

INTERNAL POLITICAL BALANCES IN NORTH IRAQ AND FUTURE OF THE STRATEGIC ALLIANCE

KUZEY IRAK'TA İÇ SİYASAL DENGELER VE STRATEJİK İTTİFAK'IN GELECEĞİ

التوازنات السياسية الداخلية في شمال العراق ومستقبل
الاتفاقيات الاستراتيجية

CENTER FOR MIDDLE EASTERN STRATEGIC STUDIES
ORTADOĞU STRATEJİK ARAŞTIRMALAR MERKEZİ

مركز الشرق الأوسط للدراسات الاستراتيجية



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CENTER FOR MIDDLE EASTERN STRATEGIC STUDIES

History

In Turkey, the shortage of research on the Middle East grew more conspicuous than ever during the early 90's. Center for Middle Eastern Strategic Studies (ORSAM) was established in January 1, 2009 in order to provide relevant information to the general public and to the foreign policy community. The institute underwent an intensive structuring process, beginning to concentrate exclusively on Middle affairs.

Outlook on the Middle Eastern World

It is certain that the Middle East harbors a variety of interconnected problems. However, neither the Middle East nor its people ought to be stigmatized by images with negative connotations. Given the strength of their populations, Middle Eastern states possess the potential to activate their inner dynamics in order to begin peaceful mobilizations for development. Respect for people's willingness to live together, respect for the sovereign right of states and respect for basic human rights and individual freedoms are the prerequisites for assuring peace and tranquility, both domestically and internationally. In this context, Turkey must continue to make constructive contributions to the establishment of regional stability and prosperity in its vicinity.

ORSAM's Think-Tank Research

ORSAM, provides the general public and decision-making organizations with enlightening information about international politics in order to promote a healthier understanding of international policy issues and to help them to adopt appropriate positions. In order to present effective solutions, ORSAM supports high quality research by intellectuals and researchers that are competent in a variety of disciplines. ORSAM's strong publishing capacity transmits meticulous analyses of regional developments and trends to the interested parties. With its web site, its books, reports, and periodicals, ORSAM supports the development of Middle Eastern literature on a national and international scale. ORSAM supports the development of Middle Eastern literature on a national and international scale. ORSAM facilitates the sharing of knowledge and ideas with the Turkish and international communities by inviting statesmen, bureaucrats, academics, strategists, businessmen, journalists, and NGO representatives to Turkey.

Assist. Prof. Dr. Serhat ERKMEN

Serhat Erkmen, who was born in 1975 in İstanbul, graduated from Ankara University Faculty of Political Science Department of International Relations. He completed his master's degree and doctoral study at Ankara University Institute of Social Sciences. Working as Middle East Researcher in Center for Eurasian Strategic Studies between the years 2000-2008, Erkmen has been working as ORSAM Middle East Advisor since 2009. Also, Erkmen has been Head of Department of International Relations at Kırşehir Ahi Evran University since 2009.

PRESENTATION

Following the invasion of Iraq, Kurdistan Regional Government drew a different picture than the rest of the country. While the majority of Iraq grappled with political instability and infrastructural problems, Iraqi Kurds made historical gains. Iraqi Kurds, who found stronger grassroots for the internal transformation which started in 1991 when the area was recognized as a federal district in the Iraqi Constitution, could achieve not carrying their political differences to Baghdad. There has been strong political differences since the beginning of Kurdish political movement in Iraq. Those differences even led to an armed conflict between KDP and PUK which were the two most powerful political parties of Iraqi Kurds in mid-1990s. Taking lesson from the developments in recent history, Kurdish parties launched a reconciliation process before the US invasion of Iraq; and they could maintain this reconciliation as of 2002 despite all kind of differences. The most important factor providing political stability in IKRG was the maintenance of this reconciliation and the strategic agreement between KDP and PUK as from 2006. The aforesaid agreement was brought up for discussion upon the Regional Parliamentary Elections in 2009. Today, it has become the most important subject in the change of political structure and future of Iraqi Kurds. In this report, ORSAM Advisor Assist. Prof. Dr. Serhat Erkmen analyzed nature and future of the strategic agreement. Dr. Erkmen paid lots of visits to the region before writing the report, and made interviews with many politician. Therefore, the report was prepared based on these interviews.

Hasan Kanbolat
ORSAM Director

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By: Assist. Prof. Dr. Serhat ERKMEN

INTERNAL POLITICAL BALANCES IN NORTH IRAQ AND FUTURE OF THE STRATEGIC ALLIANCE

Abstract

- *The Strategic agreement is the name of the document alleged to have been signed between KDP and PUK in 2006, and to have designated the conditions of strategic alliance between the two parties.*

- *The strategic agreement, which was considered as the cornerstone of the alliance between KDP and PUK for a long period of time, has been criticized since 25 July 2009 and its amendment has also been brought up to the agenda.*

- *According to KDP, the strategic agreement should be revised, the share of PUK should be reduced, and the agreement should be amended again if needed.*

- *According to PUK, this agreement is not an electoral alliance between the two parties, but a long-term agreement.*

- *The balance of power in the region should not be handled simply within the framework of the number of votes and the distribution of power in the parliament.*

- *The breakdown of PUK and the formation of Gorran, strengthening KDP, internal conflicts of Islamist movements launched the destruction process of the dual structure in North Iraq since 1990s.*

- *This agreement will not be broken as long as Jalal Talabani is alive. However, before the elections to be held, the rate of deputies and also the rate of distribution of their offices might change as a result of the agreement between Talabani and Barzani.*

Introduction

There has always been multi-headedness in Kurdish movements in Iraq. After PUK split from KDP in 1975, the political balance among Iraqi Kurds have been bipolar for a long time. While KDP advocated the groups which did not envisage a major transformation in traditional social structure as a conservative nationalist movement, PUK became a center of attraction for social democrat/liberal circles. This dual structure even led parties to drift into a conflict from time to time. The primary events which created and reinforced the dual structure among Kurdish political movements in Iraq so far are listed as follows:

- Formation of PUK by splitting from KDP in 1975;
- Regional Parliamentary Elections in 1992;
- Civil War period between the years 1994-1998;
- 2002 Agreement;
- Strategic alliance between KDP and PUK in 2006

The primary results of this dual structure among Iraqi Kurds might be listed as follows:

1. The fact that KDP and PUK led some groups prevented further split of the political field: Despite the fact that there were many parties in the region, people generally took sides with groups such as KDP, PUK and Islamists for a long time. Other parties were marginalized.

