. Then, supporting the other side in a different way and sparking a dispute over brothers were the job of secret services. Otherwise, in Talafar, While a son of a Turkmen family who knows social life would be a Shia and the other be a Sunni. Unfortunately, they have been deliberately chosen there, they have benefited from the region as they wish. The experiences are because of Talafar's importance and future; it is not a sectarian situation. YPG-PKK in Sinjar is now waiting for Talafar; but the Iraqi government in no way allows the PKK to turn to Talafar. In this regard, the Iraqi government is gradually using a different method. We are in this expectation. In addition, the people of Talafar in the south and north should return to Talafar. Such a collapse would not happen in Kirkuk. Unfortunately, we have problems in Kirkuk, Mosul and Diyala with some Kurdish political parties. They want to annex these territories to their territories to create a new authority there. You would ask from the Chinese embassy. What happens if a referendum takes place? We speak clearly; if there is a referendum, do not

Talafar, While a son of a Turkmen family who knows social life would be a Shia and the other be a Sunni. Unfortunately, they have been deliberately chosen there, they have benefited from the region as they wish. The experiences are because of Talafar's importance and future; it is not a sectarian situation.

come back to Baghdad to negotiate because if the door for the negotiation open again, they will pay the price I said a little earlier. We do not accept that price. We tell the Iraqi government; if our Kurdish brothers come to us to negotiate again, the object of them should be us. We do not accept secret agreements between only Baghdad and Erbil, however, if the referendum is realized, there will certainly be war. This war would not remain just there. You should know that there are 6 oil wells in Kirkuk; 3 wells are in the hands of the KDP administration, 3 are in the hands of the PUK administration. However, no one knows how many barrels of oil from Kirkuk are taken out and sold. The KDP and the PUK were fighting for the Khabor Border Gate for 3 years. How long will they fight for oil? We left our security to Baghdad and the Iraqi army showed weakness. Is it reasonable situation after The Turkmen and Arabs who are tribal in the region are armed? If the Kurdish political parties make these mistakes again, I am openly saying that the conflict will non more so that effect on our geography. It will be not just us who are in danger, but everyone will be affected - as I said at the beginning of my conversation. Western countries even will be affected. If the weapons that the Western countries gave to the peshmer-

ga to fight against DAESH will return to a civilian Turkmen in the future, we will complain that to the Western countries. The weapons you have given and the peshmerga you have trained shot us. I say clearly that Turkmen did not know politics before, they acted emotionally; but now it is not. We can use legal ways and international parties whenever we want, thanks to God. Therefore, if this referendum takes place, it would also has a remarkable effect on the international parties. As civil society organizations, we need everyone's support. We do not regard the Kurdish nation or any others as enemy to ourselves. We were in jail, imprisoned, and under the influence of chemical weapons with the Kurds. However, we have disagreements with some Kurdish political leaders. Today, the most damaging to the Turkmen-Kurd relationship has been the governor of Kirkuk, Najmiddin Karim. We declared this clearly to everyone. Because they know that, the Kurdish leaders have not made a speech on the dismissal of him; they know that it was wrong to appoint him. As civil society organizations, we want you to express them in all kinds of platforms and demonstrations. Thank you.

Could you make an evaluation on the activity of

al-Hasd al-Shaabi in the region? There are reports that KRG made military ammunition and peshmerga shipment to the region. Could you evaluate this subject?

The Iraqi army has been seriously facing terrorists, especially DAESH, from 2014, as if Musul had been delivered. The peshmerga has handed Sinjar to DAESH. In this period, especially with the efforts of religious authorities, they set up al-Hashd al-Shaabi to fight against DAESH with their aid campaigns. Iran supported; no one will deny it. At the same time, Turkey supported peshmerga; this is also undeniable. Both of them have helped both sides against DAESH. However, there are some sensitivities of al-Hasd al-Shaabi especially with respect to Turkey. This is conducting illegal actions in some areas. Nonetheless, those who are responsible for that are not the top officials of al-Hashd al-Shaabi. There may be mistakes everywhere and the accounts of these mistakes must be given by the relevant persons. At this moment, al-Hashd al-Shaabi is an official entity according to the Iraqi Parliament. With a new resolution, the Iraqi parliament has recognized him and, after being recognized, it is more convenient to follow the main rules of Iraq's army and to act

together. When peshmerga enters Kirkuk, it brings not only the peshmerga but also the PKK together to Kirkuk. This is not an ordinary matter; there is definitely a behind-the-scenes game behind. As a result, we have said to the Iraqi government that we are under threat and the government must take precautions in advance. It is because, there is not only one side of the military but also peshmerga. Yes, we have a voluntary Turkmen power; we also have the Kirkuk defense power in Turkmen villages. In the regions of Turkalan, Yaysi, and Kumbetler, we have people who defend themselves in small groups consisting of our tribes. However, it is certainly a very dangerous step for the peshmerga and the PKK to come to the region during the referendum period. The territorial integrity of Iraq is not only the matter for the Iraqis but the whole region. Arab countries do not think they can get rid of this issue. Therefore, whoever is behind the project should know that there is no guarantee to be successful in any project. If we embrace this issue with a righteous will, a righteous method, a righteous loyalty, I think that this project will not happen. According to the news just before, the Kurdish parliament will hold a meeting at 7 pm and decide there. Already, there are also Goranists and Islamic communities who

When peshmerga enters Kirkuk, it brings not only the peshmerga but also the PKK together to Kirkuk. This is not an ordinary matter; there is definitely a behind-the-scenes game behind. As a result, we have said to the Iraqi government that we are under threat and the government must take precautions in advance.

boycotted the meeting. Today, we are waiting for what will be the final decisions taken at 7 pm.

