



THE U.S.A. DOES NOT WANT TURKMENS TO HAVE POWER, THEY ARE AFRAID OF THAT. BECAUSE IF TURKMENS HAVE POWER, TURKEY STAND BEHIND IT.

Mehmed Ali Efendiođlu



Mehmet Ali Efendiođlu was born in 1968, in Reshidiye, Mosul. He finished elementary school and high school in Mosul and he obtained his degree in Physics in 1991 at the University of Mosul. After 2003, Efendiođlu started working as part of Iraq Turkmen Front (ITF) and he currently works as ITF Province Director of Mosul and as a member of ITF Executive Board. Also teaching at Reshidiye High School in Mosul, Efendiođlu had to flee Mosul after ISIS captured the city. Efendiođlu still continues to work as the ITF Province Director of Mosul in Dohuk where he arrived after escaping Mosul.

Could you introduce yourself in brief?

I have been working as IT-F Province Director of Mosul since 2009.

What do you think about the Mosul offensive, code named “Operation Conquest (Fatah)”, launched by Iraqi Ministry of Defence? What can you tell us about future of this operation?

The Operation Conquest is conducted in Qayyarah and Shirqat, the two towns close to Makhmur. As to why this operation is launched, there were no preparations beforehand, regarding the operation. But ISIS carried out a few attacks near Makhmur and some soldiers were killed during these attacks. Hence the USA, after coming to a decision with the military units located there, asked for nearby villages to be saved in order to protect a camp from missile attacks. Then they mobilized the troops and took the control of 9 villages back from ISIS.

There were 20-25 ISIS members (militants) in these 9 villages. After these villages were taken, the region was somewhat gone back to normal. A major (serious) operation to launch in Mosul has not yet

been discussed. The aim of Operation Conquest was to stop ISIS attacks on Makhmur and take back these villages.

Is there a major operation planned in the future in order to recapture Mosul?

We have spoken with US authorities in Erbil. They stated that they did not plan a major operation any time soon suggesting “Neither Iraqi Army nor the other armed forces in Iraq are ready to launch such a massive operation.” What we ask of the Iraqi government is for them to place 15,000 people (men) from Mosul in Makhmur in the name of Haşdi Aşeriye (Tribal Communities). We told that these 15,000 people include all ethnicities; Turkmen, Christian, Yazidis, Arab, Kurd. But Iraqi government refused our request to place these people in the camp. We told we would only include those with a Mosul identity, but they still did not accept.

Iraqi government has some conditions regarding this issue that we do not accept. Because one of these conditions suggests that they place Hashd al-Shabi in Makhmur, as well. We do not want Hashd al-Shabi to enter Mosul. But Iraqi government insists

on that. These issues remain unresolved. A decision about these 15,000 people still has not been made. At least 40,000 soldiers are needed to launch a major operation in Mosul. And currently we have only around 3,000 soldiers in Makhmur. Atheel al-Nujaifi, former governor of Mosul, has power in the region with 2,000 soldiers, which was previously 1500. And there is also the local police force with 4,000 people. There are other forces as well, and in total we have 12,000 soldiers and it is not possible for us to recapture Mosul completely, with 12,000 soldiers. We wish to increase the number of soldiers. We might have an opportunity to have the control in Mosul if we increase the number to at least 30,000. But it is not possible to complete the operation successfully with fewer than 30,000 soldiers.

What is the situation in Mosul's surroundings (outskirts)? Are those places taken from ISIS?

There are some towns and villages in Mosul's surroundings that are still under the control of ISIS. Shirqat, Qayyarah, Hadar are some of the bigger towns and they are still under ISIS control. But the 9 villages that were saved in

the Operation Conquest are smaller villages of Shirqat and Qayyarah. The north is all controlled by Peshmerga. Some of the towns of Mosul, like Bartilla, Hamdaniye, Karakuş, Tal Afar and Tilkeyf, are closer to the north, to Dohuk. These towns are all controlled by ISIS at the moment. The distance between ISIS and Peshmerga is 3-5 km (2-3 miles). In the west, the biggest problem is in the town of Rabbia. Half of this town is controlled by ISIS and the other half is controlled by Peshmerga. And also there is a small force that belongs to the Arab tribe of Shammar that works with Peshmerga.

