



AK-NEWS - Kirkuk cannot be incorporated into the Kurdistan Region through fighting or violence. If it could, the largest Kurdish armed movement in 1961 through to 1975 led by the legendary leader Mustafa Barzani would have resolved the issue in favor of the Kurds.

Kirkuk, and some other districts and towns like Khanaqin and Shingar have kept the Kurds and Arabs in Iraq deadlocked for the past 50 years. Neither Kurds nor their opponents have been willing to give them up.

Fortunately, the Kurdish leadership is now convinced that war is not decisive in any political conflict in Iraq. The Kurds are now fully convinced that the only way is through dialogue and mutual understanding. The Kurdish leadership was intelligent enough during Operation Iraqi Freedom to liberate Iraq from the grip of Saddam Hussein by the U.S. and coalition forces in 2003 not to send their Peshmarga forces into Kirkuk lest it set off bloody clashes between the Kurds and the Arabs or between Kurds and Turkmen. This paved the way for the abstinence of the Kurds from the local clashes that came later between the different Iraqi groups which ended in a bloodbath. The Kurds announced that they reasoned with a different mentality in the new era, and behaved differently too.

In my view, it will not be long before the Kurds will reach a final and different understanding regarding their unconditional reliance on “ talks, or efforts to make the other understand ” . This solution alone is impossible for the Kurds in their quest without help and the use of other means. As we all see, the new Iraqi government in which the Kurds have been heavily involved has failed to take one step forward in the the implementation of article 140 of the Iraqi constitution which outlines a three-stage process to resolving the disputes over areas contested by the Kurdistan Regional Government and the central government in Baghdad. It should be kept in mind that even democracy is essentially a form of combat; the only difference is that the guns in this battle are silent. As a general rule, if a party is not ready to yield to your demands through fighting, then there is no doubt that it will not do so by peaceful means either. This is the danger I am addressing

in this essay.

For instance: in one of the largest and most expansive battles in May 1974 through to May 1975, the Kurds managed to land heavy blows on the Iraqi army, and after the fight was finally over in favor of Iraq, Saddam Hussein admitted in a televised statement that the ability and energy of the army in the face of the Kurdish rebellion was on the verge of collapse. It was this inability of the Iraqi army that caused Iraq to give up land and water to its historical enemy, Iran, in return for cooperation to succumb the Kurdish rebellion in Iraq, and they succeeded. After nearly 15 years, Saddam Hussein said during talks with the Kurdish leaders in the early 1990s that the Iraqi government was ready to yield to the Kurdish demands after the fighting resumed in 1974, in other words “ Iraq would give Kirkuk to the Kurds ”, if it wasn ’ t for the Arab countries ’ pressure. The unveiling of this secret means that the Iraqi government, at that time, was ready to “ return Kirkuk to Kurdistan ” .

In a similar scenario, the current Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki blamed the procrastination in the implementation of article 140 on Iraq ’ s three-person presidency, in essence it ’ s the same old story.

Therefore, I believe the approach currently adopted by the Kurds to resolve the conflict through negotiations and making the other understand, or in other words holding a referendum and conducting a national census - which are the ultimate ways of democracy, are deficient solutions.

Of course, all of these are necessary steps towards returning Kirkuk and other areas to Kurdistan. It is also true that Kirkuk is part of – and will never be disconnected from – Kurdistan, but there is no alternative to democracy and the Kurds can never back down from it. However, the accumulation of these factors alone is not an adequate force to restore Kirkuk which will be more complicated the longer it is delayed and the Kurds will be more deeply entrenched. Logically speaking, even if all other factors are in favor of those wronged, the passage of time is not.

The Kurds in this historical bet have to deepen a developing economy and consolidate the democratic life in the Kurdish community of Kurdistan alongside the political struggle in Baghdad. A developed Kurdistan will dramatically weigh down the scale of conflicts in favor of the Kurds in these disputed areas. Kirkuk is only 85 kilometers from Erbil, the capital of the Kurdistan Region, but is 300 kilometers away from Baghdad. A prosperous Erbil with an economic infrastructure, democratic life, independent media, rights of the minorities and religious tolerance, will silently attract Kirkuk into its region.

The Kurds have been working, since the fall of Saddam in 2003, to reconstruct their region. The Kurdish provinces are striding towards high standards of living, prosperity, security, comfort and harmony day after day. There is no comparison between Kurdistan and the rest of Iraq. From now on, more reconstruction projects have to be implemented in Sulaimaniyah and Erbil, especially on the southern parts of the two cities towards

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Kirkuk so that step by step the city is more closely connected to Kurdistan. In the contemporary world, people align with the circles rich with culture, democracy and with a developed economy. The Turkmen and Arabs of Kirkuk have to choose Kurdistan not to be forced to conduct a referendum. Prosperity and welfare in Kurdistan has to attract the Kirkuk population with all its ethnic and religious groups like a magnet.

Of course, I advocate the revival of the economy and luxury and democracy for Iraq as a whole without any discrimination before I advocate the Kurdish cause in the disputed areas as a Kurd. My insistence on annexing Kirkuk to Kurdistan is grounded on the fact that it is pivotal for Iraq to transcend to either democracy or to remain in the former, darker era.

