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## THE SITUATION OF TURKMENS AND THE TURKMEN AREAS AFTER ISIS



ORTADOĞU STRATEJİK ARAŞTIRMALAR MERKEZİ  
CENTER FOR MIDDLE EASTERN STRATEGIC STUDIES

مركز الشرق الأوسط للدراسات الاستراتيجية



# **THE SITUATION OF TURKMENS AND THE TURKMEN AREAS AFTER ISIS**

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**Prepared by:**

Bilgay Duman, Researcher, *ORSAM*

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## PREFACE

ISIS has become a main item in the relations international agenda after its capture of Mosul in June 2014. Its impact has transcended beyond the borders of Iraq in a short time and it has emerged as a new threat and challenge after its terrorist attacks on an international scale. Moreover, ISIS has also established control over the territories that it had captured following its wars against the current governments in Iraq and Syria. This situation has resulted in a complete shattering of the balance in Iraq and Syria. At the same time, potentially permanent damages and changes have occurred in the state mechanisms, social structures, demographic and geographical dynamics and political systems due to a terrorist group acquiring territorial control and administrative authority.

These damage and changes have left a significant impact on particularly the Turkmens in Iraq. The fact that almost all of the towns under the ISIS control are Turkmen settlements makes the Turkmens a direct antagonist amidst the social, political, economic, demographical and military problems that emerged in the post-ISIS period. The rise of the ISIS has exposed the Turkmens to systematic massacres and forced migration. While the Turkmens had been the majority group in their hometowns, their forced displacement caused them to degrade into a minority status in the towns that they fled to. Moreover, Turkmen settlements have suffered from extensive devastation and chemical attacks and some of them have even been rendered uninhabitable, leaving no chance of return. Therefore, one can argue that the social, economic, political, geographic and administrative structure of the Turkmen regions have been subjected to a complete change.

Turkmens have been suffering from not only the impact of the ISIS on itself but also from the effects of ISIS over other groups. In this sense, Turkmens have found themselves in a multi-lateral war, feeling the negative effects of both the sectarian conflict and the conflict between Arbil and Baghdad. Moreover, Turkmens and Kurds are at odds with each other in Tuz Khurmatou and many other regions as a result of the Kurdish groups' territorial expansion prospects in the post-ISIS period.

This paper seeks to cast light on the situation of Turkmens in the post-ISIS period, while at the same time handling the Turkmen settlements one by one, documenting how they have been affected in that period. This paper also stands as a principle study, for it is built on primary data acquired through field research.

*Assoc. Prof. Şaban Kardeş*  
*President of ORSAM*



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**Prepared by:** Bilgay Duman, Researcher, *ORSAM*  
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## THE SITUATION OF TURKMENS AND THE TURKMEN AREAS AFTER ISIS

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Facing long years of oppression and assimilation policies, Turkmens have suffered directly from the ethnic, religious, sectarian, social, political, economic and even tribal conflicts that emerged after the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003. They have been directly targeted amidst the fighting or have felt the negative consequences of the conflicts between the opposing sides. As the losing side of the new Iraqi state structure after the regime change, Turkmens have suffered the most from the rising ISIS activity after the terrorist group's capture of more than a third of the Iraqi territory in June 2014. Various Turkmen areas were invaded by ISIS, forcing hundreds of thousands of Turkmens to flee, while thousands of them lost their lives. Not only Turkmens were deprived of their rightful political, social and economic position in Iraq, but they also lost both their lives and territories, after the new situation caused by the rise of ISIS.

In the period that started with the capture of Mosul by ISIS in mid 2014, more than 60,000 Turkmens had to flee their homes in Tel Afar, Mosul, Tuzkhumatu and Diyala due to the increased activity and control by ISIS in all Turkmen areas. Most of these Turkmens were internally displaced, while some others migrated to Turkey. Although ISIS controls a vast Turkmen territory, it still launches assaults against remaining Turkmen settlements. In addition to Mosul and Tel Afar, Tuzkhumatu and Amirli in the province of Salahaddin, Qara Tapa, Sehreban, Beledruz, Mikdadiye and Jalaula in the province of Diyala, and Daquq and Tazekhumatu in the province of Kirkuk are under the pressure of ISIS. A thorough examination of the Turkmen areas will be useful in order to make sense of the dire situation that Turkmens found themselves in after the expansion of ISIS.

## 1. THE TURKMEN PRESENCE IN IRAQ

Turkmens as a founding entity in Iraq live almost in every province from Basra in the south to Duhok in the north. Yet, they concentrate in a strip of land 50 kilometers wide that stretches from the north and west of Iraq to the southeast. Turkmens mainly reside in the provinces of Kirkuk, Mosul, Erbil, Salahaddin and Diyala.

### a. The Province of Kirkuk



The province of Kirkuk is made up of four districts, the central district, Dibis, Tavuq and Hawija. Kirkuk is sometimes called a “miniature model” of Iraq. Turkmens live in the other three districts, except for Hawija. More than half of the provincial population live in the central district of Kirkuk. Other than that, Tavuq and Dibis are most populated districts. A majority of Turkmens live in the central district. In the central district of Kirkuk along the two shores of the streamlet of Hassa, Turkmens reside in the neighborhoods of Tisin, Musalla, Korya, Baghdad Road, Sarikahya, Şaturlu, Beyler, Piryadi, Almas, Arafa, Bulak, Çukur, İmam Abbas, Cırt Square, Çay, 1 June and Beşiktaş. They are sparsely dispersed in other neighborhoods.

Nonetheless, the districts of Tisin and Tavuq known as the agricultural hubs of Kirkuk house a Turkmen majority. In addition, Turkmens are the majority in the district of Tazekhurmatu as well. There are also Arab villages under the district authority of Tazekhurmatu. The result of Kurdish demographic policies in Tavuq is that Kurds and Turkmens are almost in a 50% to 50% proportion. Turkmens are reduced to a minority in Altinköprü. There are approximately 10 Turkmen villages around Kirkuk. These villages are Türkalan, Yayçı, Çardaklı, Kızılyar, Kümbetler, Bulova and Beşir. It is also known that Christian Turkmens live in the neighborhoods of Şaturlu, Almas and Arafa in Kirkuk.

