

MUHAMMAD AHMAD: KRG PRESIDENT SHOULD BE ACCOUNTABLE TO THE PARLIAMENT

Muhammad Ahmad



He was born in 1961 in Saidsadiq, district of Sulaymaniyah. He graduated from Faculty of Veterinary Medicine of University of Mosul in 1990 and from Law Faculty of University of Sulaimani in 2001. Being one of the founders of Kurdistan Islamic Movement (Yekgirtu), Ahmad has taken on various duties within the party in active politics since 1994. He was also the member of Peace Council in the Iraqi parliament while he worked as group deputy chairman of Kurdistan Islamic Movement within the Baghdad parliament between 2005 and 2010. Today he is the vice chairman and the member of politburo of Kurdistan Islamic Movement as well as representation of his party in meetings of presidency.

What is the approach of Kurdistan Islamic Movement (Yekgirtu) to the presidency debates within Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG)? What do you suggest in order to overcome this crisis?

Muhammad Ahmad: The presidency crisis in KRG has unfortunately reached such dimension that it has now influence on the other issues as well. The political parties try to gain more by leading their party grassroots to another direction and putting forward their own political wills in terms of presidency. Now the situation cannot be controlled and this deepens the problem and postpones the solution. As the party, we believe that this problem can be solved with two principles: Firstly, we want it to be solved on the parliamentary basis and we have introduced a bill to the parliament in this respect. The other principle is that all the political parties should negotiate and compromise. We wanted to submit a common project to the parliament with Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP). We even indicated that this should be the common project of all the political parties. We may have different views, but we believe that we should compromise. We want this problem to be solved within the parliament; however, KDP does not agree

and wants the problem to be solved not with legal project but via political consensus. Nevertheless, the other political parties are in favor of solving the problem completely on the legal ground in the parliament. This is possible with the constitution and by compromising. We support that this problem should be solved in all its parts but the political parties can never agree on the common points. At the end of the day, as four political parties, we support the parliamentary system. We believe that the president of KRG should be accountable to the parliament if he has powers. If the president has no power and presidency is only an office of protocol, then the president will not be accountable to the parliament. There is a disagreement right here. KDP both supports the parliamentary system and demands that all the powers of the president should be maintained and that he should be responsible to the parliament. We could not agree on an issue before; KDP stated that the parliamentary system did not require the election of a president. And we defended that the president should be responsible to the parliament if he had powers. Otherwise, it would not be reasonable. We do not appreciate that an institution with powers is not monitored.

The disagreements, debates and meetings continue here. KDP's attitude is determinant in the resolution of this problem. KRG president has now three important duties. First of all, he has foreign policy decision making power. Secondly, he is the chief commander of all armed forces (the Peshmerga) and finally he has the power to introduce a bill to the parliament. Even Baghdad has now determined the power of the president in foreign policy. There is one matter left to compromise; which is the president's position as the chief commander of all armed forces. He should be somehow supervised by the parliament even if he continues to have this authority. KDP has by far insisted that the president continues all his powers without having any responsibility to any institution. However, this is against the parliamentary system.

As Yekgirtu, we have the opinion that the president should have responsibility to the parliament in any case either he is elected by the public or the parliament. This is the common view of the four political parties.

What is the attitude and behavior of the other countries, especially of the USA and the neighboring countries towards the presidency crisis in KRG?

Our neighboring countries and the USA are in favor of the solution of this problem and indicate that they do not want to see any political instability in KRG. Another important dimension is that KRG is at war with the ISIS now. KRG will suffer a blow from ISIS in case of political destabilization. Everyone, especially KRG will suffer from this. The whole world will lose because KRG fights against ISIS and the terrorism for the whole world. I hope the political stability will continue. The political parties strive to change the political system of the KRG for a better regime. The aim of these four parties is not to adopt a stance against Mr. Masoud Barzani. They solely endeavor to establish a new and modern system for KRG. In the end, I think we have to form an alliance and it is inevitable for us to compromise.

What kind of repercussions may be seen unless the political parties come to an agreement in this issue? It is mentioned in the media that there is a conflict between PUK and KDP. Do you think there will be an internal conflict again?

I do not think that there will be another internal conflict. We have gone through

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one before and we still the pain even today. However, it may lead to the dissolution of the KRG if an agreement is not achieved. That is, this may bring about a dual government system in the KRG. It is possible and also dangerous. The disagreements will become deeper in time in case of two governments. This may lead to an internal conflict. As Yekgirtu, we consider that it is beneficial and positive for the KRG to have one government and administration. We have made efforts so that KRG stays united and is better governed.

What do you think about the constitutional reform process of KRG?

Iraqi government has allowed KRG to have its own constitution. However, a compromise has not unfortunately been possible because of our internal conflict. There is still a constitutional problem. This requires all the parties to com-

promise eventually. The issue of constitution will come to the fore after that of presidency. However, the latter is now of high priority. The new constitutional process will begin afterwards.

Several deputies of your party performed a different attitude when the issue of presidency was brought to the agenda. Is there a different line of thinking in Yekgirtu?

There is neither a different line of thinking nor a different attitude within our party. Our party has grassroots in every region of the KRG. We have 4 deputies in Badinan region and 4 more deputies in Sulaymaniyah. Our deputies in Badinan initially made a statement about the presidency without counting on the decision of our party or consulting us. Later we held meetings within our party and then the party resolution was declared.

At the end of the day, everyone adheres to the party discipline and decisions. There is no different line of thinking within Yekgirtu.

Will your party hold a congress?

We will hold a party congress next year. It already corresponds to the ordinary congress schedule of our party. We have already started the preparations.

The conflict between Turkey and the PKK has started again. How do you evaluate this situation?