Our biggest problem in this region is PKK and the YPG. They mobilized from Sinjar to Tal Afar, which is what causes the main problem. We shared this problem with the US and told them that we could not control these groups in the region. We said "Neither your forces nor Peshmerga can get the two groups out of Sinjar." This is because these groups say that "unless Iraqi government orders us otherwise, we will never leave here". We are afraid they might mobilize towards Tal Afar. When some Shammar Arabs cooperate with the Iraqi government, they join under the

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name of Hashd al-Shabi and cooperate with the PYD. This is the main problem at hand. Iraqi government is the one who provides their payments and their sources. There are reports from Baghdad that say “If you do not let Hashd al-Shabi enter Makhmur, we will support their actions.” If this group mobilizes, there will be serious problems in the region. And the only thing standing against this group is probably Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP). And how much it stands against this group is open to question (debatable), since it does not have enough power to do so. Iraq army, as well as both PKK and the PYD have power in Sincar. Barzani made it clear that he did not wish a war breaking out between Kurds.

How much do you know about the situation of locals in Mosul living under the

control of ISIS? How does the way ISIS operates influence them?

We have been keeping in touch with them. We talk with those in Mosul on the phone. We want them to be rescued from ISIS, but there is nothing they can do. “We are alive, but we cannot talk about ISIS.” they say. The locals do not want ISIS there. Everyone is against ISIS there because no one likes ISIS activities in the region.

How about the situation of Turkmens living in Mosul, how does ISIS affect them?

According to the last count, Tal Afar was the city having the biggest Turkmen population. Unfortunately they had to flee after ISIS captured the city. As they continued to stay in Mosul, they mingled with the other groups. There were others coming from dif-

ferent places. The Sunni population also increased in the city, while Turkmen and Kurd population decreased and Christian population dropped to zero. I mean there are traces of Turkmens, but not the way it used to be. As you know, Turkmens' situation hasn't been good in the past either, but after ISIS came to the region, they stopped trading and doing business, they are not doing well.

Where did Turkmen migrate to since ISIS captured Mosul? Where do they live, how many are there, and how is their situation?

The locals, living in the villages neighbouring Mosul city centre, have all migrated. But where? 95% of them went to south, 4% went to Kurdistan Region, and 1% went to Turkey. The other Turkmens, the Sunni Turkmens, certainly did not go Kurdistan Region; 51,000 thousand of them came to Turkey. If 51,000 of them is in Turkey, and another 51,000 of them is in the south then Tal Afar is empty.

As to the other regions, there is Karakoyun village where half of the Shiite population in the village migrated to Kurdistan Region, while the other half migrated to south. Half of the Sunni Turkmen population, on the

other hand, came to Turkey, while the other half remained there. The Turkmens in Reshi-diye did the same. More than half of them went to Kurdistan Region and some of them went to Tal Afar. All of these villagers went back to south. I emphasize, I hope our situation does not end up like that of Christians. In 1980s, there was a Christian population in Iraq. You would see them, where ever you went, in every district. Now there are only one or two families left in total. This is what we are afraid of, as Turkmens.

Has there been anyone who returned to Mosul?

No, there hasn't. But some of the Turkmens in Kurdistan Region were taken into custody. They were accused of communicating with ISIS.

You've just said something about the forces joining the operation, like Iraqi Army, Peshmerga, Hashd al-Shabi. As Turkmen, you would like to join the operation, as well. If you do join the operation, where will you be standing as Turkmens? How many Turkmen soldiers do you want to be included?

