

Erasing the Frontier: Turkey's Trade and Investment in Iraqi Kurdistan

by Khaled Al-Sharikh '11

INTRODUCTION: ERASING THE FRONTIER

“Our prime minister’s vision is full economic integration. One day you won’t notice the frontier between Turkey and Iraq.”—Aydin Selcen, Turkish Consul General in Erbilⁱ

Eighty percent of food and clothes in Iraqi Kurdistan come from Turkey. The volume of trade between Turkey and Iraqi Kurdistan stands between \$6 billionⁱⁱ and \$9 billionⁱⁱⁱ, and the Turkish government is looking to expand this to over \$20 billion within the next five years.^{iv} Sixty percent of firms registered in Iraqi Kurdistan are Turkish, with Turkish company assets worth more than \$620 million.^v Turkish energy companies such as Pet-Oil and Genel Enerji have also won bids to develop gas and oil fields in northern Iraq. Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu even visited Iraqi Kurdistan in October 2009, leading a delegation of 70 officials and businessmen. He met with a former enemy of Turkey, Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) President Masoud Barzani, announcing the opening of a Turkish consulate in Erbil, the region’s capital, and declaring that the cooperation between Turkey and the KRG “will contribute to the even further development of Erbil. This will become a bridge between Iraq and Turkey. We are the gate of Iraq to the European Union. And Erbil is our gate opening to Basra.”^{vi}

This economically-driven rapprochement is especially noteworthy given that the Turkish state’s troubled history with the Kurdish people within its borders and beyond has been marked by bloody conflict and damaging civil strife. There have been nearly 40,000 casualties in Turkey’s three-decade long conflict with the separatist Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK). Kurdish identity within Turkey has been suppressed from the Republic’s founding in 1923 in a number of ways including the prohibition of spoken Kurdish in public for many years and the ban of all mention of the word “Kurd” in school history textbooks until 1991.

Central to this state-sponsored suppression of Kurdish identity is the ideology of Turkey’s founding fathers. Kemalists hold that one of the greatest threats to the integrity of the Turkish Republic is ethnic conflict fomented by foreign actors. This led to a foreign policy defined by cautiousness and isolationism to avoid

provoking other nations into upsetting the delicate ethnic balance in Turkey. However, in recent years under the current ruling Justice and Development (AK) Party, there has been a shift in the foreign policy paradigm of the Turkish Republic leading to more active, assertive and self-confident intervention in regional affairs—a foreign policy very much in line with what the late President Turgut Özal sought to achieve. The promotion of a more activist foreign policy is based on the belief that Turkey now needs to acknowledge and accept its multi-ethnic, multi-cultural demography. The increasing democracy and the salience of public opinion in Turkey also led to the creation of powerful ethnic interest groups which lobby the state to take a stand and be more actively involved in the international arena.

The Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) of strongly autonomous Iraqi Kurdistan has had to maintain a delicate balance. On one hand, they desperately need Turkish investors to take advantage of the relative stability of the region and jumpstart economic development. On the other, the KRG cannot be seen as alienating the widespread Kurdish nationalist sentiments by handing over remaining elements of the PKK who are currently mounting attacks on Turkey from suspected bases in the Qandil Mountains of Iraqi Kurdistan. The Turkish Armed Forces (TAF) have mounted air and ground attacks on the PKK in Iraqi Kurdistan since the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime in spite of condemnation from the KRG and the central Iraqi government.

Are these extraordinary Turkish investments in Iraqi Kurdistan a projection of Turkey's power and representative of the aforementioned paradigm shift? If so, does the Turkish regime hope to turn these investments into economic leverage so they can have a say in the future of Iraqi Kurdistan (and potentially prevent increased autonomy or even independence)? Does Turkey run the risk of empowering Iraqi Kurdistan economically through trade such that independence becomes a more viable option? Or is it in fact increasing Iraqi Kurdistan's dependence on Turkey? Or are these investments simply a demonstration that business and politics in Turkey operate separately under the pro-business AK Party, rather than a strategic attempt to expand Turkish influence? Could Turkey's method of investment lead to it rivaling other foreign actors such as Iran for influence in Iraq?