### b. The Province of Ninevah (Mosul)



The province of Mosul is composed of nine districts, the central district, Tel Afar, Sinjar, Baac, Hamdaniye, Talkeyf, Şeyhan, Hatra and Akre. While Arabs are the majority in Mosul, there are also high numbers of Turkmen and Kurdish population. In addition, religious minority groups such as Shabaks, Ezidis and Christians also reside in Mosul. The central district

is the most crowded district in the province, with approximately 1,700,000 people, while Tel Afar with its predominantly Turkmen population stands second. The population of Tel Afar is 510,000 before ISIS as of June 2014. Turkmens of Mosul live in the central district, Tel Afar and in the south of Hmadaniye and Telkeyf.

In addition, they reside in other parts of the province as well. Turkmens also reside in the villages of Reşidiye, Şerihan, Karakoyun, Sedabavize under Telkeyf, the villages of Tezharap, Şemsiye, Sellamiye, Karayatak, Sennif under Hamdaniye and the villages of İyaziye, Muhallebiye, Zammar and Rabia.

### Turkmen Settlements in the districts of Mosul

<i>Settlement</i>	<i>District</i>
Tezharap	Hamdaniye
Karayatak	Hamdaniye
Sıteh	Hamdaniye
Sellamiye	Hamdaniye
Sennif	Hamdaniye
Şemsiye (Kızfahra)	Hamdaniye
Şih İbrahim	Tel Afar
İyaziye	Tel Afar
Muhallebiye	Tel Afar
Zummar	Tel Afar
Rabia	Tel Afar
Karakoyun	Tilkeyf
Rezakiye	Tilkeyf
Sedabavize	Tilkeyf
Upper and Lower Şerihan	Tilkeyf

At this point, Tel Afar deserves a distinct paragraph. It is important because Tel Afar is the closest Turkmen city to the Turkish border. The city center of Tel Afar is predominantly Turkmen, while the villages of Rabia and Zammar house some Kurds and Arabs. Its demographic structure has brought about a "Tel Afar identity." Although tribal allegiance is prevalent, there are Shiites, Sunnis and even Alawites within tribes. Regional developments after 2003 and the U.S. operations in 2004

and 2005 have shattered the balance in the city; yet it has been restored. The events caused demographic changes in the city and some families fled their homes. During the operations, a large number of people had fled Tel Afar. The number of families who escaped is 4,500, according to the district commission on migrants. That amounts to approximately 30,000 people, if one considers the tribal structure of Tel Afar.

**c.The Province of Diyala**



The province of Diyala houses an Arab majority, though large numbers of Kurds and Turkmens also reside there. Its center is the city of Baquba and consists of six districts, Khanaqin, Kifri, Halis, Mukdadiya and Baladroz. Yet, Kifri is under the authority of the Kurdistan Regional Government, for it is at the border of Suleymaniya. It is known that approximately 700 Turkmen families live in Kifri.

**Turkmen Settlements in Diyala**

<i>Settlement</i>	<i>District</i>
Village of Aştöken	Kifri
Baquba	Bakuba
Mendeli	Baladroz
Kazaniye	Baladroz
Baladroz	Baladroz
Adanaköy	Khanaqin
Jalaula	Khanaqin
Kızlarbat	Khanaqin
Qara Tapa	Kifri
Al-Mukdadiya	Al-Mukdadiya

The city of Baquba, once the center of the resistance, is in the province of Diyala. The KRG’s claims on Khanaqin and Kifri fuels regional conflicts. In addition, intense sectarian fighting is seen in Diyala, despite its Sunni majority. Turkmens were directly affected from the fighting due to their dispersed settlements. Furthermore, even though there is a significant Turkmen population around Bayat in the province of Diyala, they had been subjected to the policies of assimilation and Arabization by previous governments, particularly the Saddam regime. Tribal allegiances are prevalent among the Turkmens in Diyala. That might be explained by the influence of the Arab majority and tribal structure in Diyala over Turkmens.

**d.The Province of Salahaddin**



The province of Salahaddin, which lies north of Baghdad, is composed of nine districts. These are Baiji, Tikrit, Dor, Balad, Shirgat, Samarra, Dujail, Tartar and Tuzkhurmatu. The district of Tuzkhurmatu is the most important Turkmen settlement in Salahaddin. Beside Tuzkhurmatu, Turkmens also live in villages around the districts of Amirli and Suleyman Beg.



tion in the north of Iraq. Turkmens mainly reside in the city center. Until 2006, they were living in the Tophane, Tekke and Saray neighborhoods of the Citadel of Erbil, which housed almost 700 houses. Also, it is known that Turkmens constituted the majority in the city center of Erbil until the 1990s. Yet, after Saddam Hussein launched operations against the border villages in the north of Iraq, people started to flee from these villages to Erbil. Particularly after the capture of Erbil by the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) in 1996 during its fight against the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), there has been a surge in the Kurdish population living in the city center.

In 2006, the Ebil citadel was emptied and the Turkmens living in the citadel were relocated to various neighborhoods in Erbil. The Turkmen population in Erbil is estimated to be around 300,000. After the emptying of the citadel, there is no neighborhood left in Erbil that Turkmens are concentrated in. They mainly reside in the neighborhoods of Taci, Mareke and Three Tak around the citadel. As Erbil undertook a swift development in recent years, the cost of living in the city has risen, and therefore Turkmens who have generally low incomes have started leaving the city center. Nonetheless, it is possible to see Turkmens in the entirety of the Erbil urban life. Turkmens participate in the political institutions of the KRG, including the Parliament.

