

Kirkuk City Profile

21st September 2007

“Kirkuk is our Jerusalem”, Jalal Talabani, politician and now Iraq's president, who is a Kurd from Kirkuk.

Facts & figures

Location: 155 miles north of Baghdad, on the plains south of the Zagros Mountains

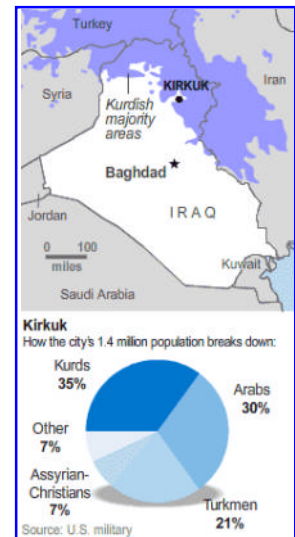
Population: 1.15-1.4 million (2007 est.) (728,000 in 2002 est.)

Ethnicity: Arab, Kurd, Turkmen, Assyrian and Armenian

Religion: Mostly Sunni Islam, plus Christian and Shi'a Islam

Population mix

According to the Kurds, Kirkuk was a majority Kurdish city in the late 1890s and up to the 1960s. The Turkmen population of the city dispute this, stating that they were the majority. What is clear is that the Arabs were a minority until the 1960s when the Baathist government destroyed hundreds of Kurdish villages, with an estimated 200,000 Kurds having to flee the region. In the 1990s a further 120,000 to 200,000 non-Arabs were expelled in the government's continued policy to Arabise Kirkuk and the surrounding area. Thousands of Arabs (mainly Shi'a) were relocated to Kirkuk from the rest of Iraq. Since the US invasion in 2003 it is estimated that up to 350,000 Kurds have moved (back) to Kirkuk. Thousands of Arabs and Turkomens have fled or been killed.



The Kurds have moved back in massive numbers as they see Kirkuk as “their” city, the historic capital of the whole of Kurdistan. Hence they want it included in the Kurdish semi-autonomous region to the north of Kirkuk. This is opposed by the Arabs and Turkmen who don't trust the Kurds to govern them and fear they will be pushed out of the city. It is also opposed by Turkey which fears the emergence of an independent Kurdish state next door to its own large Kurdish population; wants to protect the Turkmen of Kirkuk; and still sees northern Iraq as its own protectorate from Ottoman times. Iran is also nervous on behalf of the Shi'a in the city.

Kurdish fighters are highly organised, within the Iraqi army and outside it, and will fight for control of Kirkuk. A referendum was due by the end of 2007, but this has been postponed until May 2008 for technical reasons. The Kurds won't accept continual delays to the referendum, and the Arabs, Turkmen and Turkey won't accept the referendum happening! All out war or civil war is threatened either way.

As part of the process leading up to the referendum, Arabs are being offered about \$15,000 per family to relocate out of Kirkuk. About 12,000 Arab families have taken the money. Arab leaders decry this as forced relocation, even ethnic cleansing. They insist that Kirkuk must stay as an Iraqi city.



This tension between Kurds, Turkmen and Arabs is the cause of much of the current violence in Kirkuk. Mostly this is between the Kurds and Turkmen with dozens of people killed every week. Many Turkmen families have fled the city as they lack political authority or weapons to fight.

In addition, violence is on the increase as a result of Sunni Arab militants arriving in the city after being squeezed out of their strongholds in central Iraq. In the last year or so, The “Islamic State of Iraq” linked to Al-Qaeda have become active in Kirkuk.

One mother's story

A Sunday in August 2007. A police officer and two colleagues are killed in an ambush near Kirkuk. As neighbours hear of the killing they rush to his house to comfort his wife. Layla will not be comforted. She gets a pistol and shoots herself in the head.

Their five children, aged 5 to 11, are now orphans. The children go to stay with an uncle who says that the extended family in Kirkuk will care for them.

Recent bombings

Sep 17: A suicide bomber killed five people in a café in the town of Tuz, near to Kirkuk. Tuz is a mainly Turkmen-Shi'ite town.

Aug 15: Two car bombs killed five people in a market in a Kurdish area of Kirkuk.

Aug 10: A suicide bomber killed at least four people in a market in a Kurdish district of Kirkuk.

Jul 16: A suicide truck bomb killed at least 85 people in Kirkuk.

Jul 7: A truck bomb killed at least 130 in a market in Tuz.

Feb 3: Six bombings in Kirkuk in one morning killed 10 people. One of the bombs targeted the offices of the Kurdistan Democratic Party.



Oil

Kirkuk is the centre of one of the largest and richest oilfields in Iraq. It holds most of Iraq's oil, as well as most of Iraq's natural-gas deposits. The city is the centre of the oil industry in the north of Iraq, and the oilfields there account for about 6% of the known oil reserves in the world. As such the Kurds, Iraqis generally, and the Americans are very concerned about Kirkuk.



In September 2007 the Kurdish regional government signed a deal with two oil companies for oil exploration. The central Iraqi government said this was illegal. There are over 500 oil wells in the area and the suspicion is that the Kurds do not want to share the oil wealth with the rest of Iraq.

The pipeline from Kirkuk to the Turkish coast is now working again since August as there seems to be an end to sabotage attacks.

Cholera outbreak

47 cases of cholera have been confirmed in Kirkuk with at least five people dying in the region. Thousands have diarrhoea. With years of sanctions, war and insurgent attacks, the water, sewage and electricity systems are severely damaged and decayed. With such poor sanitation it is feared the epidemic could spread to thousands. The city may be rich in oil, but what is needed is clean drinking water.

How to pray

- Pray for an end to violence in Kirkuk
- Pray that Kirkuk may be a place where different ethnic groups can be reconciled and live together
- Pray for a just political solution for the city and pray for the future referendum
- Pray that the spiritual principalities of violence, control, greed and division would be dethroned
- Pray that Arabs, Kurds and Turkmen would hear of the liberating love of Jesus and embrace Him as the Prince of Peace
- Pray for new communities of followers of Jesus to be started in Kirkuk among these peoples



Compiled by: Iraq Pray Initiative

W: www.iraqprayer.org

E: initiative@iraqprayer.org