Ankara's rapprochement with Erbil appears to be influenced by more than just economic interests and a completely benign "zero-problem" policy with its neighbors. Turkey desires to create a sphere of influence in what it considers its near-abroad in Iraqi Kurdistan. By engaging so actively with the KRG and increasing the region's dependence on Turkey, they are attempting to "smother them with love," as described by Joost Hiltermann of the International Crisis Group, and use increasing economic ties as a means to exercise leverage over Iraq's Kurds.^{vii} Turkey views Iraqi Kurdistan as a landlocked entity with few options for the political

and economic support it so desperately needs in light of tense relations with the central government in Baghdad. The AK Party is actively fostering Turkey's economic dominance over Northern Iraq to achieve three main objectives.

What are Turkey's goals in Iraqi Kurdistan?

The primary objective is to find a solution to the long-standing Kurdish question in Turkey by subsuming potentially subversive Iraqi Kurds into its sphere of influence. This particular objective is two-pronged. Firstly, Ankara wants to use its economic ties to pressure the KRG into hindering and eventually combating the PKK presence in Iraqi Kurdistan. Secondly, the AK Party seeks to establish economic stability and prosperity in southeast Turkey through trade and business with Iraqi Kurds. The AK Party views the elimination of separatist elements and negative sentiments amongst Turkey's Kurds related to economic disparity as the only long-term solution. By the same token, Ankara believes it can also use its leverage to pressure the KRG if nationalist sentiment amongst Turkey and Iraq's Kurds gets out of hand with an unprecedented economic interaction—for instance, by limiting trade across the Habur border gate.

The second objective relates both to the AK Party's desire to become a regional energy transit point and to its need to diversify its sources of oil and gas imports. The KRG estimates their unexplored oil reserves to be around 45 billion barrels.^{viii} EU energy experts estimate that Iraqi Kurdistan can provide between five and ten billion m³ of natural gas.^{ix} Turkey has long harbored ambitions to be a major energy hub, taking advantage of its energy-rich neighborhood which contains an estimated 70 percent of the world's proven hydrocarbon reserves.^x Turkey is attempting to become an energy hub through its flagship project, the Nabucco pipeline, which is intended to bring oil and gas from the Caspian Sea and Iraq to European markets. As a geographically pivotal though energy-poor nation surrounded by energy-rich neighbors, Turkey hopes to increase its weight in the international community through this project. In addition, Russia supplies Turkey with a third of its imported oil and two-thirds of its imported gas.^{xi} Though relations between Ankara and Moscow are currently cordial, Turkey's reliance on Russian energy has hindered its ability to assert itself on the world stage. Diversifying energy imports is a key strategic goal of the AK Party and Turkey is eagerly searching for opportunities in Iraqi oil and gas.

The final objective is for Turkey to utilize its influence amongst Iraq's Kurds to have a say in the uncertain future of Iraq and for Iraqi Kurdistan to serve as a buffer should the situation in Iraq deteriorate after the planned United States withdrawal by the end of 2011. Iraqi Kurds have emerged as kingmakers in the struggle between Sunni and Shiites in Iraq's fragile political system. Iran is cur-

rently perceived as the most influential actor in Iraq as a result of its close ties with the ruling Shiite parties, currently led by Prime Minister Nuri Al-Maliki. Turkey aims to challenge Iran's hegemony through the Kurds, and potentially establish its own dominance in Iraq, historically a lucrative market for Turkish goods. The AK Party's desire to carve out a sphere of influence falls in line with its neo-Ottoman foreign policy—an ambitious drive to reestablishing Turkey's long-lost dominance over former Ottoman territories exemplified by its willingness and propensity to use its imperial history as a tool of foreign policy. While Turkey's political exertions in Iraq (such as its facilitation of talks between United States forces and Sunni insurgents) are well-documented, it is through economics, the launching pad for Turkey's push in Iraqi Kurdistan, that Turkey aims to establish this hegemony. In addition, Turkey wants to strengthen Baghdad's ability to cement northern Iraq's status as a federal region within Iraq, to prevent Iraqi Kurds from declaring their own state. Turkey is also hedging its bets by enhancing ties with the Kurdistan Region. Should this risky adventure fail, Iraqi Kurdistan is seen as pivotal buffer zone to the rest of Iraq should violence intensify or a civil war erupt.

In light of these objectives, Aydin Selcen's statement, quoted earlier, suddenly appears far more ominous. Rather than an idealistic reverence for economic integration, it is in fact through economics that Turkey wishes to transform Iraqi Kurdistan into a vassal state with little mobility and ability to act out of Turkey's purview. By the time the frontier between is no longer "noticeable," Iraqi Kurdistan will have become an economic dominion of Turkey and deprived of its ability to stoke the flames of Kurdish nationalism without risking serious economic consequences.