## 2. THE SITUATION OF THE TURKMEN SETTLEMENTS IN IRAQ

### a. The Situation of the Turkmen Settlements in Kirkuk and Its Surroundings

ISIS has launched an offensive against Kirkuk after capturing Mosul and captured the Sunni Arab areas in the south and southwest of the province. While the Sunni-dominated town of Hawija was already under the control of ISIS before the capture of Mosul, the villages of Ab-basiye, Zap and Riyaz, which are located between Hawija and Kirkuk, had fallen to ISIS as well. Additionally, the Turkmen village of Beshir, which is located in the south of Kirkuk, was invaded by ISIS as well, while other Turkmen towns such as Tazekhurmatu and Daquq emerged as the main frontline of the fighting. Capturing most of the villages around Daquq, ISIS approached the district of Molla Abdullah which is only 8-10 kms away from the city center, but failed to enter the city after launching assaults from time to time. Despite that failure, ISIS has captured the villages of Molla Abdulla, Mektep Halit, Meryembeg and Tel El Verd after a surprise attack during a single night. As of the current situation, ISIS still controls one third of the province of Kirkuk, while the main frontline is situated 12-15 kilometers from the city center stretching from the south of Kirkuk along the southwest, west and northwest.

Faced with the pressure of the Kurdish groups after 2003, Kirkuk was finally taken under the authority of the security forces and the Peshmarga of the Kurdish groups after ISIS captured Mosul and the Iraqi army abandoned the city. Local police and Kurdish security forces maintain the security inside the city, while the Peshmarga protect the surrounding areas. Nevertheless, the district of Hawija and surrounding villages, which have Sunni

Arab majority, have fallen to ISIS. As of the current situation, Hawija is still under ISIS control. Additionally, Daquq and Dibis, other districts of Kirkuk, are under the Peshmarga control, while there is also Hashd al Shaabi presence in Daquq. Furthermore, PKK terrorists are also positioned in various towns around Kirkuk such as Daquq, Kara Hanjar, Chamchamal in order to aid the Peshmarga against ISIS.

Hashd al Shaabi and other Shiite militia have opted to support Turkmens since the majority of Turkmens between Amirli and Kirkuk are Shiites and these territories have strategic importance for the fight against ISIS. Cooperation with Hashd al Shaabi enabled the protection of Turkmen settlements in some regions. For example, the Turkmen group in Hashd al Shaabi, known as the 16th Brigade, has taken part in the fight against ISIS in Kirkuk and its surroundings. Six units of the 16th Brigade serves in Tazekhurmatu, Beshir, Daquq, Tuzkhurmatu, Qara Tapa and Tisin. These units are composed of Turkmen fighters who hail from these towns. As of the current situation, most of the villages around Daquq are liberated from ISIS. Yet, the village of Beshir remained under the ISIS rule, until it was liberated through a joint operation of Hashd al Shaabi and Peshmarga, with the support of the international coalition, after several unsuccessful attempts. ISIS still conducts attacks against Beshir and Tazekhurmatu. It even carried out a chemical attack against Tazekhurmatu, when it still had control of Beshir. Tazekhurmatu was targeted by more than two hundred mortar shells and Katyusha missiles in only three days in March 2016. While most of the missiles targeted the frontline, civilian areas were also hit. Additionally, chemical agents such as chlorine and mustard gas were detected in these attacks and affected ci-

vilians have been placed under medical care in hospitals and facilities. It is known that approximately 7,000 of the total 40,000 people were affected from chemi-

cal attacks in Tazekhurmatu, of which all are Turkmens. 167 Turkmens who were heavily wounded were taken to Turkey for treatment. It was seen that the ISIS threat

### Cemical Attacks in Tazakhurmatu

Population:	Nearly 40,000 (All Turkmens)
Date:	March 7-9, 2016
Attacking Group:	ISIS
Number of Rockets, Katyushas and Mortars Fired:	More than 200
Chemical Material Used:	Chlorine and Mustard Gas
Effected People:	6,900
Number of Heavily Injured People Treated in Turkey:	167

in Kirkuk is still present with the surprise attack in the city on October 21, 2016, just after the start of the Mosul operation on October 17, 2016. At a time when focus is on Mosul, ISIS with almost 100 terrorists, attacked Kirkuk and controlled some neighbourhoods for a short period of time. It was argued that some of these terrorists infiltrated into the city from Hawija which is under the control of ISIS and some are from the sleeper cells in Kirkuk. ISIS-affiliated terrorists kidnapped people from mosques, kindergartens, and their houses. They deployed snipers on the tallest buildings in Kirkuk which they occupied. Turkmeneli TV chief correspondent Ahmet Hacaroğlu lost his life with such a sniper attack. 3 suicide attackers carried out an attack on the energy plant which is being expanded by the Iranian firm Sunir in Dibis, and claimed the lives of 4 Iranian workers and 12 Iraqi administrators. Police forces, asayish forces affiliated with the Kurdish parties and peshmerga

who are in charge of the security in Kirkuk fought for 2 days against this surprise attack. In addition to peshmerga forces in Kirkuk, peshmerga special forces led by PUK Deputy Secretary General Kosrat Rasul also entered into the city. Moreover, Hashdi Shaabi-affiliated Turkmen forces also established security checkpoints. After the ISIS attack in Kirkuk was thwarted, operations began against the sleeper cells of ISIS in the city. Still, the ISIS attack cost many lives and left hundreds of people injured. It is reported that whereas 100 people lost their lives, around 250 people were injured.

Besides, an Iraqi Air Forces aircraft bombed a condolence gathering in İlhanlı Khuseiniyye owned by Turkmens in Daquq and claimed the lives of 17 people and left more than 30 people injured. Following this tragic incident in Daquq, a research committee was formed under the leadership of Turkmen MP Niyazi

Mimaroglu. Mimaroglu stated that Iraqi security officers avoid talking about the incident and there are suspicions about it. Iraqi PM Haider El-Abadi stated that Iraqi aircrafts are outdated and their pilots are exhausted, so an aircraft on its way to Mosul mistakenly bombed the gathering and such mistakes can happen. With this indifference to this tragic incident, he continued his policy of ignoring the Turkmen population. Considering that the distance between Daquq and Mosul is almost 200 kms, his statement seems quite questionable and thus, this incident can be regarded as an extension of the annihilation policy against Turkmens.