We have concerns for the future. So, we are trying to build power in the region in order to protect the geography

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where our people live, and to be able to go back to Turkmen villages. That's what our people want us to do. If Hashd al-Shabi enters the region, we cannot go back. They caused more harm to us than ISIS did; we suffered from both of them. If we could rebuild the Turkmen villages, we might have a chance to go back. 15,000 soldiers would be enough to have the power we need, but so far Iraqi government hasn't let us have that power.

Let's say ISIS is driven out of Mosul with an opera-

tion. Are there any plans for the future of Mosul? What does Iraqi government or Mosul governorate think about that?

Mosul governorate was assembled in Erbil in recent weeks, in order to discuss what to do after Mosul was rescued. Commissions, non governmental organizations and other organizations are formed ready to start working as soon as Mosul is saved. They were formed within the Mosul Provincial Council. And also, these organizations work with commander of the operation, the police, the members of the



council, and other non-governmental organizations, as well. They are preparing to work in Mosul after it is rescued.

So Mosul governorate has taken some action for the future of Mosul. How about Iraqi government?

Iraqi government has no plans for the future of Mosul. How to take back Mosul is the only thing they care about. They let Hashd al-Shabi and PKK so that Mosul is kept under control. They don't care about other issues. We haven't received anything from Iraqi government after we migrated. They paid migrants \$800 once. What can you do with that money? If it wasn't for Turkey, we would have starved to death.

A tragic incident happened in Taza Khurmatu (Tuz Khurmatu). ISIS launched chemical attacks from which many civilians suffered. What do you think about the attack? Do you think ISIS can launch similar attacks in other Turkmen regions?

I keep emphasizing that Turkmens suffer the most from these incidents. Shiites and Sunnis suffered as well. Why does ISIS launch their chemical attacks in Turkmen

regions? ISIS hasn't been active in the Arab regions which are under its control. ISIS has only targeted our regions. For the first time, 600 of our people were hurt and some were killed. And that's exactly how it happened. Ebu Faddal Abbas Brigade came from Baghdad, entered the region.

US authorities in Ramadi said that "We wanted 10,000 soldiers from Ramadi people." And so they took 10000 men from Ramadi. After the operation started, Hashd al-Shabi entered Ramadi with 140,000 men. And US couldn't control Ramadi anymore. We told them "Either you are supporting this plan or the situation is out of your hands. But they said "No, Ramadi is under our control." In response, we asked "How can 140,000 Hashd al-Shabi force enters the town without your knowledge?" Same thing happened in Saladin, and it is now happening in Kirkuk and it will happen in Mosul.

So you are saying other Turkmen regions are also in danger?

Yes.

Almost as if it is planned.

It's all planned. They are doing this on purpose.

We have concerns for the future. So, we are trying to build power in the region in order to protect the geography where our people live, and to be able to go back to Turkmen villages.

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And Bashir village hasn't been retrieved due to not being able to launch an operation there. So Turkmens requested, from both Iraqi government and international commission that an operation is conducted here, because if Tuzkhurmatu falls, Kirkuk will be under threat. And not just Kirkuk, but the surroundings as well, may face with ISIS threat. Do you think Iraqi government or international coalition will take any measures regarding an operation in Bashir?

No. Who is the governor in Kirkuk? Najmaldin Karim. Najmaldin Karim works with Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). He plays a secret role in PUK's project. He also plays a secret role in Iran's project. We took only 50 soldiers

to a village in Kirkuk, so that they would protect this village. But those 50 soldiers were like a nuclear bomb. The governor is doing research on them, asking "What are you doing, who armed you?" Peshmerga and Hashd al-Shabi are also looking into this, by asking "What are you doing?, Who is giving you orders?"

But nobody asks anything to thousands of those coming from the south and staying around Bashir village. I've been looking into this matter; I even spoke with Ershad Salih, the president of ITF. I also spoke with Najmaldin Karim but he wanted the approval of both Iraqi and Iranian government. "We can get it from the Iraqi government but how can we get it from the Iranian government?" I asked. He

said “I don’t know, you look into it.” Iran probably has more influence on Kirkuk than Turkey does. So does PUK, because it only listens to Iran.