2. The dual structure appeared both as a factor of stability and instability. Whether the dual structure would lead to stability or instability was designated by the regional dynamics in the Middle East and the intensity of conflict dynamics in North Iraq.

3. The dual structure created polarizations in social, political, and economic fields. Even though it is not exactly the same in each example; while KDP is rather defined as tribalist, conservative etc. in social subjects, PUK is regarded as liberal and urban. In political terms, while KDP is an organized group of families (Barzani family organized under Massoud Barzani or Mullah Mustafa, or a larger confederation of tribes); PUK, on the other hand, is another faction gathered under a charismatic leader.

4. While the dual structure was the primary conflict dynamic in the region for a long time, it became the cornerstone of the stability in the post-2003 period: The war between KDP and PUK reinforced the dual structure in the region in 1990s in both aspects. The first one is that the KDP-PUK war did not give the opportunity to those who did not want to be involved in the war. Almost all political actors in the region had to take sides with a group or another. Although this situation made it possible for tribes and tribalism to survive, it ultimately led to choose only one group. The second aspect, on the other hand, is that both actors understood one of them could not eliminate the other. Neither KDP nor PUK could establish dominance in each other's regions. Even though conflicts mostly took place in Erbil, on which they claimed rights; Iran, Turkey and the US tipped the balance of the conflict. In the post-2003 period, on the other hand, the dual structure became the basis of the stability in the post-2003 period. While the alliance between KDP and PUK which decided to act in unison against problems that could arise during the invasion preserved the dual structure, it is based on preventing development of other movements.

1. Strategic Alliance as the Key of Dual Structure in North Iraq

The "strategic agreement" which is the most important political issue of the recent period

in North Iraq is about whether KDP-PUK agreement will be ended or not. The Strategic agreement is the name of the document alleged to have been signed between KDP and PUK in 2006, and to have designated the conditions of strategic alliance between the two parties. It is suggested that the agreement embodies gathering ministries of two parties under a single roof, joint polls, and keeping their alliances not only in North Iraq but also in Baghdad. On the other hand, it is seen that there is no any written document yet. Even those who are at senior positions of both parties put forward that they did not see such an agreement which is alleged to have been signed on that day. They also assert that the document presented on their website as the strategic agreement is irrelevant to reality. Therefore, the document called “strategic agreement” might be considered as a verbal agreement between Massoud Barzani and Jalal Talabani, rather than a written document.

The strategic agreement, which was considered as the cornerstone of the alliance between KDP and PUK for a long period of time, has been criticized since 25 July 2009 and its amendment has also been brought up to the agenda. The criticism on the agreement from the perspective of KDP might be outlined as follows: After PUK started to be split in 2006, it lost power to a large extent. The Gorran Movement received almost half of the votes of PUK. Therefore, the number of votes that PUK received considerably dropped compared to the period when the agreement was signed between the two parties. When the agreement was signed, the votes received by both parties were close to each other. Therefore, sharing both seats in the parliament and ministries, and also other offices might be based on the equal share between the two parties. However, in current situation the number of votes received by both parties is not equal. Therefore, the strategic agreement should be

revised, the share of PUK should be reduced, and the agreement should be amended again if needed. In fact, a more extreme group within KDP estimates that if KDP and PUK stood for the first local elections to be held in IKR separately, thus it would be more powerful as a result of the major failure of , it is seen that some groups within KDP argue for amending the agreement with new conditions, or terminating the agreement by getting rid of PUK which impedes KDP. PUK, on the other hand, acknowledges the difference between today and the period when the agreement was signed between the two parties. They believe that the strategic agreement might be revised. However, this agreement is not an electoral alliance between the two parties, but a long-term agreement. So, PUK is aware of the loss of support they received. However, PUK defends itself by approaching the alliance between the two parties from a different perspective. According to the majority of PUK, even if PUK received less vote than KDP in any election, it should not be taken seriously. The alliance between both parties is not an electoral alliance, but a long-term alliance. PUK considers the sharing based on equality between both parties not in the axis of vote, but in the context of votes to be lost in case the alliance is broken. Within this framework, PUK says to KDP that a major vacuum of power would appear if the alliance was broken, and thus KDP would not be able to maintain its power. The major trump of PUK against KDP is that total number of votes to be received by Gorran and PUK would be more than the votes to be received by KDP. Therefore, PUK might use Gorran as a kind of political bargaining trump against KDP.

Even if future of the strategic agreement is still discussed in both parties, it might be suggested that the person who pulls the strings of the strategic agreement and the political balances in North Iraq is Jalal Talabani. The underlying

ing reasons might be listed as follows: KDP became a much more stable political party. There might be a struggle for leadership of the party in the future. However, currently there is no such a problem at least in appearance. On the other hand, nothing is certain about the future of PUK. Talabani takes the lead of the party. However, he is in poor health. Who takes over leadership of the party after Talabani is not known. Barham Salih, Kosrat Rasoul, Hero Talabani and Mullah Bahtiyar try to form their own circles within the party. It is highly likely that none of the candidates will be able to control the party alone. Therefore, the situation of PUK in the post-Talabani period will determine the future of the strategic agreement. Although Talabani and Barzani are politicians with considerable number of conflicts, it does not seem possible that either party would break the “strategic agreement”. However, if the aforesaid agreement is not a written document, then the strategic agreement might partially be amended only through two leaders’ reaching an agreement and rearranging the distribution of seats or positions accordingly. To sum up, agreement will not be broken as long as Jalal Talabani is alive. However, before the elections to be held, the rate of deputies and also the rate of distribution of their offices might change as a result of the agreement between Talabani and Barzani.