Iraqi Kurdistan is in many ways a victim of its geography. Landlocked, though blessed with an abundance of hydrocarbons, Iraqi Kurdistan does not have the option of either being left alone by their neighbors or practicing isolationism. However, it would be remiss to read into the Kurdish position as one of complete helplessness. Though not a state, the KRG could learn from smaller states in the region, such as those in the Gulf, on how to pursue different options amongst the other large regional actors like Iran, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Israel or, indeed, the Iraqi central government. Turkey is attempting to limit these options by pioneering investment in Iraqi Kurdistan and maintaining an immovable foothold over the region. Stoking Kurdish nationalist or separatist sentiment amongst Turkey's Kurds also remains an option for the KRG, but Turkey's policy aims at making this an extremely costly measure for Iraqi Kurds. Even today, Turkey often limits crossings over the Habur border gate in response to any lack of KRG action taken against the PKK.

BUILDING NETWORKS AND LEVERS OF INFLUENCE: TURKISH TRADE AND INFRASTRUCTURAL DEVELOPMENT

*“The common vision of the businesspeople living in the region, the regional government’s and official representatives is to secure mutual friendship and cooperation with Turkey. Our mission is to become a leader in the region as we deserve.”—*Lütfü Küçük, Chairman of the Young Business Association of Turkey (TÜGİAD)

Through extensive trade with and investment in northern Iraq, the AK Party is pursuing a multifaceted approach towards transforming Kurds, at home and in Iraq, into an asset for Turkey rather than a damaging liability used by foreign actors against it. Firstly, Turkey intends to use commonalities in culture and shared Islamic heritage to foster a rapport and build networks between Turkish and Iraqi Kurdish businessmen. This would provide Ankara an avenue through which it can exercise its influence using what it believes to be its greatest asset—the private sector.^{xii} Turkey, having become the 17th largest economy in the world with record growth rates until the financial crisis, is a regional economic powerhouse, and the AK Party wants to translate its economic strength into greater ability to pressure the KRG to combat PKK elements in northern Iraq and to prevent the KRG from attaining independence or increased autonomy.^{xiii} Turkey also wants to use trade with Iraqi Kurdistan as a way of achieving prosperity in the historically deprived Kurdish-dominated provinces of southeastern Turkey to wean them away from separatist ambitions.

Infrastructural development

Of the 1,200 Turkish companies in Iraq, 300 are construction firms.^{xiv} These firms completed \$2 billion in infrastructure projects. The KRG is planning \$100 billion in construction projects, and Turkish firms are expected to benefit greatly.^{xv} Of the \$5 billion in trade between Turkey and Iraqi Kurdistan in 2008, \$1.5 billion was in construction materials and contracting services, and the vast majority of foreign contractors in Iraqi Kurdistan are Turkish.^{xvi} Some of the construction is in major, high-profile infrastructural development. The Erbil International Airport, reportedly with the second longest runway in the world, was built by major Turkish construction company Maykol-Cengiz İnşaat.^{xvii} In addition to two new overpasses and repairs to Sulaimaniyah University, a major airport in Sulaimaniyah is also being planned by AGS, another Turkish construction company

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Turkish companies have developed a reputation for knowing how to win contracts in Iraqi Kurdistan with their skilled knowledge base and ability to “ne-

gotiate the often heavy red tape in the developing and autocratic world.”^{xix} Many believe that their competitive advantage lies in their understanding of Kurdish culture and business in the Muslim world. A Kurdish businessman noted that “[Turkish contractors] are near to us in culture. It is easy to cooperate.” A London-based consultant believes that “Turkish firms are becoming serious rivals because they can relate to Muslim cultures and are very competitive.”^{xx} Turkish Consul General Aydin Selcen emphasizes the cultural connection between Turks and Iraqi Kurds, claiming that “we share a common culture, our interests are common; our economies complement each other.”^{xxi}

In addition to exploiting their common culture with Iraqi Kurds, Turkish construction companies have immense experience working in the Middle East. Indeed, many of today’s largest Turkish construction companies grew on the back of projects in the Middle East in the 1970s as a result of the oil-boom in Gulf states and went on to become major regional players in the construction sector.^{xxii} An understanding of Kurdish and Islamic culture combined with experience working in the region make Turkish companies prime candidates for any construction project. Construction companies in Turkey recognize lucrative opportunities in northern Iraq. Real estate in Iraqi Kurdistan is worth \$10 billion according to local government estimates.^{xxiii} Initially, the construction was mainly infrastructural in major projects such as roads, bridges and highways. Now, projects have become more diverse with schools, houses, malls and tourists sites all planned.^{xxiv}