As you know, Tal Afar is one of the biggest towns and is controlled by ISIS. What do you think about the rescue of Tal Afar, one of the Turkmen regions? What future is in store for this town?

I talked about this topic last month. “We are losing Tal Afar.” I said. It happened before and it is happening now. “How come?”, they said. Mosul Provincial Council declares “Hashd al-Shabi cannot enter Mosul.” I said. But he (a member of Hashd al-Shabi) said “I will take the control in Tal Afar. This is my responsibility, not other’s. And the only way to do this is this”, meaning Hashd al-Shabi in Sinjar would enable PKK, and PKK would mingle with them right away.

To address the problem there, USA thought about building a camp there. We thought we could place 5000 of 15,000 people, and even if they are Turkmen, we could place them there. I said Hashd al-Shabi would not let this happen while they con-

rol the area. They are planning to do something there. If Hashd al-Shabi doesn’t let it happen, then take them out. What is Hashd al-Shabi doing there? They have already made preparation. They could attack Tal Afar. “If that happens, then we will step in.” said the USA. Then I said, we have been patient for 10 years. For 10 years, we have been facing bloodshed. We will have to move along with our own plan, then.” “What are you going to do?” they asked. And I told them “You prepare the lists and bring them to us. We will place those 15,000 people. They can enter and stay in Tal Afar.” I do not trust them, because they don’t want Turkmen to have power. They are afraid that Turkmen will have power. Because if they do, Turkey will support it. The Iraqi government will not play a big role in this. Because Hashd al-Shabi will have less influence there, as well as PKK and the PYD. I don’t think they have a plan concerning Turkmen.

So in short, we can say that they are slowly trying to erase the Turkmen presence in Tal Afar. What awaits Turkmen in politics after ISIS? What lies ahead

The locals do not want ISIS there. Everyone is against ISIS there because no one likes ISIS activities in the region.

for Turkmen in the process? Something worse or better?

As I said, if we have the kind of power I've just mentioned, then the fate of Turkmen will be better. But without power, even if someone came from Baghdad to rebuild the village, nobody would return.

There are trust issues, as well. Nobody trusts one another. No one believes that someone's going to come from Baghdad and establish the Turkmen regions. Peshmerga comes and protects these regions. They don't trust anyone. Because they think they can only be present in the region if there is Turkmen power there, and vice versa. And it is too late now. I've constantly mentioned this everywhere since 2005 that we must have power, but nobody listened.

Will that power be given to Turkmen? I mean, will the Turkmen be allowed to have armed forces?

The ministry of Peshmerga has given licence for the Turkmen power, at the moment. So we are allowed. And we want a Turkmen to lead the force. If we approve to be under the peshmerga, Turkmen forces will be officially under Ministry of Peshmerga Affairs. So we cannot make decisions. We said that to US "we can give 2000 names for Turkmen forces to Baghdad". But they said, "you give names to Peshmerga. If they approve these names, we can send to Baghdad. If Iraqi government doesn't approve these options and 15,000 people in Makhmur, then our 500 men will have to join Peshmerga. So a Sunni region is formed inside Iraq. And this is what



Sunni Arab leaders want. If our forces join Peshmerga in the future, they will not be serving in Turkmen regions, because Peshmerga works in certain regions. What will happen to Turkmen regions? Who is going to live in those regions? Sunni Arabs will, and then we will lose everything. That's why we have not been the ones who make the decisions. Of course having power inside Peshmerga is good. Because if we have a forces inside the Peshmerga, we can control our region.

And for this reason, in order to talk about the future of Turkmens, they need to have power that belongs to Turkmen. This is what we conclude. And we strongly believe that Turkmen will have a greater say in the matters. Is the exact count of these migrants known? How many Turkmen migrants are there?

Tal Afar, the biggest Turkmen town, has a population of 330,000. There are 300,000 people displaced inside Iraq. And there are also others in Turkey and in different places. The total count of Turkmen migrants is 350,000. 50,000 of them are in Turkey. And others are in Najaf and Kerbela.