On the other hand, balance of power in the region should not be handled simply within the framework of the number of votes and the distribution of power in the parliament. There are also other factors affecting the relations between the two parties. One of the most important factors is that KDP and PUK are going through a transformation in nature. KDP and PUK are opposition parties which were involved in all kind of political struggle, including armed struggle, for many years.

Nevertheless, as from 1990s, both parties got used to be in power, and each became a ruling party. They became parties having responsibilities towards those who had helped them in the past. Today, both KDP and PUK are ruling parties. In case one of the parties lost the power, they could grow weak in political equation. Furthermore, in case the aforesaid parties lost power, they might be put on trial. In short, there are major problems in the infrastructure despite the fact it appears like stable in North Iraq. Neither KDP nor PUK wants to lose or to be marginalized by the government. At this point, the main problem is the fact that KDP increasingly believed that it might come to power alone; while PUK, which is aware of the fact that it is growing weak, is ready for all kind of alternatives to be able to stay in power.

Considering the current political balances in North Iraq at first glance on the basis of parties, it is seen that the pointer indicated KDP. However, when considering the balance of power from a wider perspective, it is highly likely that a new political instability could take place in the region. KDP currently controls the cornerstones of the system by holding the prime ministry, IKRG, security organizations and ministry of oil. Listing the advantages of KDP, we see that:

Massoud Barzani, President of IKR, has become the symbol of leadership for a substantial part of Kurds. However, the role of Barzani is dependent on geographical limitations. Among Iraqi Kurds, the number of those who consider Barzani as the leader in Sulaymaniyah, Kirkuk and Geramiyan is relatively low. However, their number in Mosul, Duhok and Erbil is on the rise. The most important reason why Massoud Barzani has become the leader of all Kurds is the fact that he declared the independent state and he is the first and founding President of the state. Prime ministry in North Iraq is an extreme-

ly important office. As prime minister plays a crucial role in management and reallocation of resources, he can form a political base close to himself. Probably Nachirvan Barzani is probably the best figure for the office of prime ministry in North Iraq. On the one hand, most of the criticisms towards Masoud Barzani is not directed to him indeed.

What frightens the people most in North Iraq is the intelligence agencies. Even though both parties have their own intelligence agencies, when it comes to intelligence in North Iraq, the first thing that comes to mind is Parastin. Therefore, it is necessary to take the intelligence agency of KDP into account in the political equation in region.

Lastly, a few people who know it in North Iraq which is thought to have an important oil reserve are all from KDP. On behalf of the government and presidency, the Minister of Oil Ashti Hawrami talks to oil companies. Hawrami directly informs Prime Minister and IKR, and he does not share information about other politicians or institutions. This situation which is frequently complained about in North Iraq is actually a big advantage for KDP. To sum up, the number of votes received by KDP, which holds the cornerstone of the system, in the last elections shows that it would rank first even if it was the only candidate in a potential election. However, what is more important than to rank first in the region is to form government and control the system. Currently, officials in KDP think that the party would get ahead of other parties based on economic and political tendencies. But if it ran for elections alone, failure would be inevitable.

2. Potential Political Developments to Take Place in the Region in the Near Future

The present bipolar political balances in North Iraq were always established through

war or conflict throughout history, and these balances also changed through these factors. Currently, the system in North Iraq is no more bipolar. All former experiences show that: Whenever a change takes place in internal political system in North Iraq, it was either triggered or caused by a political change. Therefore, KDP's splitting from PUK due to its weak points following the elections it won thanks to PUK results in a new conflict. Political balances in North Iraq looks like breakdown of the bipolar system and arrival of a new system. In bipolar system, depending on weakening/collapse/breakdown of a party or on over-strengthening of the other one, a new system appears. In this case, one of the two major allies of the older system would like to pioneer this change. As a matter of fact, its signs started to be observed as well. However, balancing actors would play a middle role. As KDP became more powerful, most of the other parties grew weak. None of these parties is content with KDP administration. It is seen that the opposition is in quest of balancing KDP. Therefore, rather than KDP's seizing control of the system alone, it would rather want to limit the influence of KDP by cooperation of other actors among themselves. At this point, PUK pursues a very different policy. PUK would support every group to keep it in power. It might also include an alliance with KDP, or other parties. To sum up, the breakdown of PUK and the formation of Gorran, strengthening KDP, internal conflicts of Islamist movements launched the destruction process of the dual structure in North Iraq since 1990s. In this process, as the biggest power of the system, KDP wants to form a unipolar structure. Therefore, it applies pressure on them to adapt themselves into the new system. KDP's expectation from the new system is not to form equal alliances, but to form coalitions with other parties on a hierarchical basis. In other words, KDP prefers a coalition government where PUK,

Gorran, Kurdistan Islamic Union and other parties are small allies, rather than a strategic alliance with PUK on equality basis. So that it could establish a hierarchical relationship with others, and control major points of the system. However, as it is seen from the fact that Nachirvan Barzani could not convince the opposition while forming the 7th Government, the opposition prefers balancing KDP. In this context, neither Gorran nor two major Islamist parties could enter in the government. This situation reinforced PUK. The fact that opposition parties did not enter in government led KDP to ally with PUK again. This situation showed to PUK that: PUK has organizationally grown weak, but KDP needs PUK to stay in power due to the internal political balances in North Iraq.