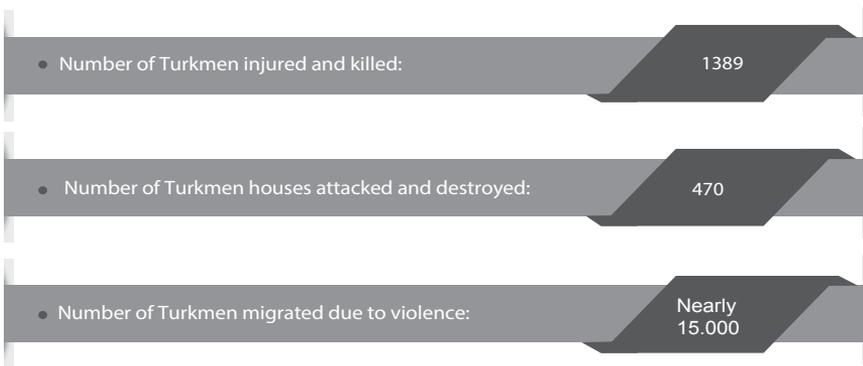
ISIS still threatens Kirkuk through Beshir from time to time. As a matter of fact, Beshir stands 20 kilometers away from Kirkuk. As ISIS attacks Tazekhurmatu from this region, Turkmens are faced with risks of massacre and the ISIS threat

on Kirkuk is magnified. That is because, Tazekhurmatu is a resistance spot between ISIS and Kirkuk. If Tazekhurmatu falls, ISIS will surely capture Kirkuk. Also, if ISIS capture Tazekhurmatu, it will sever the Kirkuk-Baghdad road and boost its activity in the north-south axis. Therefore, ISIS will have the opportunity to restore its strength and the fight against ISIS will be jeopardized. In addition, there is an electricity distribution plant and a natural gas station in Tazekhurmatu. If ISIS attacks these facilities, it might cause a serious disaster and devastation. Therefore, the survival of Tazekhurmatu is crucial for fighting against and destroying ISIS and ending terrorism in Iraq.

#### **b. The Situation in Tuzkhurmatu and Its Surroundings**

Tuzkhurmatu is a district with a population of 180,000 in which Arabs, Turkmens

#### **Violence in Tuzkhurmatu between 2003 and 2015**



**Not:** The figures infographic are received from Turkmen Rescue Foundation.

and Kurds live together. Its sub-districts are Amirli, Bastamli, Suleyman Beg, Kadir Kerem and Yengice besides its district center. Almost the whole population of Amirli, Bastamli and Yengice are Turkmens, while in the district center Turkmens are more populous than Kurds or Arabs. Even though it is under the administrative authority of Salahaddin, the people of Tuzkhurmatu have never felt that they belong there. That is because, Tuzkhurmatu had been a province under Kirkuk until 1976

and then was placed under the authority of Salahaddin after it was founded. Nevertheless, the link between Kirkuk and Tuzkhurmatu has survived due to the kinship relations and geographical proximity. Yet there are still administrative problems related to the border revision by the Saddam regime in Tuzkhurmatu in 1976.

Once under the control of the KRG, now the Tuzkhurmatu-Kirkuk road is controlled by Hashd al Shaabi after the

increasing ISIS activity in the region. Nonetheless, the Peshmarga maintains its presence along the road.

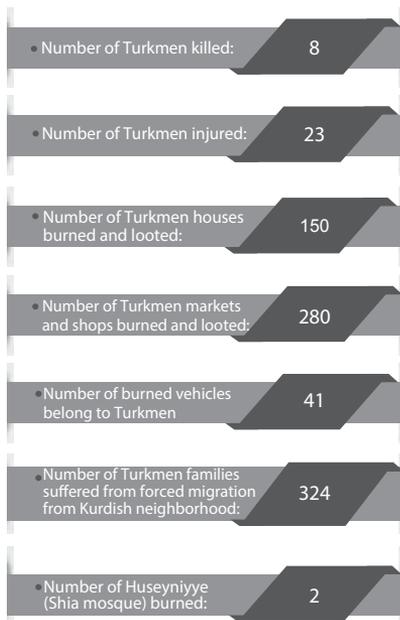
Besides, the Kurdish groups maintain the control over the Tuzkhurmatu-Tiqrit road, as far as the Hemrin Mountain Range. The Hemrin Mountain Range is the geopolitical border of the de facto Kurdish dominance. They range as far as to the east of Tuzkhurmatu as well. The border of Suleimaniyah lies just behind the mountains. In addition, Tuzkhurmatu has suffered the most from Saddam regime's Arabization policies. Large numbers of Turkmens were forced to migrate and their properties were seized. Moreover, some rumors suggest that the KRG paid some Kurdish families to migrate to Tuzkhurmatu after 2003. Yet it would be wrong to state that Kurds pursue a systematic policy of intimidation. That is because, the Kurdish families, who were paid to migrate, do not seem to have a clear political agenda, and the Kurdish political actors were not faithful to keep their promises. Some of these families even returned to their previous settlements.

Tuzkhurmatu is particularly important for Turkmens, since it had the first Turkmen uprisings against the Kurdish groups' encroachment into Kirkuk in 2003. After the Mosul offensive of ISIS, Turkmens have been putting forward an excellent defense in Tuzkhurmatu, for it stands on the road between Kirkuk and Baghdad. They have managed to survive despite being targeted by systematic terrorist attacks since 2011.