Are there any in Kirkuk?

We have a camp in Kirkuk. 400 families are living in the camp. Outside the camp there are 1600 families. And we also have 400-500 families in Erbil and 1200 families in Sulaymaniyah. Most of the migrants went to Turkey.

Do you know where in Turkey? Which cities?

Most of them are living in Ankara, Mersin, Kırşehir and Amasya. There are 20-25 families in Amasya, 325 families in Kırşehir, and 9000 families in Gaziantep, in İslahiye camp. 15-20 families live in other places. Most of them live in Ankara.

Do you have a chance to meet these families?

We had a meeting here, in Ankara. We invited one person from each city. We listened to their problems, we learned their numbers. They had a lot of problems. Everyone told how many Turkmen are found in their cities.

How do you communicate with the families in Iraq? Can you reach the migrant families, the ones in south, the Turkmen families or do you hear from them? Or is it just the ones

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in Kirkuk and in north that you are able to reach?

We have a camp in Zakho where 620 families live. We have elementary schools, and literacy centres. We also have 1000 families in Dohuk. In south, we have one ITF responsible who is in charge of the families in there. And we are also regularly in contact with the families in Baghdad and in Kerbela.

When you ask them, do they want to go back right now?

They all want to go back.

Is it possible for them to go back?

It looks different for them to return. If they don't go back, our number in Mo-

sul decreases but if they go back, we want them to return our way, and not according to the plans of others. The number may decrease as long as they don't go any other way.

What kind of helps is provided for the Turkmen migrants at the moment? As ITF, you must be in constant contact with them.

That's right; we are in contact with all the families there. We have a list of the names of the head of the families, their phone numbers, their home addresses. We also have a commission, and they always reach the commission with the numbers on the list. They reach and

their problems are tried to be solved.

Recently, the security officials decided for 15 families to go “either to Baghdad or to Turkey”. We contacted the security officials in their stead. We said “there is no problem with these families, we, as ITF, can vouch for them.” and they said “Alright, you can vouch for them.”

We always support those who have patients, or who live in poor financial situation. We have the list. One day these lists are revealed, you can see how much (help) we have provided, for each and every family. Couple of days ago, two girls who were in a severe health condition, went to the hospital. The hospital picked a date for surgery, a month ahead. The doctor said “If they wait for a month, they will die, they should be treated in a private hospital.” So we took them to private hospital where they received treatment. In short, we both visit the camps twice or three times a week and we also contact the families by phone. The commissions report us their news.

So that means you keep in touch with all the camps; the one in Kirkuk or Dohuk. Does ISIS keep

any Turkmen or Turkmen women? Ershad Salihi mentioned a few things about this issue. He even made a statement regarding these people. Does ISIS have any Turkmen or Turkmen women?

Yes.

How many are there and what is their condition?

As Turkmen, our cause is freedom. We do not want to bring up these issues. We didn't do it like Yazidis did. Every time we assembled, Yazidis told “Our women are gone.” But as Turkmen, we didn't say anything like that. ISIS has 72 Turkmen children at the moment, ages of which range from 10-15. They are all in hands of ISIS, as are 50 Turkmen women.

You do not know much about their situation.

No, I don't.

My final question is, as Turkmen what are your expectations from Turkey?

Turkey is our home. If it wasn't for Turkey, we don't know where else we would go, or what we could do. And we are always asking “when can we pay you back?”. We believe we owe Turkey that

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much. Today we are wiped (swept) away from our own lands and people cannot live without a land.

3,5 million Turks live in Germany but they have not any definite geography. That's why their numbers are not counted. There are more than 100,000 Turkmens in the south, but 5-10 years from now, all these children

will go to Arab schools and then become Arabian. We've been the ones who suffered the most from the beginning. We are losing both our lands and our people. Arabs, Sunnis, they don't lose their identity when they come from other places, we do. And we ask for the support of Turkey, to deal with this issue.

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