

ORSAM INTERVIEWS ON REGIONAL AFFAIRS

NO.15, JUNE 2015



ORSAM

ORTADOĞU STRATEJİK ARAŞTIRMALAR MERKEZİ
CENTER FOR MIDDLE EASTERN STRATEGIC STUDIES
مركز الشرق الأوسط للدراسات الاستراتيجية



GÖKHAN ÇETİNSAYA: INCLUSIVENESS IS THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLE IN TURKEY'S IRAQ AND THE MIDDLE EAST POLICIES.

Gökhan ÇETİNSAYA



He graduated from Ankara University Faculty of Political Sciences in 1985 and received his doctoral degree in Middle Eastern Studies from Manchester University in 1994. He won social sciences doctoral thesis championship award from the North American Middle East Studies Association (MESA), and the award for the best doctoral thesis from Middle East Studies Association (BRISMES) with his thesis titled "Ottoman Administration of Iraq, 1890-1908". He had served in Hacettepe University Department of Public Administration (1986-2001) and Istanbul Technical University Department of Humanities and Social Sciences (2002-2008). He had been a guest researcher in SOAS, University of London (2001), Free University of Berlin in Turcology Institute (2004) and the Woodrow Wilson International Center (Washington, DC, 2007-2008). Having been the Rector of Istanbul City University (2008-2011) and the Head of the Higher Education Board (2011-2014), Çetinsaya has currently been serving as Ambassador and Chief Advisor to the Prime Minister.

ORSAM: First of all, thank you for accepting us. We want to talk about Iraq with you. If it is appropriate for you also, we may begin our talk with Iraq's core dynamics. What has changed in Iraq after 2003? What kind of structure has emerged and what kind of process occurred in Iraq? What kinds of dynamics appeared in Iraq after 2003?

Gökhan Çetinsaya: During Saddam's last years, Iraq had recently become a closed box. While the interaction with the world reduced and there had been a process with certain and visible impacts on the Iraqi society stemming from Saddam's policies; we witnessed the opening of 'Pandora's box' in Iraq with the US intervention and invasion. The elements, masses and factors which were repressed for many years or dragged into a certain position as a result of domestic policies, all began to come out. Then the present and future of Iraq began to be reshaped. This was achieved with an external intervention. US policies were also influential in this process. The assessment of this process has been made in the United States and all over the world. Especially when I examine the developments in the context of Daesh, I may say that total

discharge of the Army, or in other words, Saddam's army, instead of retirement of senior officers has become one of the most influential dynamics so far. As a historian, I read the developments in this context. Because generally the armies in the Middle East, with some exceptions, are national armies. The people coming from villages form the army staff. It is unreasonable to dissolve an army and punish all the staff just because some high rank officials from the command level had been involved in unacceptable wrong acts. Several aspects that emerged in the last 10 years have proven that. When we look at the situation in terms of internal security, we see that there is a chain of events, which is an outcome of this mistake, continues to consistently produce nothing since. At first, there were militias, Al Qaeda and Al Qaeda-like organizations; and now Daesh. Then the security vacuum that was created has not been filled yet. There were attempts to fill that vacuum, but a national army could not be formed. Sectarian based structures appeared. Similar issues can be seen at the emergence of Daesh.

When we consider the main reasons, we observe that the first reason is the abolition of the national army and the continuing security vacuum

which was created by this situation. The second reason is that ethno-sectarian politics has become dominant. From this point of view, I consider the constitution experience as a successful achievement. Among all wrong things, there was an attempt to reach a balance through the constitution by encompassing all elements.

But this attempt is limited with constitution, is not it? In other words, the constitution was not promoted by constitutional law and legal texts.

Sure, but despite all these failures, it is a success to form the constitution. However, implementation and scope of the constitution was inadequate. We have all observed the crisis in Iraq within the last three years. So, we all see how an exclusionary, sectarian government has resulted in a disaster. Hence, the solution in Iraq is based on maintaining inclusiveness and gathering all elements around a table. At that point, prevalence of the constitution and the parliament is very crucial. So, despite social realities produce policies against this, at least theoretically there is a mechanism, a constitution, and a parliament on which people reached a consensus. Everyone should strive for its processing.

In terms of the basic dynamics, it is seen that politically there is a desire to gather every each group around a table and establish a management structure consisting of each group. However, this is becoming a process which cannot function on one hand. Because considering the basic structure emerged after 2003, it is noticed that it has always been tried to establish the governments under the name of national unity governments. As you very well know, for a well-functioning democracy, there should be a good opposition in addition to the government. When we look at the political process in Iraq, we saw that all the parties participating elections has united under governments. Therefore, the parties dissatisfied with their positions began to oppose within the government and hence made the government inoperative.