PUK's realizing this fact brings up three different ways of action within PUK on post-Talabani period. The first one is PUK's maintaining its close relations with KDP to carry on being a part of the government in the post-Talabani period. This possibility might lead some PUK members to leave their party and join KDP in the post-Talabani period. Secondly, it might be an extension of PUK's efforts to find a new leader in the post-Talabani period despite all the problems within PUK. As the recent developments also show, in case one of the four major figures within PUK keeps the party together, PUK will be able to be a part of the regional equation of power, and it might also be a powerful actor in coalitions.

The third way of action to appear in the post-Talabani period is the reunification of PUK and Gorran. There is a substantial number of people who feel close to each other in both parties, and also who think that it would be better to form an alliance among themselves rather than with KDP. In case this possibility comes true, the chance that new alliance rank first in the region should not be underestimated.

It hard to predict which one of the aforementioned scenarios could come true for now. But it might be suggested that the most important development to designate how PUK will act in the future will be the local elections to be held in North Iraq. The way election is held, its results and revision of the relations between KDP and PUK afterwards will designate PUK's future moves. However, considering current situation, it might be asserted that PUK would like to continue its relations with KDP as long as Jalal Talabani is the leader of PUK. It is suggested that the three above-mentioned possibilities are likely to happen in the post-Talabani period. So, a group will join KDP, another group will strive to form a new leadership in PUK, and another one will be united with Gorran. The size of these groups will determine the establishment of a new system in North Iraq. In case of a small-scale participation in Gorran, and a large-scale participation in KDP, KDP's dream to become the only power might come true. However, in other cases, KDP would begin to lose its current power slowly or rapidly.

Interviews

1. Interview with Shaho Saeed, Spokesman of the Gorran (Change) Party

ORSAM: Could you introduce yourself to us very briefly?

SHAHO SAEED: I am Shaho Saeed, the spokesman of Gorran, Change Movement.

ORSAM: Gorran Movement is not very well known in Turkey, although it is very important political actor especially after 2009. Can you define your movement and party, what are the aims and goals of the party?

SHAHO SAEED: Our party appeared in the 2009 election, it became a political movement in 2010. It has a legal permission from KRG. The aim of the movement is to change the political system of KRG in to a more democratic one; to change the rules of the game in politics in the Kurdistan region; to provide equal opportunities for all the political parties in Kurdistan region and to end political discrimination against other oppositional groups. In Kurdistan the ruling parties, PUK and KDP, dominate political opportunities, while their opposition faces lack of political opportunity. We aimed to end the revolutionary legitimacy and to bring civic struggle and competition among the political parties; not to let any political party to have a militia or armed men; not to let any political party to monopolize economy; not to let any political party to use their resources of this country to its self-interest; not to use people's budgets for their interest. These are the general aims of Gorran Movement in KRG. I am not talking about the aims in terms of education, economy, infrastructure and some social aims. Here I talked only about our priorities.

ORSAM: How can Gorran define itself in terms of ideology of the party? Is it a liberal party or a social democratic party?

SHAHO SAEED: So we haven't defined our ideology accurately for two reasons. First of all, in any totalitarian regime, the priority is to change the system, not to define ideology. The second thing is that we haven't held our congress yet. We don't aim to tackle the political parties or their ideology, if they were right, left or middle; our issue is the totalitarian parties. At that point, it does not make any difference if they are left, right, Islamic or secular while they are totalitarian.

ORSAM: You define current regime as totalitarian regime in KRG as far as I understand. Which factors do cause you to think that the current regime is a totalitarian one?

SHAHO SAEED: The first one is that these two ruling parties have their armed forces in which their affiliation is for the parties, not for the state of KRG. These parties have their arms, security, units and intelligence services. They used the budget of people on their own interests, not in a transparent way. They used a lot of people's resources for their armament interest in a not transparent way. They have a very big monopoly in region's economy while they have a hand in every civic organization in the society. In addition, they have neutralized the state institutions such as parliament which is supposed to monitor the government; but they made it dysfunctional. Besides, they act like they are facing a danger in any time; they are alike ready to use armed forces against themselves and their opposition.

ORSAM: We would like to learn your views on general issues on Iraq. Although you told that you created the movement to change the system in KRG, you are a part of

Iraqi political system. So we are wondering your ideas about some critical issues. First one is the oil law and the second one is centralization attempts and current claims by Maliki. Third issue is about internal disputed boundaries, disputed areas and the Kirkuk issue.

SHAHO SAEED: We are defending using or distributing of wealth of oil to the people as it comes in the Iraqi constitution; not transferring to the benefits of some privileged people or authority. The problem of Iraq was always the same with the problems that all other countries which have oil. Basically it is using oil by the authority and officials for their interest, not for the people. To set up the principle of constitution which says oil and gas are two properties of Iraqi people, we should have a very transparent law concerning oil and gas distribution. In order to achieve implementation of transparent oil and gas law, it should be monitored by Iraqi and Kurdistan parliament. To prevent the authority from using these recourses for their own benefit and to develop economy of Iraq and Kurdistan, we would like to use oil and gas in a way that which does not make Iraqi people consumer but producers. We also very much with encouragement of the foreign investment because we think that the foreign investment is always on the benefit of Iraqi people. Change Movement aims to make the country to open to foreign investment. As much as Iraq becomes more open, the chance of democratization in Iraq will be much more. It reduces the possibility of extremism in all forms, in ideology, in sectarianism, in nationalism and so on.

ORSAM: As we can observe from media, KRG has signed several oil agreements with international oil companies like Exxon, Chevron, Total and etc. do you think that these agreements would create some problems regarding the transparency in

KRG Parliament? Do other parties know about what is going on in this process?

SHAHO SAEED: No, Kurdistan Parliament still works about on these questions. These were not transparently signed. In addition, we don't believe that these deals do not serve for stability and development in Kurdistan region. We would like these companies to come into Iraq and Kurdistan but the contracts should be signed in a way that benefits long term of interest of people. So they should sign the bonds with government as well as representative of people to make the contracts of the interest of people and stability of the country. So people of Kurdistan would feel that contracts are in their interest. But up until now, the authority of KRG could not convince people that the contracts are in their interest. Because they are not ready to reveal the details of these contracts to people and to the parliament and up until now, we don't know the money gained from these contracts and how they were spent.