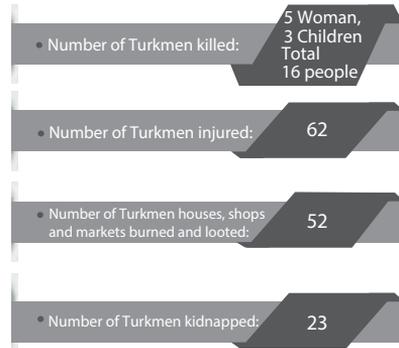
After the capture of Mosul and subsequently Tiqrit, the ISIS pressure on Tuzkhurmatu increased. The Turkmen settlements known as "Bayat Obası" in Tuzkhurmatu, i.e. the villages of Yengice, Bastamli, Köküz, Muratlı, Karanaz, Biravçılı, Suleyman Beg, Hasadarlı and Çardaklı, as well as mixed population villages such as Bir Ahmet, Abbud and Zengili were invaded by ISIS and suffered looting, robbery and devastation. Most of the resident Turkmens migrated to Kirkuk. The fact that some Turkmen tribes in Yengijah and Bastamli started supporting ISIS has caused a great discontent among Turkmens.

**Turkmen-Kurd Clashes in Tuzkhurmatu**

**12-15 November 2015**



**23-25 April 2016**



Turkmens have survived despite the enormous pressure on them in Tuzkhurmatu. It is even to the extent that the Turkmen resistance in Amirli has attracted the attention of the international community. ISIS failed to capture Amirli after an 86-day long siege. When the siege of Amirli was broken with the aid of Hashd Al Shaabi and Shiite militia, the Kirkuk-Baghdad road was reopened. In a similar fashion, ISIS has failed to capture Tuzkhurmatu despite its repeated assaults. Hashd al Shaabi and Shiite militia reinforced the Turkmen positions between Amirli and Kirkuk, since the majority of the Turkmen population living there are Shiites and the region itself has a particular strategic importance. Therefore, Turkmens were able to protect their settlements.

Although ISIS has been warded off, the tension in Tuzkhurmatu ensues. Sporadic fighting has been seen since 2015 between Hashd al Shaabi and the Kurdish groups who have been laying claims on Tuzkhurmatu from 2003 onwards. At first glance, the conflict seems to take place between the Peshmarga and Hashd al Shaabi; yet the developments encompass a multitude of conflicting dynamics. The apparent conflict between the Peshmarga and Hashd al Shaabi creates tensions elsewhere other than Tuzkhurmatu such as in Khanaqin, Jalaula and rural Kirkuk, the places where they both fight against ISIS. Hashd al Shaabi is composed of different militia groups such as the Badr Organization, Hizbullah, Asaib ahl al Haq and Saray al Selam. Notwithstanding the truce in Tuzkhurmatu, large numbers of external forces enter the city on the side of either the Peshmarga or Hashd al Shaabi. That is likely to extend the reach of the conflict.

Additionally, the conflict in Tuzkhurmatu is also called a Turkmen-Kurdish conflict. That is because, almost all Hashd al Shaabi militias in Tuzkhurmatu are Turkmens. Therefore, Kurds and Turkmens, who clashed in the past over Tuzkhurmatu, have found themselves at odds again. Two large skirmishes have taken place among Turkmens and Kurds: one was between 12-15 November 2015 and the other was on 23-25 April 2016. These skirmishes claimed the lives of

24 Turkmens, wounding 85 others. In addition, Kurds burned Turkmens' houses and businesses, fueling a social tension as well as a military clash. It is difficult to overlook the risk that the Turkmen-Kurdish tension in Tuzkhurmatu may affect all other towns from Erbil to Khanaqin, where they live together.

Furthermore, it is likely that Tuzkhurmatu will be a new contested area between Erbil and Baghdad. The risk of confrontation is further magnified, since the dispute between Erbil and Baghdad rages on in many areas, particularly about the budget share. The presence of Hashd al Shaabi in Tuzkhurmatu will likely force the Iraqi central government to oppose the KRG's position. As a matter of fact, it is known that a team composed of Hashd al Shaabi members in Baghdad was dispatched to Tuzkhurmatu. Therefore, the number of actors in the dispute is likely to increase. In addition, the local conflict in Tuzkhurmatu is expanding in scope for the local actors, due to the involvement of external forces. At this point, it is also known that the terrorist group PKK has positioned itself in Tuzkhurmatu in order to support the Peshmarga and targets Turkmen civilians in its attacks.

Lastly, there is still the risk of a restoration of ISIS influence in Tuzkhurmatu, due to the current confrontation that takes place around the city. Such a situation will have negative repercussions on the broader strategy of the fight against ISIS.

The conflicting parties in Tuzkhurmatu need to act responsibly in order to prevent the further escalation and expansion of the conflict. The expansion of the conflict will not only hamper the fight against ISIS but also instigate a humanitarian crisis, considering its negative impact on the civilian population. As mentioned earlier, Turkmens suffer the most from the ongoing confrontation. Their houses and businesses are devastated, while they are targeted by snipers and abductors. Nevertheless, the Turkmens in Tuzkhurmatu have been struggling against terrorism for long years while also preserving their iden-

tity and presence. For this reason, it should be kept in mind that one sided attempts by Kurdish political groups in the regions such as Tuzkhurmatu and Kirkuk will not work. It is clear that such attempts go no further than harming the civilians. Therefore, the most proper approach involves responsible action and conflict resolution through political consensus by all sides, be it Iraqi central government, KRG, Iraqi Turkmen Front, Kurdish parties or Hashd al Shaabi, regardless of their position in the confrontation.