You are right, I think that as the lessons are learned and the government continue its inclusive as well as non-sectarian and non-ethnic-style of rule, Iraq may reach ideal conditions as you mentioned. We learn lessons from our mistakes and try not to repeat

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them. I'm sure that the actors in Iraq will realize this situation, but first, it is necessary to solve the existing problems in order to reach a situation of ideal conditions. However, Daesh terrorism has locked the Iraqi society and Iraqi politics for now.

Inclusiveness issue here is extremely important. Maybe you can keep the power by establishing pressure on different groups and using the opportunities offered by the state.

No matter where it is applied, you will suffer as soon as you apply the ethnic and sectarian politics. But if you implement inclusive policies, you can reach solutions- it is how civilizations advanced. When we look at the five thousand years history of

civilizations, we see wherever there is inclusivity; there is a rise of civilization, including the Ottoman Empire. Whenever there is an ethnic-sectarian politics, there everyone loses.

There have been diverse balances and political developments in Iraq after the year 2003, especially after the US withdrawal from Iraq in 2011. How do you assess US policy in Iraq since 2003?

As we pointed out at the first question, the mistakes of the USA are very clear. As the witnesses of the period mention in various memoirs and books, the USA already had mistaken imaginations on Iraqi society. What is Sunnism, what is Shiism, what is their reality? They had mistaken

imaginations about these basically and in the context of these mistaken imaginations, diverse policies were adopted by military and civilian decision-makers that are arbiter in Iraq politics. Some mistaken policies were tried to be corrected later, but in the end Iraq lost. The US loss will be evaluated by themselves, but due to these mistaken policies everybody has lost. Now they are trying to compensate. In consequence, an ember burns where it falls.

In the period between 2003 and 2011, there was an Iraq influenced by the USA. However, we see the beginning of a transformation process in the Middle East after 2011. There is a change process called Arab Spring. No matter how we named it, this process led to a serious transformation in the Middle East. In the period of US withdrawal, Syrian issue came to the fore; and all these affected Iraq also. How do you evaluate this? How has Iraq been affected by this transformation process in the Middle East?

I consider the impact as negative. In terms of Iraq's self-discovery process, I believe that the Arab Spring and the following events have neg-

atively affected Iraq. As I said, the dynamics of change in Iraq are related both to Iraq's own internal dynamics and dynamics of the Middle East. Also, they are related to the post-Cold War balance. What happened in Iraq is related both to external factors and internal factors. The transformation in the Middle East is largely associated with post-Cold War world order. This change was inevitable in the Middle East. This is because of the global developments: There was an order established centuries ago and this order has roughly changed with the end of Cold War. It was expected that the Middle East would also experience a similar transformation as in Eastern Europe during 1990s. Because in new world orders, those orders established centuries ago inevitably changes. Eastern Europe has somehow managed this successfully and we theoretically assumed that the time for the Middle East has come, too. We foresaw that it would fit into the usual flow of the river, the direction of democratization. However, internal balance, external balance, different social structures, and strategic foresight were directed to other courses and there have been developments out of expectations. Polarization in the Middle East is increasing. In the context of security and within the ethnic and sectarian dimensions, Arab Spring adversely affected

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the developments in Iraq.

Before the Arab Spring, Turkey urged to gather everyone, including Iran and Israel, around the table in order to determine the fate, the security and the future of the Middle East collectively. For the last two centuries, the Middle East had been ruled by foreign states and its destiny had been determined by foreign states. Now, with the end of the Cold War and the establishment of a new world order, there was a hope for peace in the Middle East for the first time. Both internal forces and external forces were supporting it. Do not consider these forces as foreign countries; we should take them as economic conditions and social conditions. But we see that the opportunity was missed. We have only one hope. I hope this process is like the process in the French Revolution. In other words, I hope that we are in a time of travail and hereupon we can reach that peace order that we miss and desire. Because let's not forget; The French Revolution was in 1789, but the establishment of the new order after the French Revolution took place with the Vienna Convention in 1815. In this regard, I hope that all we endure today is travail.

In your assessments in 2004-2005, following the Iraq War in 2003, you

mentioned that transformation of the Middle East would begin from Iraq. Five-six years later, a process of transformation began. Do you think that it is a delayed transformation? What are the factors that hold or trigger this process according to you?