Syrian Turkmens also held demonstrations to support you. Can you talk about your relationship with the Syrian Turkmens? What steps do you take in international organizations regarding the Kirkuk issue? How do you assess the contacts of US special representative Brett McGurk with Arbil?

Although the cruel disintegration has set boundaries, we are certainly people of the same geography and we exchange of views of each other. We have long-term goals. First of all, we hope that they will take part in the new administration will be established in Syria. However, we must have a flag and the Turkmen flag is the flag of all of us. Syrian Turkmens do not want the disintegration of their lands like the Iraqi Turkmens. I hope they will remain so. Our hearts, and our long-term goals are coincided in this respect. As for the second question, we have been left abandoned for centuries. After Ottoman came out of the region, the Kingdom of England came and beat us. After they came out, the Arab governments started to beat us. The

Armenian massacre happened, then, 1959 massacre happened. In truth, we remained unprotected. I do not want to remind the past, but while the massacre of 1959 was, the journalists were instructed to not bring the massacres into the agenda in Turkey. However, whatever happens, these folks are not finished, they will not. If there is will, it will not end. I say this not only for ourselves, but for all of us as I have just said. We had complaints, we got angry to the authority repeatedly, we were not supported enough. Yes, all of them happened. However, no matter what happens, the Iraqi Turkmens have short, medium and long term political plans. Therefore, as an Iraqi deputy, we want to protect and to continue protecting our Iraq. We do not want to the fragmentation of Iraq. The fragmentation of Iraq will affect all of us. It will affect the Turkmens first and then the neighboring countries. We have not adequately explained on the world platforms that Kirkuk is a matter of human dimension. At this point, we have a mistake and a deficiency. To explain this matters, we should announce these matters more not only to the Turkish world and Turkish people, most of Turkey still does not know Kirkuk; but also to European people. Our representatives should be

there, and conferences should be held there. Shortly before, we just told that we want civil society organizations to assist us in this respect. However, we made a few complaints with respect to humanitarian and legal dimension. These complaints has been stated in Brussels and the EU. As a result, we are invited to there and a few meetings were held, especially in the EU Foreign Relations Commission. We conveyed all our documents about how the demography of Kirkuk was changed there. We hope that the EU will protect the Turkmen as they protected the Kurds in the time of Saddam. There are some leakages about the agreement made during the visit of McGurk to Erbil-Sulaymaniyah. According to this leaks, a matter of postponing the referendum in Kirkuk and disputed regions is discussed in exchange for the prolongation of the two-year period of Barzani. Then, it is not known how the agreements would be. Especially, if decisions have been made at these meetings, something clear decisions may emerge from there. McGurk's visit was different. If the matter is money, 17% of oil is already taken. Besides, they take the shares from petroleum in both official and informal forms. However, there is corruption among them. This was already a cause of the separa-

tion of political parties. Today, Goranists ask to the KRG to be transparent on selling oil and money flows. Presumably, McGurk's messages were clear. If I am not mistaken, Turkey and Iran also have messages. According to the information we received about the UN, the UN is also involved in this issue. We met with UN several times. At those talks, we gave a project about giving Kirkuk a special status. The UN also supports to give Kirkuk a special status and to make Kirkuk independent. There are some others who support it seriously. At the same time, there are also some issues we will ask the US. We will meet with the US ambassador in a few days. Our most asked question to the US is hosting the PKK in Kirkuk. In particular, Kaiwan military base is under the control of peshmerga. 200 people linked to PKK were brought there on 5th of September and you know that there were also US advisors. We are asking them in a commonsense and we are getting some things from them. In any case, as I have just said, everyone has a measure with respect to this issue. However, we do not want to have mistakes because we would be harmed, everyone would be harmed. They are harmed rather than us.

Mr. Salihi, thank you for accepting this interview.

Therefore, as an Iraqi deputy, we want to protect and to continue protecting our Iraq. We do not want to the fragmentation of Iraq. The fragmentation of Iraq will affect all of us. It will affect the Turkmen first and then the neighboring countries.

ORSAM is an independent think-tank specializing on Middle Eastern affairs. ORSAM seeks to diversify sources of knowledge on the region and establish a channel of communication between the local experts and Turkish academic and policy circles. Toward that end, ORSAM facilitates the exchanges of officials, academics, strategists, journalists, businesspeople and members of civil society from the region with their Turkish counterparts. ORSAM conducts studies on the regional developments and disseminates their results to the policy and academic circles as well as the wider public through various publication outlets. ORSAM publications include books, reports, bulletins, newsletters, policy briefs, conference minutes and two journals *Ortadoğu Analiz* and *Ortadoğu Etütleri*.

© Content of this report is copyrighted to ORSAM. Except reasonable and partial quotation and use under the Act No. 5846, Law on Intellectual and Artistic Works, via proper citation, the content may not be used or re-published without prior permission by ORSAM. The views expressed in this report reflect only the opinions of its authors and do not represent the institutional opinion of ORSAM.



ORSAM

Ortadoğu Stratejik Araştırmalar Merkezi (ORSAM)

Süleyman Nazif Sokak No: 12-B Çankaya / Ankara

Tel: 0 (312) 430 26 09 Fax: 0 (312) 430 39 48

www.orsam.org.tr