### **c.The Situation of the Turkmen Settlements in Diyala**

Being one of the oldest Turkmen settlements, Diyala is one of the regions that ISIS has been active. An intense confrontation has begun in Diyala particularly after ISIS started moving towards the tomb of Imam al Asqari, a Shiite sacred site in Samarra which is the symbol of the sectarian conflict in Iraq after 2006. In this period, ISIS extended its activity in the Turkmen settlements of Qara Tapa, Jalaula, Saadiye, K rdere, Mansuriye (Adanak y), Mukdadiya, Khanaqin, Mendeli and Baquba. It has even managed to capture Saadiye, Mansuriye and Jalaula. The Turkmen of Saadiye fled to Khanaqin, Baquba, Kalar, Suleimaniyah and Kirkuk, while the Turkmen of Mansuriye fled to Qara Tapa. The fact that the Sunni Turkmen of Mansuriye have taken refuge in the Shiite Turkmen settlement of Qara Tapa shows that sectarian differences mean little for Turkmen. The Turkmen of Qara Tapa have prioritized their ethnic identity over their sectarian identity and welcomed their kin from Mansuriye.

ISIS launched heavy assaults against the predominantly Turkmen town of Qara Tapa but failed, thanks to the resistance of the Qara Tapa Turkmen. The Qara Tapa Turkmen have formed a militia under the auspices of Hashd al Shaabi consisting of 350-400 fighters for ensuring the protection of their town. Yet, while the Turkmen militia protected the town center, the Peshmarga covered the countryside, hence achieving the longstanding objective of the KRG. It is also known

that the people of Qara Tapa who fled to Kirkuk and other cities during the ISIS assaults returned to their homes after the assaults were thwarted.

ISIS also launched numerous assaults against Khanaqin. It approached towards Khanaqin after capturing Jalaula, where the Peshmarga resistance halted its advance. Since Khanaqin was a contested area between the Iraqi central government and the KRG, the deployment of the Peshmarga for the defense of the city has ensured the Peshmarga dominance. The Iraqi Army and Hashd al Shaabi are barred from entering Khanaqin where sporadic fighting occurs between the Peshmarga and Hashd al Shaabi.

On the pretext of protecting the region from ISIS assaults, KRG has launched an initiative that involves "digging trenches" around Diyala, thereby ensuring its total control and drawing a de facto border. Trenches have been dug from the town of Khanaqin in the east, skirting southwest around Jalaula and reaching northwest toward Kirkuk, enveloping Qara Tapa and Tuzkhurmatu. The trenches enabled the KRG to extend its dominance beyond its borders (Erbil, Suleimaniyah and Duhok) towards the contested areas in Diyala (Khanaqin, Jalaula and Qara Tapa). In addition, Hashd al Shaabi controls Saadiye, Mansuriye, Mukdadiya, Kazaniye and Mendeli. Therefore, the Turkmen geography in Diyala is effectively split between the Peshmarga and Hashd al Shaabi.

As of the current situation, all the towns captured by ISIS in Diyala have been taken back by Hashd al Shaabi, Peshmarga or Iraqi Army. People have started to return to Mansuriye, Saadiye and Jalaula. Nonetheless, the devastation of the fighting left many houses uninhabitable. Consequently, a humanitarian crisis is at hand and there is a growing need for daily consumption goods.

### **d.The Situation of Turkmen in Mosul and Tel Afar**

Tel Afar, the largest Turkmen town of Iraq, has shared the fate of Mosul. It has been

invaded by ISIS just after the fall of Mosul. The Turkmen people numbering approximately 230,000 in the town center and the surrounding neighborhoods of Iyaziye and Muhallebiye had to flee their homes. They initially moved to Sinjar and Dohok. After a short time, those Turkmen who fled to Sinjar had to move once again and headed to Duhok and Erbil when ISIS launched an assault against Sinjar. Turkmen of Tel Afar received harsh treatment by the KRG and were not allowed to enter Erbil. They had to wait for days in the checkpoints outside Erbil. Most of the Shiite Turkmen had to move to the southern provinces such as Najaf, Kerbela and Hille, while the Sunni Turkmen migrated to Kirkuk. Turkish agencies, AFAD (Disaster and Emergency Management Authority), TİKA (Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency) and Turkish Red Crescent have set up a camp in Yahyava, near Kirkuk, for the people from Tel Afar. Currently, approximately 1,500 families live in this camp. Some of these Turkmen from Tel Afar were settled in the camps in Duhok. Additionally, there are also approximately 52,000 Turkmen who passed through Syria and arrived in Turkey. Others who could not flee strive to carry on their lives under the oppression of ISIS. While no clear figures are present about the number of Turkmen that remained in Tel Afar, some figures suggest that the number is approximately 10,000-15,000.

Besides, other Turkmen settlements in Mosul came under serious pressure after ISIS captured Mosul. In the villages of Reshidiye, Sellamiye, Karakoyun, Şerihan, Sadabavize, Fazliye, Hurzibat, resident Turkmen have abandoned their homes. ISIS has also invaded the villages of Tezharap, Razkiye and Babnid of the Hamdaniye and Tilqaif districts. As of the current situation, ISIS still controls Tel Afar and Mosul. Yet, the village of Babnid in Tilqaif was lately recaptured by the Peshmarga.

Moreover, it is known that the Turkmen who fled Tel Afar formed a militia group in order to help liberate their hometown. Their militia numbers approximately 3,500-4,000

and joins the fight in several places under the banner of Hashd al Shaabi. There are also 500 Turkmen in the camp of Bashiqa where the Turkish army provides training to local forces. On October 17, 2016, the Mosul operation has begun. Peshmarga forces from the east of Mosul and the Iraqi forces from the south started the operation with the support of the US-led coalition to put an end to the ISIS presence in Mosul. Peshmarga and the Iraqi army also conducted joint operations in the southeast of the city. In addition, Hashdi Shaabi forces also consisting of Turkmen fighters started operations against ISIS from the South and southwest of Mosul to Tel Afar. Liberating Tel Afar from ISIS is important for the Turkmen identity in Mosul. Here, however, it is important how to ensure peace in Tel Afar in the post-ISIS era. Meanwhile, there are some efforts to foster national reconciliation, to help enable the Sunni and Shiite Turkmen to live together in peace in Tel Afar.