What we've seen during the Arab Spring is that there are social forces for change. These social forces exist in Iran, in Egypt and elsewhere in the region. However, global security and natural resources such as oil and natural gas related concerns does not leave the fate of the Middle East to its own hands. There are international interventions and these disrupt the natural course. For example, the United States has supported democratization in the Middle East from time to time, and tried to do that through military intervention as well as free-elections. But in both cases, the emerging structures did not provide favourable rhetoric for the US interests. Each time the ballot box led to emergence of forces who question US hegemony in the region, naturally the old strategic accounts and concerns came to the fore once again. Let's face it: That was because this is a region holding world's most important oil and gas reserves.

Now perhaps the US does not need these reserves anymore. It is actually a myth. As far as I can see, the United States guarantees its energy security through diversification of the various sources. But for its critical allies, the Middle East is important. It is essential to guarantee the safety of oil and gas in the Middle East at least for fifty years and this security needs to be carried out by the US-friendly regimes. In this regard, global strategic accounts and regional social forces are also balanced. Second, certain social forces, which were repressed due to the miscalculations made a hundred years ago, raise their voices and there is a search for balance. In a democratic environment, everything that was repressed before re-emerges one day and calls to pay for the past. In addition to these political calculations, there is also a globalization phenomenon and we should be ready for it. Any regime, regardless of its nature, cannot prevent social forces in the Middle East. Everyone can reach any kind of knowledge and information via TV and social media, and are affected by globalization. There are two main features of globalization, contradicting each other. First, it encourages high identities. Second, it also encourages sub-identities. Deal-

ing with the consequences of these two opposing forces is also the dilemma of the Arab Spring.

During the last two centuries, everyone built a wall because of the process of nation-state formation as well as the Cold War. For example, the Muslims in India were not in enough interaction with those in Iraq in the last century. But now all sub-identities can interact freely. Civilizational politics is important for it. Otherwise, we cannot absorb these political dynamics. It is necessary to strike a balance here. We need a balance which can guarantee Iraq's unity and sustain the happiness of Iraqis.

In particular, as you mentioned, consensus and cooperation justify the rightfulness of civilization projects, which are on Turkey's horizon. You also expressed it. As you say, there are a local policy and globalization. But the main important thing is to reconcile local policies.

Turkey has already been complaining about the policies implemented during the last three or four years and calling that these policies would bring a disaster in Iraq; everything including Daesh is related to this process. But

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policies practiced in Iraq for last year relaxes Turkey as well in this regard.

After 2003, Turkey, in the Middle East and specifically in Iraq, has prioritised the implementation of inclusive policies, hasn't it?

As you say, more significantly since 2004-2005, Turkey has followed an inclusive policy, which aimed to gather even the smallest party, Christians, around the table. Internal developments in Iraq made it difficult to implement these policies and dialogue sometimes. In recent years, relationships that have been missed for so long began to be created. In the final process, it is seen that there is an adaptation of inclusive policies, not exclusive, with the new government. It also affected Turkey-Iraq relations in a positive

way. Mutual visits reached to a high level. Recently, Iraqi President Fuad Masum paid a visit to Turkey. Perhaps the public might not have noticed; but Fuad Masum also participated in the peace summit, which was held during Gallipoli ceremonies on 23 April 2015. Four prime ministers and the president made speeches, and there were around seventy representatives. One of the speakers was prime minister of Australia; the other was prime minister of New Zealand. The other two speeches were delivered by the Prime Minister of Turkey and the President of Iraq. Fuad Masum gave an important message there. All this makes us happy, of course. This visit demonstrates both how Turkey paid an importance to Iraq as a neighbouring country and a close ally and how Iraq paid an importance to Turkey as well.

It also expresses a symbolic meaning. In the Ottoman history, Çanakkale represent an important event, and also there are cemeteries of Iraqi soldiers in Gallipoli. Arabs, Kurds, Shiites, Sunnis fought in Çanakkale and there were people who fought, gave their lives, and became veterans for the defence of the common ideals of the Islamic world. In this respect, it is very important symbolically.

We already talked about Turkey's foreign policy towards Iraq and relations with Iraq, but let's deepen our conversation on these topics. There is a structure emerged after 2003, and Turkey's foreign policy towards Iraq has developed in a different manner. How do you evaluate this? How were Turkey's Iraq policy and its relations with Iraq?