As change movement we are the only force, which are not the part of Maliki or KRG. We are the opposition with Kurdistan region as well as Iraqi (government). At the very beginning we said "no" to the formation of the government of Maliki. We feel like this government has been formed of the agreement between Kurdistan and Iraqi powers, not between political segments and fractions. That is why this government is not for the interests of fractions but in the interests of the political parties. This is the reason of our stand that this government is not strong.

ORSAM: Maliki claim that Mesud Barzani and KDP wanted that Gorran should not be the part of government. Is it true or media propaganda?

SHAHO SAEED: It is true but it was a planned agreement between the parties like Maliki and Barzani.

ORSAM: So you think that Maliki is becoming more authoritarian day by day?

SHAHO SAEED: As a ruler, you have two paths either rules of institutions or rule of personality. I guess that the current political affairs of Iraq went through individual interests, not institutions. It is not on the interests of democracy. There is an attempt for dictatorship in Iraq but we are not afraid of this kind threat. So we feel like all factions who made Maliki a Prime Minister are responsible for this abuse of power.

ORSAM: The other question is about related disputed areas?

SHAHO SAEED: We believe that the deportation policy which was implemented by the former regime made some areas like disjoint some areas in Iraqi government. That is why these areas are called disputed areas in Iraqi constitution but we believe that these areas are a part of Kurdistan region, not disputed at all. But this subject is very sensitive because these so called disputed areas are the result of the former regime's policies. The chauvinist policies of the former regime made the issue an ethnic and sensitive issue. That is why there is a tension between the ethnic groups that live in these areas. The duty of KRG and political parties is to work to reduce this tension between these groups. We are not supporting any policy based on nationalistic and chauvinist slogans in order to integrate these areas to Kurdistan region. We believe that the citizenship in Kurdistan region should be higher than the ethnic affiliation. There should be a guarantee to non-Kurdish ethnic groups, not only a slogan but a legal guaran-

tee in Kurdistan region. For example Arabs, Christian, Turkmen should feel like that that they are first class citizens of the Kurdistan region. In order to reach that kind of citizenship which is not based on ethnicity, we need a total democracy in Kurdistan.

And last one Kirkuk. Kirkuk is a part of disputed areas and we have the same position about Kirkuk but as a Change Movement, we try to reduce this ethnic tension in this city. We are a democratic party. We do not have any nationalistic or chauvinist discourse. Our rivals in KDP and PUK interpreted this course as a compromise to the non-Kurdish ethnic groups in the city but we will continue on our discourse.

ORSAM: How could you define your relations with Turkey?

SHAHO SAEED: We believed that Turkey is a very important country in the region. We have several links with Turkey such as geographical, historical, and cultural links, religion and interests. These links made us to consider Turkey as a very important country and Turkey is a very pure democratic country in the region and the world. Turkey had a very important role to protect Kurdistan region during the time of Saddam Hussein, because of having Incirlik Base in its border and because Turkey was a gate for Kurdistan region to outside world. These things made us to have good relations with Turkey. This is the perception of Kurdish people and change movement.

ORSAM: Thank you very much for this interview.

2. Interview with Muhammad Tawfiq Rahim, Director of External Relations of Gorran (Change) Movement

ORSAM: Could you introduce yourself for our readers?

MUHAMMAD TAWFIQ RAHIM: My name is Muhammad Tawfiq Rahim. I am active in Gorran movement. I am, so to speak, in charge of external relations of the party.

ORSAM: How can you define the current political situation in KRG?

MUHAMMAD TAWFIQ RAHIM: The general political situation in Iraqi Kurdistan right now is that of a crisis between the region and the central government in Bagdad. That crisis has divided political forces in the region. There are different approaches for the current crisis with Bagdad. One approach is led by KDP; another is led by other political parties, mainly Gorran. We have full different position for the situation with Bagdad. Probably you know that KDP was trying to organize a front against Maliki front about taking confidence in the parliament. While we, in Gorran, have different positions. PUK is similar with us but officially they try to keep it quiet. Our approach is that we have problems with Maliki, there is no doubt about it but then set of a front and collect of signature to remove him we have to summon him to the parliament. Summoning in the parliament does not make any difference. We should give him a chance to make his position and stance clear about the current issues and that crisis although there is not much noise about it. But still it is here.

ORSAM: The crisis has not finished yet; however after the attempts to remove Maliki from power, it seems that he is much more powerful now in the parliament. Although he gave some promises, again to reform, he is not doing something. He is controlling much more government. What do you think about that situation?

MUHAMMAD TAWFIQ RAHIM: Yes, they prepared a reform plan and telling everyone that there are problems but they have a plan to reform the situation. He is stronger than he used to be. A couple of months after, because of anti-Maliki front they were unified, cleared their awareness and agendas within that front. For example, Barzani's agenda was different from Motloq. Motloq's agenda is different from Al-Hashimi and others. So they were not unified on what they want. They had different policies and different agendas and Maliki was clever in dividing them.

ORSAM: Do you think that current balance of power or dynamics in Middle East affect the Iraqi politics?

MUHAMMAD TAWFIQ RAHIM: It affects very much politics, especially what is happening in Syria now.

ORSAM: Can you define the impacts of the Syrian affairs on Iraqi politics?

MUHAMMAD TAWFIQ RAHIM: It affects the Iraqi politics because Iraqi politics is similar with Syrian politics, based on the secularism and the sectarian issues. So if you ask a Sunni on what happens in Syria, it is good for him, but if you ask a Shia, it is bad. Because of that, we do not have a national policy. We have various sectarian policies so we are not unified. So, what is happening in Syria would affect Bagdad and would affect the Kurdistan region as well but for different reasons.