#### **e. The Situation of Turkmen in the KRG**

The developments after the ISIS invasion of Mosul have negatively affected the KRG in both security and political dimension, just like the other regions of Iraq. The Peshmarga of the KRG has directly taken part in the fight against ISIS, while the economic and political problems involved with the war have shattered the domestic balance of the KRG. ISIS advanced towards Erbil after Mosul and was stopped only 20 kilometers from the city center. In addition, the towns of Khanaqin and Jalaula in the south of Sulaymaniyah, which were contested areas under the de facto control of the KRG, suffered from ISIS attacks and Jalaula even remained under the ISIS rule for a while. Later on, these towns were taken back. After the ISIS attacks against the Turkmen settlements outside the KRG, Turkmen refugees were settled in the camps within the KRG territory in a controlled fashion, though many of them were not allowed to enter and even their transit passage was blocked. Many Turkmen families had to wait in the checkpoints at the border for long days under harsh conditions.

After the insistence of Turkmen leaders, they were allowed inside the KRG territory, only to be relocated to other areas. Most of the Turkmen people of Tel Afar were relocated to the south of Iraq through land and air transport while others were settled around Kirkuk. The Iraqi Turkmen Front (ITF) played an important role in this period. ITF vouched for the passage of Turkmen families and coordinated their movement. In addition, the ITF bureau in Erbil took part in the coordination and distribution of the aid provided by the Turkish Crescent and other aid organizations. Besides, the Mosul bureau of ITF was relocated to Duhok after the ISIS invasion and has started to carry out its activities in the KRG territory. ITF seeks an active role not only in the coordination of Turkmen refugees and internally displaced but also in the activities of the Provincial Council of Mosul and the preparations about the liberation of Mosul.

Additionally, the capture of Mosul by ISIS has shattered the balance in the domestic politics of the KRG. The current balance was restored, when the government was formed 9 months after the parliamentary elections in September 2013. Yet, the discussions about the Presidency term of Massoud Barzani, which was already extended for two years in June 2013, has once again upset the balance. A meeting was held in the KRG Parliament on 22 June 2015, pioneered by the PUK, Goran and Kurdistan Islamic Union. After the meeting, a common declaration was published, announcing that the Presidency of Massoud Barzani should not be extended once more and the new President must be elected by the KRG Parliament.

Massoud Barzani and KDP denounced this view, boycotted the meeting and deemed this meeting a coup attempt on the pretext that the U.S. and Iranian diplomats and foreign mission representatives also participated in the meeting. After that, protests and demonstrations took place and the political crisis deepened. Particularly, the KDP did not allow the Parliament Chairman Yusuf Muhammed Sadik (of Goran) to enter Erbil, which escalated the crisis. As of the current

situation, the Parliament is unable to hold sessions and Nechirvan Barzani, Prime Minister of the KRG, has suspended four ministers from the Goran Party. In addition to the political crisis, an economic crisis has started to affect the daily life negatively. The KRG was able to pay only one fourth of the wages of public servants once in four months.

In this period, Turkmens have sought to act as a balancing actor. Turkmens, who are represented by only 5 deputies in the KRG Parliament consisting of 111 deputies, have refrained from taking sides in the political crisis. They have only one seat in the cabinet (The Ministry of Justice) and have opted to act in favor of maintaining the stability in the region. As the largest political actors in terms of representation, political history and experience, ITF has left the KRG politics in 2005 but returned in 2011 and participated in the parliamentary elections of 2013. It has won one seat (Aydın Maruf) in the Parliament out of the Turkmen quota of 5 seats and has been working to rise in the KRG politics as an active player. The current political balance in the KRG allows for even one deputy to be effective and ITF seeks to achieve a political balancer role, repeatedly declaring its intentions for the maintenance of the stability in the region.

Despite the active approach of the ITF in the KRG politics, it would be wrong to assume that Turkmens have achieved a significant and active role in the KRG. There are still deficiencies and problems in the KRG's perspective of Turkmens. During the government formation talks after 2013, it was promised that Turkmens would be granted an undersecretary reporting directly to the Prime Minister which would deal with the Turkmen affairs, if they took part in the government. Yet, no such step was taken afterwards. Besides, no appointment was made for the Directorate General for Turkmen Education after 2011. The most significant development for Turkmens after 2013 is that the government has allowed some mosques to hold sermons in Turkish. Other than that, no serious positive step has been taken so far in the KRG about the rights of Turkmens.