As you said, after US invasion, except a short term, a consistent policy was adopted by Turkey and the principles of that policy had never changed. Inclusiveness, equal representation of all parties in Iraq and recognition of equal rights in terms of the future of Iraq had always been the basic principles of Turkey's foreign policy towards Iraq. One of the

reasons behind non-application of these policies properly was Iraq's own internal turbulences. Sometimes we could not get the results that we aim, sometimes we did not get the answer we'd like from Iraq, even if we wanted to. But at the point we have reached today, we know that the future is really promising. Of course, it may be necessary to mention here the issue of Daesh. I've been there for a week for the anniversary of Kut'ul Amara Victory. I made some contacts. Of course, the hottest issue is Daesh and the elimination of it in Iraq as soon as possible. One of the reasons behind that is a certain period of ethno-sectarian dominance over politics, and the other reason is security vulnerability. The effects of the mistakes made in 2003 are still continuing. At that point, whatever the reasons, the damage is done, and we have to find the cure and heal the wounds. Regarding this issue, from time to time, negative propaganda criticizing Turkey is made. You know these as well. All these accusations are propaganda and groundless. Turkey is a country that has declared Daesh a terrorist organization since the beginning. Now Turkey has its own struggle and is giving support to Iraq in terms of bilateral relations. Thirdly,

Turkey is in expectation of a holistic strategy to fight against Daesh.

Turkey gives support to the international coalition. According to the recent statistics, thanks to the joint intelligence sharing, around 15,000 people were not allowed to enter the country with the suspicion of possible Daesh membership. In addition, approximately 1,500 people were deported. These are serious numbers. It demonstrates Turkey's determination, but there are a lot of things to do as well. Turkey is in expectation of a holistic strategy to fight against Daesh. We cannot distinguish between Syria and Iraq. If we are to fight against Daesh, we should develop a holistic strategy that covers Daesh's presence in Iraq and Syria together.

If you agree, let's move on to the relations between Turkey and Iraqi Kurdish Regional Government (KRG). Especially after 2009, the relationship between Turkey and the KRG is improving. How do you evaluate this relationship?

There are many dimensions. In addition to historical, social and kinship ties, peace and cooperation policies, which were also relevant to Turkey's discourse, were prioritized after 2003. Because Turkey wants all parties to gather around a table together. Turkey wants a united, in-

tegrated and prosperous Iraq. Turkey wants Iraq to identify and manage a democratic federal structure which is based on everyone's equal rights and responsibilities. Turkey also wants Iraq's security. In this regard, Turkey's good relations with the KRG are an indication of this policy. Those who cannot see these are the people who do not look at or do not want to see whole picture. Turkey is making similar efforts for every party in Iraq. The same policy is applied to every region in Iraq. In addition, the commercial and economic dimension is very important. Due to opening the border gate with Iraq, the overall trade volume with Iraq as well as KRG has increased. There are Turkish companies doing business in Iraq. As you know, according to international relations literature, the increasing economic dependence and mutual relations will bolster peace and prosperity. These increasing cooperation and good relations are important as well in the context of the issues that Turkey confronts in its Southeast, and everyone benefits from that. In terms of the future of our cognates in Iraq, Turkey's good relations with the KRG serve this purpose. So it is worth continuing these policies and good relations that promote mutual economic relations for the future of Turkmens.

While you mentioned Turkmen's situation in Iraq, let's continue with this topic. When we examine the relations between Turkey and Turkmen, we see that Turkmen are the ones who have always great expectations from Turkey. Hence no matter what Turkey does, it will not be enough for the Turkmen. For most of the Turkmen, Turkey is their homeland and the only protector. Turkey has taken necessary steps before 2003 as well as after 2003. Despite there are declines and rises of relations with Turkmen from time to time due to Turkey's relations with Iraq, regional and international politics; Turkey's concerns towards Turkmen have continue to exist. According to your point of view, what is the role of Turkmen in Iraq and how do you evaluate Turkey's Turkmen policy?

As I already mentioned in the previous question, let's do not consider the historical, social and cultural dimensions. Even if we focused on the post-2003 era, we see that security of the Turkmen in Iraq, welfare and status in the current system in Iraq is one of Turkey's foreign policy priorities. It is a Turkey's over-

all foreign policy priorities as well as one of the main titles of Iraq policy. In this regard, as you mentioned, we paid an extreme importance to the issue. Welfare and security of the Turkmen is extremely important for Turkey. Turkey has always showed that. But we need to see that Turkey has always been striving for the unity of the Turkmen. Because, as our proverb says, 'What's wrong with one hand there is the sound of two hands'. In other parts of world, the groups similar to Turkmen can only became influential only if they unite. So as we advise Iraq in terms of inclusiveness; as well we gave Turkmen messages of unity without making any discrimination. If we unite, we can raise our voice in better way. We can better use our constitutional rights and can convert many drawbacks to advantages. Because there is a geographical dispersion. There are natural, cultural, and social divisions. But when it came to politics, constitutional rights, and getting the right place in the structure of politics and the state in Iraq; they all need to unify and gave the image of solidarity. I think that everyone will agree, you will gather more fruit, as long as you gave this unity image. And you gather less fruit if there is perception of alteration.

