

MEETING EVALUATION

No.13, DECEMBER 2016

“TURKEY-IRAQ RELATIONS” WORKSHOP

A workshop on Turkey-Iraq relations was held in Ankara on 28 December 2016, under the cooperation of ORSAM and Al-Nahrain Research Center operating under auspices of the National Security Undersecretariat of the Iraqi Prime Ministry. Iraqi academicians and specialists coming to Turkey attended the workshop as well as bureaucrats, academicians, specialists and researchers from Turkey.

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During the workshop, the following issues were primarily addressed:

- Mosul operation and the effects of Mosul’s future on bilateral relations,
- Political process in Iraq and Turkey’s approach,
- Perception of Turkey in Iraq,
- KRG’s effects on the relations between Turkey and Iraqi central government,
- Iraqi future and Turkmens’ role,
- PKK presence in Iraq,
- Refugee problem and solutions (Refugees’ problems in Turkey and solution proposals to the problems which may be faced in case of their return to Iraq),
- US presence in Iraq within the scope of the NATO and the international coalition against ISIS and the effects of this presence on Turkey-Iraq relations,
- Iran’s regional policies and its effects on Turkey-Iraq relations,
- Effects of the Syrian Crisis on Turkey-Iraq relations,
- Fight against Global Terrorism and ISIS,
- Energy issues in Turkey-Iraq relations,



- Border gates,
- Trade volume and investment opportunities between two countries,
- Problems and opportunities in economic and trade relations.

The following matters were underlined in the workshop held within this framework:

- Both countries may naturally have disagreements but efforts should be made to prevent these disagreements from turning into conflicts. No one will profit from the conflicts. On the other hand, damages will harm everyone.
- Strong relations and partnerships exist between two neighboring countries and people. Therefore, efforts should be concentrated on partnership rather than problems.
- Iraqi government and people look at the relations with Turkey in a positive light.
- Turkey is an important partner for Iraq. Thousands of Iraqi students receive education in Turkey. Hundreds of Turkish companies carry on business in Iraq. More than 300 thousand Iraqi people are refugees in Turkey. There are some Iraqi people who have been living in Turkey for years. All these necessitate a cooperation.
- Turkey's relations with KRG negatively affects its relations with the central government. It will yield beneficial results in terms of improvement of bilateral relations if Turkey acts together with Iraqi central government regarding the energy agreements which do not fall within the scope of authority of Iraqi federal zone and customs gates.
- Iraq knows that Turkey is in favor of stability in its country. Turkey has adopted this approach not only today but also since 1920.
- Turkey supports equal participation of different political groups in political affairs in Iraq. No group should be excluded from political life so that similar problems will not be faced in Iraq again. Political and social balance should be built in Iraq.
- Turkmen community is important for Turkey. Turkmen come first among the communities under ISIS' influence. The role that

Turkey-Iraq relations should be dealt with on the basis of bilateral relations, apart from regional developments. They should be kept out of the regional balance.



Turkmen will play in the future of Iraq will affect Turkey's policy in Iraq.

- The media affects the people negatively. It will be healthier if the leaders of both countries directly contact each other instead of discussing the problems through press statements. The problems between two countries should be resolved by diplomatic means.
- Turkey-Iraq relations should be dealt with on the basis of bilateral relations, apart from regional developments. They should be kept out of the regional balance.
- Different matters between Turkey and Iraq should also be addressed independently. The relations should be evaluated separately, on the basis of specific matters. That is to say, a problematic matter should not be able to hinder any progress in another matter.
- Serious destruction has been witnessed in Iraq due to fight against ISIS. This organization planted bombs and set traps in the regions under its control. Turkey's experience in this field can be used as in the example of mine clearance on Turkey's borderline with Syria. Turkey can help Iraq in the reconstruction of the regions reclaimed

from ISIS. If Turkey shares its experience with Iraq in terms of refugees, this will be beneficial for the solution of the refugee problem.

- Terrorism should be addressed as a whole. Therefore, PKK should be considered as a common threat as in the fight against ISIS. Show-down cannot be beneficial within the scope of the PKK question. Close cooperation is needed in this regard. The elimination of PKK will not only help Turkey but also contribute to the sovereignty of Iraq.
- High Level Strategic Cooperation Council should start functioning again. The same attitude should be performed against PKK after ISIS. PKK's presence harms the reputation of Iraq. A joint commission on terrorism should be formed among Turkey, Iraq and Iran. There are strong natural relations and common interests among these countries. On the other hand, Turkey may join the "common operation center" formed by Russia, Syria, Iran and Iraq.
- A fight should be conducted with common sense against the groups, notably ISIS, that abuse the religious feelings. This problem can be solved at the very center, in Iraq. ISIS gains power by abusing the victimization that especially the Sunni has endured. Sunni population should be reintegrated into the society.
- Different demands of the Iraqi society should be fulfilled. This is necessary for security and economic development. Each people in Iraq is victimized. Iraq will be in a deadlock if this victimization does not end. Long-term and permanent solutions should be found to these problems.
- There is a "corridor project" which will reach Turkey from the Persian Gulf and transport both road and railway equipment and oil and its products between two countries. This project has been discussed on the agenda since the 1980s. This corridor which will be constructed to cover different fields such as goods and human transportation and trade will both boost the relations between both countries and will be beneficial in the region.
- Despite all, Turkey and Turkish goods are the first preference of the public even in the south of Iraq where the Shiite lives. Even though the political groups in Iraq have different views about Turkey, all parties support the improvement of economic relations. The importance attached to economy in bilateral relations can also be beneficial to solve the other problems.

- Common initiatives and programs should be started in the common borderlands. Productive projects should be supported for the construction of houses and the return of refugees.
- The labor force in Iraq should be diversified. The state employs 70% of the labor force in Iraq. Security problems in Iraq have almost ended the private sector. Therefore, it will be beneficial for Iraq if Turkey conveys its experience of amelioration and privatization in the public sector. Turkey can also help Iraq provide institutionalization in its country.

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*.

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