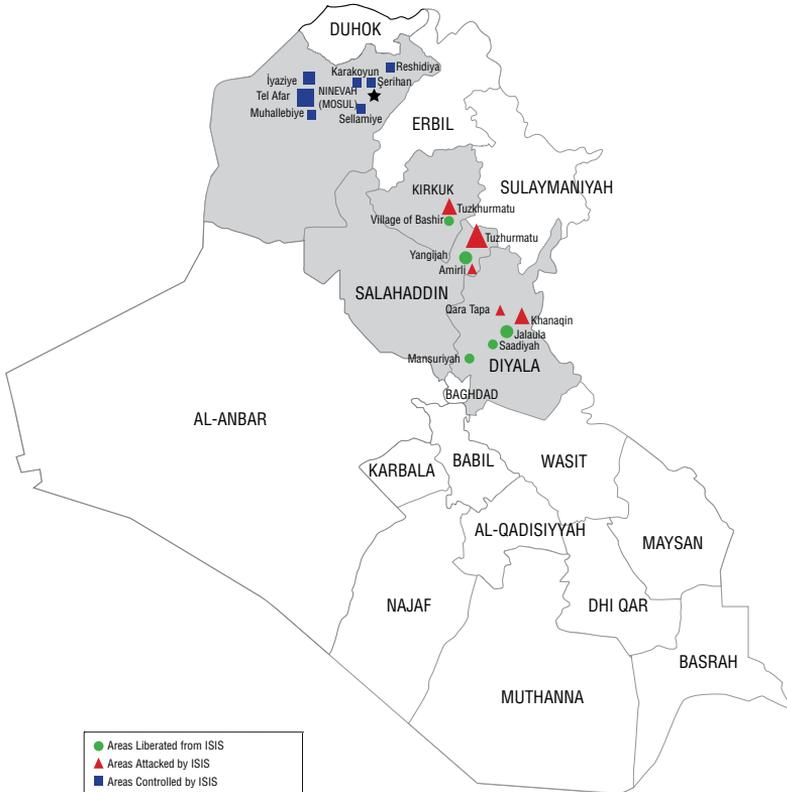
## CONCLUSION

As detailed above, Turkmen are faced with a multidimensional struggle and war in the post-ISIS period in Iraq. They have been carrying out a three-pronged war of survival. Many Turkmen settlements are suffering from the invasion or continuous assaults of ISIS; therefore Turkmen have participated in the fight against ISIS. They have been trying to protect their settlements which are not under the ISIS invasion. In addition, Turkmen stand amidst the conflict between the KRG and the Iraqi central government. The dispute between the KRG and Baghdad is mostly over Turkmen lands. Lastly, the heated ethnic and sectarian war in Iraq after the ISIS advance directly involves Turkmen as well.

After its fast advance in June 2014 and the capture of Mosul, ISIS invaded the north of Iraq and even threatened to capture Erbil. The airstrikes by the U.S. and Iraq halted its assault toward Erbil, yet ISIS invaded numerous Turkmen settlements in the north of Iraq. The regions under the ISIS control are still mainly Turkmen-populated areas. These predominantly Turkmen settlements are Mosul, Tel Afar, Sinjar in the northwest, Daquq,

Dibis, Taze Khurmatou in the environs of Kirkuk, Tuzkhurmatu and its villages in Tiqrit, and the towns of Khanaqin, Jalaula, Mukdadiya, Mansuriye and Saadiye in Diyala. That is the reason why Turkmen directly participated in the fight against ISIS after June 2014. Considering the developments in the Amirli district of Tuzkhurmatu following the 86 days of siege by ISIS, it would not be wrong to assume that the turning point in the fight against ISIS has taken place in the Turkmen regions. As a matter of fact, since Amirli lies on the main line of transportation along the north-south axis, the end of the ISIS's encirclement also meant the end of its activities around Tuzkhurmatu. When the surroundings of Tuzkhurmatu is cleared of ISIS, security was maintained along the north-south axis and the threat against Baghdad from the north has been averted. Besides, Turkmen have played a significant role in the defense of Kirkuk. They have fought in the ranks of Hashd al Shaabi, the Shiite militia, and delivered crucial blows against ISIS in tandem with the Peshmarga resulting in the liberation of villages around Daquq, Kirkuk.

### Turkmen Areas Suffered from ISIS' Advance



Nonetheless, the struggle of the Turkmen to liberate their towns from ISIS is still continuing. The liberation of Tel Afar, an important ISIS stronghold, will be an important step in the fight against ISIS, enabling the liberation of Mosul. Similarly, more than 250,000 Turkmen will be able to return to Tel Afar, who had to flee after the ISIS takeover thereby the dispersed Turkmen people will be reunited. The liberation of Beshir, a village of strategic importance near Kirkuk, will relieve the pressure on Kirkuk and enable the sweeping of ISIS from Hawija, another ISIS stronghold in the south of Kirkuk. Therefore, one could argue that Turkmen are still a major force in the fight against ISIS.

Turkmen have been negatively affected after the KRG expanded and reinforced

its dominion by deploying the Peshmarga forces in some portions of Mosul, Kirkuk, Salahaddin and Diyala. The KRG's claims over these regions, which are under the administrative authority of the central government, creates problems among the two sides while Turkmen living in these contested areas are left amidst the confrontation and forced to take sides. As an example, an armed confrontation occurred in November 2015 in Tuzkhurmatu between the Kurdish parties and Hashd al Shaabi forces among whom there are many Turkmen. The clashes resulted in additional force deployment by Baghdad and increased tension in the city. Turkmen's houses and businesses were burned down and Turkmen civilians were targeted. Similarly, as the KRG pressure grows and the Kirkuk governor Necmettin

Kerim acts increasingly independent of Baghdad, tension will inevitably increase and Turkmens will be negatively affected. Administrative and security problems worsen in Kirkuk as Necmettin Kerim ignores the decisions taken by Baghdad.

In addition, the conflicts related to ethnic and sectarian identities in Iraq after 2003 have deteriorated after the rise of ISIS in June 2014. ISIS claimed that it defends Sunni Islam yet produced terrorism as it declared an “Islamic state” based on caliphate and oppressed all who did not adopt its views. Turkmens have clearly suffered the worst of the ISIS’s oppression. Although Turkmens prioritize their ethnic identities, ISIS targeted Shiite Turkmens and forced the Sunni Turkmens to either flee or submit. After the supreme Shiite cleric Ayatollah Ali Al-Sistani declared “fatwa of jihad” against ISIS, large numbers of Shiite Turkmens joined forces with Shiite militia under the banner of Hashd al Shaabi. Therefore, the sectarian identity among the Turkmens received a major boost.

In addition, Turkmens and Kurds started fighting each other at times as the Kurds

have sought to expand their territory under the pretext of carrying a “national struggle” against ISIS as they recaptured settlements under the ISIS control. This is most clearly seen in Kirkuk and Tuzkhurmatu, which have historically been contested areas. As mentioned earlier, the clashes in Tuzkhurmatu in November 2015 are incidents of ethnic struggle between Turkmens and Kurds.

Consequently, Turkmens are still the losing side in Iraq. They are affected from the fighting in many aspects, while also being directly targeted by the fighting. The situation not only affects their security but also hampers the acquisition and utilization of their political, economic, and cultural rights. Turkmens seek a solution for themselves in the current conjuncture, yet their identity is being eroded as they are forced to take part in the many conflicts currently unfolding in Iraq. Turkmens’ survival with their national identity requires that they do not take part in different conflict dynamics but they move together and seek common solutions.