The Turkish private sector’s active involvement in Iraqi Kurdistan’s infrastructural development demonstrates a number of key insights into Turkish policy in the region. The willingness of Turkish businessmen, who are key constituents of the AK Party, and indeed that of Turkey’s Consul General to utilize commonalities in culture to facilitate infrastructural investment is indicative of dramatic shift in Ankara’s attitude vis-à-vis the Iraqi Kurds. Rather than viewing the freedom of Kurds in Iraq to practice their culture as a threat to Turkey’s unity, the AK Party is attempting to transform Kurdish culture into an asset. This strategy in and of itself is reminiscent of the Ottoman acceptance of multiculturalism, utilizing their shared Islamic heritage as force bringing them together. Although implemented mainly by the Turkish private sector, the key infrastructural projects completed by Turkish companies will facilitate Ankara’s pursuit of economic hegemony over the region. Networks based on this common Islamic heritage are being rapidly built amongst Turkish and Iraqi Kurdish businessmen. Once completed, these long-term construction projects will facilitate the activities of all private sector activities, including those of Turkish companies. The main concern expressed by Kurds is related to the Turkish companies’ employment policies. Turkish construction firms seem to prefer hiring Turks and bringing them to Iraqi Kurdistan rather than hiring locals. This is because to Turkish workers have more experience than their Iraqi

Kurdish counterparts and earn only marginally higher wages.^{xxv} Some estimate that there are around 50,000 Turkish workers in Iraqi Kurdistan.^{xxvi}

Facilitation of trade

Waves of Turkish business delegations supported by both the Turkish government and the KRG have visited Iraqi Kurdistan in the past two years. A TÜGİAD delegation led by its chairman Lütfü Küçük visited Erbil from April 2-5, 2010. Küçük identified a plethora of investment opportunities in Iraqi Kurdistan, including construction, energy generation, agriculture, tourism, food processing, health services, industry and real estate value assessment.^{xxvii} Küçük implored his fellow Turkish businessmen to “set off to discover the world for market diversification” and to “analyze northern Iraq as well.” He went on to claim that “words were not enough to express; one should go and see.”^{xxviii}

Another such visit was a small delegation of 25 industrialists visiting the Erbil Chamber of Commerce from İzmir. The heads of both the Erbil and Dohuk Chambers of Commerce cordially welcomed their visit. Ayad Abdulhalim, the head of the Dohuk Chamber stated the following regarding the desire for Turkish investments:

“There are no other products that can compete with the Turkish ones in this region. Turkish goods are the best we can get here. Northern Iraq is a hub that sends Turkish goods to other regions and cities in Iraq. We would like to further improve our relations with Turkey. We invite industrialists from İzmir to Duhok. We can guarantee these investors all kinds of incentives and conveniences.”^{xxix}

This statement is indicative of a number of advantages Turkish businesses enjoy. The higher quality of Turkish goods compared to products from other countries is a key advantage which Turkish industrialists aim to exploit, making their business and investment far more attractive to Kurds than that of other regional actors. Another advantage implied are the immense incentives offered to foreign investors, including Turks, by the Kurdish investment law which allows for foreign ownership of land, transfer of profits and even a ten-year tax exemption on investments.^{xxx} Turkish businessmen not only have immense experience working in the region, but they also are accustomed to capitalist environments. They are self-confident and have no qualms about having their products and services compete with those of other countries, which is the reason they are flocking to the burgeoning market in Iraqi Kurdistan.

There is also direct AK Party involvement in trade relations between the Kurdish and Turkish businessmen. Turkey’s Minister of State for Foreign Trade Zafer Çağlayan led a delegation of 250 businessmen to Iraqi Kurdistan in June