ORSAM: Can you define your movements position regarding the Syrian affairs or change in Middle East?

MUHAMMAD TAWFIQ RAHIM: We are in the so-called Arab Spring. We believe that Arab Spring is in a big delay, it should have taken place many years ago. What is happening in the Arab world is that. The people are fighting for the dignity. Look at the all political regions in Middle East, especially in the

Arab countries. They came to power, either through coup d'état or armed movement or conspiracies. And they stayed in the power through manipulated elections. Ben Ali is the same. Bashar Assad has the power with 99.9% of people's vote. Now people know that they have a chance to gain their dignity. So it is happening in Middle East, the Arab Revolution is the revolution for dignity. In the Gorran we are on the side of people. It doesn't matter for us when this regime removed like in Egypt, Tunisia or Libya, who will come to power. We support the will of people, what they decide through free elections. This is a sovereign issue for them. So we do not think that Assad would be replaced with whom. We have to respect the will of people.

ORSAM: Does the Arab Spring affect the Kurdish politics in Iraq?

MUHAMMAD TAWFIQ RAHIM: Yes because there are similarities between the ruling political parties and the similarities between desperation of people. Why the Kurdish would be different from a Libyan, a Tunisian, a Yemeni or an Egyptian? We have the same problems. Especially now, with the developments in Syria, people see that there are deep political parties, ruling political parties, like the Baath party, like the KDP and the PUK. They have the same mentality. They belong to different ages; age of the political parties based on socialism, central democracy, iron discipline; son is replacing his father, father is replacing his grandfather. It is the same what is happening in Syria, and what happened in Egypt have lots of effects on the mind of people and region.

ORSAM: In February 2011, there were some protests in Sulaymaniyah. After some events occurred, these protests have stopped. What were the reasons for that?

MUHAMMAD TAWFIQ RAHIM: The real reason is that the opposition parties in the region did not want to escalate because we have very bad experience of internal thing. So we did not want to live the same things and we are waiting for the situation to get mature to different actions, different courses. What is happening here, for example, people say that they want to be differentiated to Iraq; that happens in Sulaymaniyah, Arbil and Dohuk. The expectation in everywhere is the same. Ok, we have different social natures, Arbil is different from Dohuk, Dohuk is dominated by tribal relations which is very dangerous. Arbil is different and the politics in Sulaymaniyah is liberal and intellectual. Otherwise, the expectations and demands of people are the same everywhere. People in Sulaymaniyah want transparency; the people of Arbil and Dohuk want it either. People of Sulaymaniyah are fighting against corruption, the same is happening in Arbil and Dohuk. In Sulaymaniyah, people want electricity and public services which is the same in Arbil and Dohuk. Even the different profile of ruling parties, they have the same vision with the opposition parties. It is not because we are not the member of KDP and PUK, not leading parties and not having privileges. This doesn't mean that you don't want electricity or public services. But as I said we did our best, not to allow the situation to get out of control.

ORSAM: The easiest and legal base to show people's will is the election. However, the provisional council elections in KRG unfortunately couldn't have been done until now and delayed again. What are the reasons for that?

MUHAMMAD TAWFIQ RAHIM: The reason is that the ruling political parties are afraid of election. Because, the election right now would be very different form the elections of the past. Because of the atmosphere

there are positive situation for the people who vote for the opposition parties. It is like two different eyes we can say. Everyone have election, we had the election of 2009 right now but that will be different from it.

ORSAM: Do you think that there would be provisional elections in KRG?

MUHAMMAD TAWFIQ RAHIM: There must be, but yesterday and the day before I was following the issue in Bagdad and everyone says that the election is delayed for political reasons. They are creating problems for the provisional elections. They are doing technical issues. Usually, the ruling political parties in KRG or in other parts, it is not important to whom people vote but who counts the votes. You can be sure that friendly people are counting their votes.

ORSAM: How could you define the relations with Turkey and Turkey's stands regarding the KRG?

MUHAMMAD TAWFIQ RAHIM: We are ready to go and meet anyone, everywhere, anytime from Turkey, parliament, government, and all the institutions and exchange our views and explain our stands to them. But official relations should be from Bagdad. We are not very open Gorran representative anywhere but KDP and PUK are doing now in Ankara, in Tehran, in Damascus; everywhere. This is not our policy but of course, we see the Turkish policy via what is happening in Middle East as very positive.

ORSAM: However Turkey's relation with KRG is in a different position. Turkey has good relations with KRG.

MUHAMMAD TAWFIQ RAHIM: Is it KRG or KDP? Turkey should be seen by the people of KRG as a neutral force and neighbor. This is very important, especially for Turkish in-

terests in the region. It is important for us to have Turkish interest in the region. Economic and cultural relations are very important and very positive and no political party in the region should be allowed to use the relationship with Turkey for internal politics. I was in Turkey a couple of months ago. I met people from AK Party, foreign affairs, even from security institutions. They were very surprised when I called Gorran's political progress because they met people telling them that we are very leftist, extremist organization, close to Iran that we are very nationalist. These are what they said when they go to Turkey. When they go to Iran, they said that these people are supported by Israel, Turkey and America. As we said, life of a lie is very short. So we pay very much attention to Turkish politics and the role that Turkey is playing in the Middle East is very good.

ORSAM: As a last question, Iraq is heading towards an election. Next year a provisional election will take place and then a general election will take place. What are your expectations for the future of Iraq? Do you think that Iraq could be united or these sectarian or ethnic problems would cause a new crisis?

MUHAMMAD TAWFIQ RAHIM: Iraq would remain united because neighbors want Iraq united.

ORSAM: Is it possible to ignore the internal dynamics?

MUHAMMAD TAWFIQ RAHIM: Iran wants Iraq to be united but dominated by Shias. Turkey wants it too but dominated by different political groups. So all the neighbors want Iraq to be united but as I said, what is happening in the Middle East, in the Arab Spring will affect this in Iraq, in a positive way.