The issue of Daesh also affected the Turkmen so much.

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One of Turkey's priority objectives is to struggle against Daesh terrorism and sustain the return of the displaced Turkmens in their homes. Turkey provides a serious assistance to those affected. 750-track humanitarian aid was delivered to Turkmens. We opened camps both in Iraq and in Turkey in order to help our Turkmen brothers. Recently, we were in there due to Kut'ul Amara Victory anniversary, and in Kut, there were displaced Turkmen families. I've been there with the Turkish Red Crescent. We made humanitarian assistance.

Some Turkmens criticizes Turkey in terms of the migration issue after Daesh. This criticism does not overlap with Turkey's overall foreign policy. Turkey intends to improve

conditions and welfare of Turkic groups living in other countries without interfering their internal affairs, does not it?

Sure, absolutely. As long as you gave an impression of making discrimination, whether you provide humanitarian aid or you defend a certain political position, it will do harm to everybody. Such attitude will damage both Turkey's policies in Iraq as well as Turkmens themselves. Let's assume that you have 100 pounds. Distributing these 100 pounds to only one group out of 10 groups will not only harm Turkey, but also will have negative impact on the group that you help in the long-run. Because you would earn the displeasure of the other nine. But if you distribute 100 pounds to all groups justly in accordance with certain principles,

you will be the one respected. And also you have act together with the authorities of that country that received humanitarian aid. Therefore, the Iraqi Red Crescent and Turkish Red Crescent are in close relationship. We also expect the same things for our country.

Regarding your Kut’ul Amara visit, your visit indicates that Turkey-Iraq relations will reach to a better point, but what do you see in your visit? What would you say in the scope of Turkey-Iraq relations?

On 29 April, it was the anniversary of Kut’ul Amara victory. On occasion of victory, there was ceremony in Kut. Hence, I also visited Baghdad and Kut, and made several meetings. It was very successful. We have seen that the Turkey-Iraq relations are getting better every day. The issues that we are now discussing with you also were discussed there. There is also a negative propaganda about Turkey. It should not be hidden. And also we should speed up activities to improve our image and perception in the eyes of both Iraqis and Turkmens and also eliminate the question marks in the minds of both Turkmens and Iraqis. But there is a hope for a new era in Turkey-Iraq relations and there are expectations. I think the

activities like Kut’ul Amara will contribute to a positive direction in the bilateral relations. In fact, the 100th anniversary of the victory is next year, and I have had some contacts in the context. What can be done for next year? This victory, in terms of Iraq and Turkey is important. It contains important elements that will strengthen the friendship between the two countries. I tried to explain a little while ago. There is a period of approximately one year between these two wars and victories, so they are related closely. And if you ask the importance of this victory in terms of Turkey-Iraq relations, I would say, when you visit Çanakkale cemeteries, you would see that the soldiers coming from all Ottoman provinces including Iraq lost their lives. In the same way, when we go to the cemetery in Kut, you will see that there were soldiers coming from all around Iraq in addition to many from Anatolia. Both in Çanakkale and Iraq, there is no Sunni-Shiite division, Kurdish-Turkish division or Arab-Turkish division. There are *fatwas* given by Shiite *mujtahids* in Najaf and Karbala in order to defend the last Islamic state at that time. Those *fatwas* were also very effective. In addition to the regular army, a tribal unit consisted of about 10,000 people was formed in southern Iraq. I think that there are serious

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lessons learned from this historic event today. I think the anniversary next year will be a means for both sides, for Iraqis and Turks, to remember Kut'ul Amara and similar events. Such an occasion will enhance both the friendship between two countries and social structures within us. It is also meaningful for Iraq to have everyone serving the common defence. In Iraq, it is really important today that everyone, without discrimination, as Arab, Shiite, Sunni, Kurd or Turkmen, came to the defence of Baghdad. This is something that contributes to the brotherhood and cooperation. In this regard, I hope that you will also contribute to this joint memorial next year and there will

be good 100th anniversary of the victory.

As ORSAM, we also conduct joint works in cooperation with think-tanks, academicians and universities in Iraq in order to contribute to mutual cooperation and consensus. Currently, we are expanding this cooperation. We signed protocols with universities and think-tanks in Iraq. There will be other joint cooperation works. In the coming period, we will try to contribute more to this with your support. Thank you for sharing your views with us.

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

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