We were very glad with the peace process since there was political stability in Turkey. What we expected was the resolution of the problem. The economic, political and even sociological conditions in Turkey will reach a better level providing that the Kurdish problem is solved peacefully and then we will be glad. In case of any unsettled situation including war, we are influenced and troubled as well. It is important for our neighboring countries to have stability because we will somehow influence each other. We do not want to see political instability or a worsening economy in Turkey. We hope that Kurdish people will be defined as equal citizens in Turkey. We are also in favor of resolving consti-

tutional the problem via dialogue. Unfortunately, there is war now and we are definitely against it. We call both sides for negotiation. External powers will intervene if the war continues. This may lead to a terrible situation and cause instability. Turkey's power stems from economy, which also affects KRG. We will continue our dialogue with both sides as long as they come to the table again and the peace process continues. They should have a political consensus and the problem should be resolved democratically. Kurdish people should have their incontestable rights and be defined as equal citizens, more investments should be made to the eastern provinces and their rights should be specified in the Constitution. We expected durable peace and a new constitution immediately after the elections. However, it did not happen so and the process went back. Now peace should be built and both sides should come to the table.

KRG has played a role in the progress of the peace process within the last three years. What kind of role have you played to build peace as Yekgirtu?

We have been in contact with both sides and in favor of peace not only for the last three years but also the past ten years. Our official delega-

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tion even went to Turkey ten years ago on behalf of Yek-girtu. Mr. Abdullah Gül was then the Minister of Foreign Affairs; we held meetings with him and defended that the Kurdish problem should be solved not with war but peace. We even negotiated with the Kurdish side; we came together and conveyed our opinions about building peace. We defended a solution through democratic constitution, dialogue and political negotiation. I think the reason why the process did not continue is the lack of confidence among the parties. This allows for the intervention of external powers and exacerbates the situation.

At what stage is the KRG-ISIS war? Do you think that KRG had to go to war with the ISIS?

KRG did not want to go to or be a part of this war, but ISIS attacked US and declared war against us for no reason. At the beginning, we thought that ISIS was an armed group that wanted to dominate the Sunnite regions in Iraq, but it was not the case. They ruined everything. As a terrorist organization, it made Iraq such a place that it is almost impossible for Iraq to become integrated again. Moreover, it waged war against the KRG in vain and attacked us for no reason. They imposed this war upon

us; otherwise we did not want to go to war. Thank Allah, all the political parties here are of the same mind, everyone is against the ISIS and terrorism. All parties stand shoulder to shoulder in our fight against the ISIS. We are one voice and we have one will. At this point, it is important that the Western countries support us. We have now gained more victory against the ISIS. We are in a better state. We are the sufferers. The ISIS is a terrorist organization and does not have the right to survive. They attack us and threaten our gains and values. We are now at a better position. We make progress day by day in our fight against the ISIS and reclaim the towns and villages under ISIS' control. ISIS is no longer dangerous in KRG.

Do you think Iran's influence has been more at the forefront in KRG during the last period?

Iran generally influences Iraq and this is the result of American policy. In this sense, the USA weakened Iraq because Iraq can never stop an external intervention. This has deepened the internal conflicts in Iraq. As a neighboring country, Iran has also its interests in Iraq, thus plays a role in Iraq. However, we can say that it plays a smaller role or is less influential in KRG.

How do you evaluate Turkey's role in the region?

Turkey follows a politically better line in the region. That is, it is mostly objective and it is not involved in an international alliance at the same time. Turkey defends itself and has a good political line since there are a lot of countries which do not like Turkey. They may blame it somehow but Turkey takes cautious steps in the region.

How is the current state of affairs between KRG and Turkey? Do you find our current relations sufficient?

In my opinion, Turkey can pursue a more balanced policy towards KRG. In addition, everyone in Turkey should keep the faith and form good relations with all the others. I think it is better to be more balanced. For example, Turkey's position is closer to KDP but more distant to the parties in Sulaymaniyah. Turkey now considers opening a representative office in Sulaymaniyah in order to have closer relations here. Of course, balance is important and necessary in the politics. The better relations we have, the better it will be for everyone. We can build better relations with Turkey by respecting our common interests.

How do you consider oil's being sold from Turkey?

Turkey is always an important door for KRG. If it had not been for Turkey, KRG would have seen a lot of crisis under Saddam's regime. KRG is important for Turkey because it is like Iraq's door. Turkey is an important neighboring country and we consider the relations between KRG and Turkey positively. Our representative has been in Ankara since 1999-2000. As Yekgirtu, we have made efforts so that the KRG-Turkey relations could be better. Our relations became tense for a certain period, we went to Turkey with Salahaddin Bahaddin, the president of that time and we played a positive role. KRG-Turkey relations reached a better level afterwards.

Elections will soon be held in Turkey. How do you presume that the results will be? How do you think KRG will be affected by AKP's coming to power?

No matter what the results of the elections will be, we should build the peace together. HDP should also pursue a more cautious and positive policy and they should build peace instead of blaming each other. I hope both sides will bring stability and peace to Turkey by learning

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lessons from their mistakes. The AKP government was beneficial to KRG. The previous Turkish governments did not recognize us. Their views disturbed us, but AKP took initiatives towards KRG and Turkey's point of view changed. We consider that AKP's KRG policy is good, but we should carry it one step further and balance it.

In conclusion, is there anything you would like to add?

I wish that all the people in Turkey can live in peace. We have common history, common religion and common interests. We believe that it is necessary to live justly. It is sad that we, Kurdish people, still do not have our own state even though we have a 40-million population. I hope we will head towards a better future with unity and fraternity.

Thank you.

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Ortadoğu Stratejik Araştırmalar Merkezi (ORSAM)

Süleyman Nazif Sokak No: 12-B Çankaya / Ankara

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

www.orsam.org.tr