ORSAM: Thank you very much for your answers and sharing your time with us.

3. Interview with Mohammad Ahmad, Politburo Member of Kurdistan Islamic Union (KIU)

ORSAM: Please can you introduce yourself for our readers very briefly?

MUHAMMAD AHMAD: I am Muhammad Ahmad, member of political bureau, representative of council of Sulaymaniyah.

ORSAM: How do you evaluate the general political situation in KRG?

MUHAMMAD AHMAD: From a security perspective it is good. From economic perspective it is good too but it is not at the level that we expected. From political perspective there is complexity, and a need for a reform in political and managing system in the region but the authority have little preparation for such a reform. Oppositions are pushing for a reform.

ORSAM: There was a leader change in Kurdistan Islamic Union and now there is a new party leader after Salahaddin Bahaddin. What does this leader change mean for Kurdistan Islamic Union? Does this mean a change in party politics, if yes in which ways?

MUHAMMAD AHMAD: We went through some kind of change for ourselves. One of them was the system of managing the party. It is used to be very vertical but now we expanded from the top. We are inclined toward decentralization in the party. From ideological perspective, we didn't go through any change; we are a national party with Islamic background. From management perspective of the party and the structure of the party went through some changes.

ORSAM: Can you give some details regarding this structure and this process?

MUHAMMAD AHMAD: We are more implementing decentralized way of managing the party. For example, in the past we didn't have any organization to observe, but now we have a unit to make observations within the party. We are observing the whole parties' activities in the region and whole movements within the party. Within the party if we have any problem or conflict, this organization is to solve conflicts and problems.

ORSAM: What was the problem and how decentralization process solves them?

MUHAMMAD AHMAD: There was not a problem but we want to improve. We want to be more systematic to show the strength of our party. We have the presidency that planning and this new organization can follow and observe and implement political reform.

ORSAM: We know that there was an opposition within the Islamic Union. Did this decentralization process end this opposition within the union or do they still go on?

MUHAMMAD AHMAD: There was no fraction within the party but there were different point of views. We like to have different points of views. We are a reformist party. We would like to have all the conditions of the reform. We are demanding transparency and so we have to be more transparent than the others. On that base, we held the congress transparently without having any censorship. The leader of the party gave up the leadership in his strongest time and transferred power peacefully. We wanted to show that our party is not dominated by a personality, we have a method. Mainly the political parties in here have a personal domination.

ORSAM: What about the party's stand on forming coalition with other parties? As we know PUK and KDP has formed a co-

alition. So the other parties cannot get the majority and rule the country. In the coming election whether in KRG or in Iraq, do these parties consider to form a coalition or a block? And if yes, which parties do you prefer for coalition?

MUHAMMAD AHMAD: We have no reservations against any political parties. Our past approved that we can create coalitions with Christians, leftist parties and ruling parties. The most important thing for us is to share a base for working together. We don't come together with any political party on the base of ideology. However, we have paid the price of such a point of view. In the past we did show that the possibility of coalition between Islamic party and the people who have a left background. Just to show and tell to people that yes we are an Islamic party but we are not a kind of entering politics on the base of ideology. But people did not get our message or we failed to reach people. Therefore, in the last election, we suffered from some kind of punishment. So far, we didn't benefit from that point of view but we hope that the future will show that our main perspective and aim is a national project, not anything else. The future possibilities are open to all parties which we share the similar background and perspective.

ORSAM: When Nachirvan Barzani was establishing the new government, he met with opposition parties as well as with your party. But you did not choose to be a part of the government. Why did these negotiations failed?

MUHAMMAD AHMAD: We experienced the participation. In the past, when Nachirvan was prime minister, we held a ministry within the government. We tried to do reform internally. On that base we submitted the memorandum to the president that the

system needs a reform. And then they asked us you have to change the project and submit it to the government and we did that, for more than three years we tried to do a reform but we didn't reach any result. Therefore, we decided to go to the path of opposition. At the beginning we were thinking that the culture of being opposition in Kurdistan region is not mature enough. We tried to be separate from Bagdad. They could not accept that and regarding this as a threat. They attacked to our bases and injured so many people in 2005. Then we were patient and told ourselves that they cannot figure out our position. But later on, it became clear in Bagdad that our split which is different from theirs did not mean that we are enemy to them. In the beginning, it was difficult for them to accept that we have the slogan of fighting against corruption and demanding services. Later on we decided to go step by step of being an opposition. We would like to show that being opposition does not mean being an enemy. We hold an opinion that a democratic system requires a ruling party and opposition at the same time. It took a lot of time until this culture develops. After we experienced internally by being a part of government cannot do any reform, and then we went through a successful period of being different in Bagdad. After that we decided to declare ourselves as an opposition party in Kurdistan region. However, our partners did not resist this very well. The ruling party tried a lot for us and gave a lot of opportunities but we have decided to implement and support the culture of opposition and make it as a normal part of the political system. We believe that the culture of opposition transfers to the people and that creates a pressure on the system and then we lead to a reform. So, our strategic decision is remaining in opposition until next election, until this culture of opposition matures in Kurdistan. We believe even if we are in power one day we will support the opposition. We believe that the right

and the responsibilities of the ruling party and the opposition should be clarified in the constitution.

ORSAM: What do you think about the Iraqi government and the Prime Minister Maliki, do you think that Maliki is becoming a totalitarian leader?

MUHAMMAD AHMAD: There were certain principles that we would like to see, support and implement in Iraq such as democracy, national union, participation, national balance, acceptance of constitution and federalism. None of these are believed by Maliki. Maliki has centralized, authoritarian tendencies. He has a pure sectarian believes and does not believe in sharing power with any other sector of Iraq. Even he does not believe in sharing power with his own sect. He still believes in leadership in the party as a necessary condition. As a result of that, Kurds, Sunnis and also Shias have been marginalized in Iraq. Therefore, this complexity and troubles continues in the country.