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### PART II

Since the early days of the Iraqi state, Kurds have not been desperate for a law to resolve their conflict with Baghdad. Iraq ' s post-1958 revolution constitution made provisions that Iraq is shared by Arabs and Kurds. Partnership means equality in decision-making and in harvesting the fruits. If Iraqi Kurds were given equal rights as their Arab counterparts, they wouldn ' t have suffered the agony the Iraqi state inflicted on them after that date.

There ' s no question that even before that date there were laws in favor of Kurds in Iraq, for instance; the general population census of 1957 gives Kirkuk to Kurdistan if it is a matter of majority of Kurds in the city. Now that half a century has passed since the general population census of 1957 and 1959 and the constitution of that time, Kurds should have clearly seen that their dependence on article 140 of the current Iraqi constitution – which is roadmap to solving the issues in Kirkuk and other disputed areas – or the result of the next population census (scheduled for Dec. 5) in the hope of resolving the Kirkuk issue will make no difference if the counterpart “ the Iraqi Arab Leadership ” doesn ' t believe in the principle of change in their mentality and reasoning in the new Iraq. There are a thousand and one proofs and evidences that the counterpart has not believed and is the same old person.

The Kurdish actors, whether the political leadership, the Kurdish media, or civil societies, are muted and do not guard themselves from accusations. Tens of thousands of those Arab families that Saddam Hussein brought from southern and central Iraq to settle in Kirkuk in a bid to change the demographics of the city, are still there seven years after Saddam and his regime were toppled in 2003, even though laws have been issued that oblige those Arabs to go back to their original regions. And tens of thousands of Kurdish families that Saddam Hussein forced to leave Kirkuk have not returned to the city yet we

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hear from the media that some Arab and Turkmen politicians complain about the Kurds trying to change the demographics of the city.

Certainly, many Kurds have returned to their places in Kirkuk without receiving remarkable help for the years of suffering of being displaced and being expelled from their economic life, but there are many who have not returned because they lack the motivation to return to Kirkuk. Those who have returned might represent a big number, however they are only the poor and helpless who lived for years in Erbil and Sulaimaniyah and were not able to build their own lives in those two cities so they went back to their home in Kirkuk. A small shake-up in the city will once again dislodge those families.

The Kurdish elite of Kirkuk, the bourgeois and the capitalists, the bureaucratic officials, intellectuals, artists, journalists, academics, judges and engineers - all expelled from Kirkuk by Saddam Hussein ' s regime - are still in Erbil and Sulaimaniyah, and a large number of them are abroad.

This elite is very little inclined to return to Kirkuk. Even those who held high ranks in the city in recent years, are based in Erbil and Sulaimaniyah and go to work in Kirkuk during the day, returning home at night on a daily basis. The Kurdish dependence on large numbers of Kurds in their plans to win Kirkuk and their neglect of this elite is a danger with binding responsibilities.

Now, the civil circles of Kirkuk are not in the hands of Kurds. Oil companies, the banking sector, trade and industry, government offices, education, courts or any other sectors of a contemporary city are not in the hands of the Kurds. In some of those institutions, not even a single Kurdish individual is found, except for the security services whose role is contingent on the status of violence in the city. Once security is stable, they have to go back into their stations, if not home.

The Kurdish policy regarding Kirkuk is a macho policy but not an intelligent one. We have to see that no matter how big the number of common Kurdish people in Kirkuk, it is of no use in weighing down the scale in favor of the Kurds. The destiny of the city is going towards loss if the Kurdish Kirkuki intellectual elite are adamant not to return to Kirkuk.

The result of this macho policy by Kurds in the past seven years is that they have not been able to open civil institutions, say for instance, hospitals, education centers, civil society organizations, tourist and trade centers, or even playgrounds for children, in the city. Relying on the large number of helpless and rural returnees who will be swept away with a gust of a wind, is a bet whose result is already clear: Kirkuk will be lost.

The longer the annexation of Kirkuk to the Kurdistan Region is delayed, the further it slows down the economic and popular development of the city. It is not only Baghdad which is to blame in this issue for adopting unilateral policies, but also the Kurdish side. The Kurds are to blame in terms of not adopting lenient and intelligent policies. What excuse do the Kurdish authorities or even the Kurdish Kirkuki elite have for not going

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back and associating their homes, lives and fates to Kirkuk while most of them have made sacrifices for the city and the harvesting of their efforts is near? Besides, who says the fears of Arabs and Turkmen have about the Kurds is not essentially a cultural difference between urban and rural people rather than an ethnic conflict as it appears to be? I have an instinct, as an Iraqi, and believe that upon the return of this Kurdish elite to Kirkuk, it will, to a great extent, defuse the current outrage of the representatives of Turkmen and Arabs and will make them feel secure in their coexistence and the building a civil life for everyone ' s future. Meanwhile, the fate of the city – which has been the mother of all calamities and a deadlock for all Iraqis for half a century - will be won for the Kurds.

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