ORSAM: What do you think about the oil law debates in Iraq and the oil agreements that signed by KRG?

MUHAMMAD AHMAD: Oil is covered by corruption both in Iraq and Kurdistan region. We believe that most of the profits go to the companies. If the oil agreements has been done according to constitution, it would be resulted with the benefit of people and fulfill the general interest. It is possible that Iraqi oil

creates benefits for Iraq and also its neighbors. But there is no transparency on this sector. There is not a clear law because of lack of mutual trust among KRG and Bagdad. It is possible that the situation which emerged now requires a revolution in the future in order to nationalize the situation. Because what is done till now is not based on law and transparency. People have no clue about those who signed this agreement and how it was done.

ORSAM: What do you think about Turkey's approach to KRG and as party what do you expect from Turkey to cooperate?

MUHAMMAD AHMAD: As a party, we had a role in making a better relation between Turkey and regional government. If you remember when there were a lot of problems between Turkey and KRG, as Kurdistan Islamic Union, we led representatives of all parties to go to Turkey. To create an understanding base on shared interests. We believed that Turkey is a big country and if we reach an agreement it would be beneficiary for both sides. We are a good gate for Turkey to reach other parts of Iraq and Turkey is a good gate for us to reach other parts of the world. If we have a relation based on understanding, both sides would benefit. We do not forget the embargo years that Turkey was the only gate for us towards the world. We believe on base of understanding, negotiation and exchange of views, we will reach the situation that both sides will benefit.

ORSAM: Thank you very much.

4. Interview with Sadi Ahmad Pire, Politburo Member of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK)

ORSAM: Please can you introduce yourself for our readers very briefly?

SADI AHMAD PIRE: My name is Sadi Ahmad Pire. I am member of Politburo of PUK and ex-minister and ex member of parliament.

ORSAM: Could you define current political dynamics in KRG?

SADI AHMAD PIRE: In Iraqi Kurdistan we have a very good political climate and very good economical climate and also cultural climate. We have in Iraqi Kurdistan more than 1200 radios TV stations, newspapers, magazines. Less than 200 of them are parties dependent and more than 800 of them are independent. Unemployment is getting down. We reduced it through job creative activities through inviting the investors from outside and also increasing the economical activities in different branches. We have very active opposition groups here in parliament. The Kurdish Government and the Kurdish opposition learned how to govern and how to oppose. They created a mechanism to work together. Security issue is one of the thing that we are proud of. Security situation is very good. Of course we are trying to enhance the capacity of our universities by inviting teachers from western universities. We know that such a development such a progress without culture of democratic life without culture of parliamentary life is not successful. We try also to educate new generation in order to work together and to take part in the social, economic and political life.

The second issue as the Kurds in Iraq we hope that we can cooperate with existing govern-

ments in the region to solve the democratization issues and Kurdish problems in all countries. This is best for the stability and security of borders, because the common security is one of the priorities for the Kurds and also for the region. Bringing the difficulties and difference with our neighbor countries on the zero level is another target of us and we have to start developing mutual interest and mutual understanding.

ORSAM: Could you evaluate the relation between KRG and the government in Baghdad?

SADI AHMAD PIRE: I think that this kind of relations between any federal government and central government is very normal. The difference is about the shortage of resources, about the services about this kind of issues. In Iraqi Kurdistan region we have different experiences in history with different central governments in Baghdad. For example the Iraqi governments has to take care about what's happening in Halabja what's happening by destroying 4500 villages and many many townships. I think not only through 17 percent of the budget of Iraqi Kurdistan you can solve all these destructions. The Iraqi Government has to support KRG and to take part in these issues.

The second issue, the peshmarga forces are national forces. They are not paramilitary forces. They are well organized well educated. The Iraqi Government according to institutions of Iraq has to accept the peshmarha as the part of the defense system of Iraq for defending order and stability. Besides the Iraqi government has to equip, finance and train the peshmarga forces like any other units Iraqi army.

The third issue, we have problems about disputed areas like Kirkuk, Khanaqin, Mahmor

and other areas. High Commissions from UN prepared a report about how to solve these problems. We had many elections like Iraqi parliament elections, local elections and any of these cities, townships and cities are Kurdish populated and the question is uncertain. We have to accept that this disputed areas as a part of Kurdistan region. If there are any problems we have to solve it via article 140 which speaks about three steps for the solution. The first step is the normalization. Because during the Saddam era they deported many Kurds from these regions and they brought Arab families from other governorates from South of Iraq and settled them in places like Khanaqin, Kirkuk and Sincar. Of course they have to bring them back and bring the Kurds back to their villages and give back their land. Few months ago we had a decision taken by the Iraqi government called Decision 29. This is to give back the lands of Kurds which are taken by force by the Iraqi government during Saddam Hussein's time. I think in this way we can solve all problems and Kurds has the right to feel themselves equal as other Iraqis.

ORSAM: How does the Arab Spring affect the Kurdish region?

SADI AHMAD PIRE: Of course Arab Spring has effects on everywhere of the world. In our region, first of all the Kurds did not and do not suffer because they are Muslims but because they are Kurds. The second is that we celebrated our spring in 1991 when the Saddam regime was kicked out of the Kurdish region and also 2003 after the liberation of Iraq. Therefore, comparing North African countries like Egypt with Iraqi Kurdistan is not true.

ORSAM: What do you think about the Turkish policy toward Iraqi Kurdistan? How it should be developed more?

SADI AHMAD PIRE: There is a big chance for the benefit of both country and both nations. Talking in Kurdish language is no more a utopia in Turkey. I think the reform process which started in Turkey has to continue. This reform is in the benefit of Turkey and also the Kurdistan region. With this reform process we can remove all barriers between us and both sides can benefit from this.

ORSAM: Mr. Pire, thank you very much for sharing your ideas with us.

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