2010. He met with the highest-ranking KRG officials including President Barzani, Prime Minister Barham Salih, former Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani and Minister of Trade Sinan Chalabi (an Iraqi Kurd and a naturalized Turkish citizen). Çağlayan arrived with the stated goal of opening two new border crossings and expanding annual trade between Turkey and the KRG to \$20 billion from its current estimated \$6-9 billion within four years “as expected by [Turkey’s] prime minister.” These Kurdish officials also proposed the establishment of a free trade zone at the border crossing Zakho.^{xxxix} Çağlayan expressed hope, in a speech to a forum of over 500 Turkish and Iraqi businessmen in Erbil, that “improving business ties will eradicate the problems between us.”^{xxxix} The Turkish consulate in Erbil also works hard to facilitate the visit of Kurdish businesspeople to Turkey. According to Deniz Kutlu, advisor to the Turkish Consul General in Erbil, the consulate works “13-14 hour days” to complete visa requests for Kurdish businessmen. The Turkish consulate even suggests that Iraqi Kurds with businesses visit Turkey two to three times a month.^{xxxix}

As a result of trade with Turkey, the Habur border gate at Zakho (Turkey’s only border crossing with Iraqi Kurdistan), has become a lifeline for Iraqi Kurds.^{xxxix} As previously mentioned, a stunning 80 percent of Iraqi Kurdistan’s goods are Turkish and cross through the Habur border gate. These visits by Turkish government and private sector officials are key foreign policy exertions for the AK Party. At a conference in Bahrain, Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu summarized the reasoning behind Turkey’s desire for economic integration:

“Soft security is as important as hard security. If we do not have economic, political, cultural and energy substance of regional security, there cannot be military or hard security in our region. So the most important aspect we need to focus on is the substance; a comprehensive understanding of regional security.”^{xxxv}

Davutoğlu and the AK Party aim to establish levers of influence through the private sector. Through trade, cooperation on infrastructural projects and constant exchange of visits between Turkish and Iraqi Kurdish businessmen, Turkey is establishing an increasingly cohesive network of sympathetic decision-makers. This push for deeper economic ties is instigated by key constituents of the AK Party—the so-called “Anatolian tiger” capitalists in up-and-coming cities in the mixed Turkish-Kurdish hinterland such as Gaziantep and have so far amassed 75 percent of the KRG’s foreign direct investment.^{xxxvi} Not only will these businessmen serve as agents of Turkish influence in Iraqi Kurdistan, but they will also facilitate the improvement of the conditions of Kurds in Turkey—a key goal of the AK party. Erdoğan has actively pursued the Southeastern Anatolia Project (GAP), which is essentially an implementation of the late President Turgut Özal’s very own GAP plan in the early 1990s. Through a number of grand infrastructural projects,

Erdoğan aims to spend \$11 billion, create 3.8 million jobs and increase the GDP per capita of the region by 209 percent.^{xxxvii} Expanding trade with Iraqi Kurdistan would undoubtedly greatly benefit the Kurds of Turkey and enhance the growth of this sensitive region.

The increase in trade also provides Turkey with the ability to truly pressure the KRG to combat PKK elements present in Northern Iraq. Turkey has often halted movement across the Habur border gate in response to PKK attacks.^{xxxviii} By increasing Iraqi Kurdistan's dependence on Turkish goods and by becoming leaders in the region Küçük believes they deserve to be, Turkey is acquiring an increased ability to assert its will over Iraqi Kurds.

A PIPEDREAM: TURKEY'S ENERGY INVESTMENTS IN IRAQI KURDISTAN

"We do not want to be only a transit country... The Kurds know that their oil export route is through Turkey."—senior Turkish official ^{xxxix}

Sasha Suderow, a graduate student at The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University, noted that "it was no coincidence that Turkish overtures to the KRG began in April 2008 as crude oil surpassed \$115 per barrel (a 100 percent increase in 24 months)."^{xl} Qubad Talabani, the KRG Representative to the United States, believes that "commodity trade opened political opportunities with Turkey but our future relationship will be driven by energy investment."^{xli} Turkey's two most important objectives in the energy sector are to become a major energy hub and ensure the security of its oil and gas imports as domestic demand increases.^{xlii} Iraqi Kurdistan, with its estimated three to six billion m³ of natural gas and 45 billion barrels of oil, is critical to achieving both of those objectives.^{xliii} The AK Party, in tandem with Turkish petroleum companies, has seized the opportunities presented to them. They aim to incorporate Iraqi Kurdish gas into their flagship energy project—the Nabucco pipeline. Ankara also wants to maintain access to Iraq's oil through its Kirkuk-Ceyhan pipeline.

"An ocean of oil"

The 960 kilometer Kirkuk-Ceyhan pipeline has the capacity to export 500,000 barrels of oil per day, a fourth of Iraq's output, through Turkey's major port city. The pipeline has been operational since 1987 but a combination of war, sanctions and sabotage have prevented it from ever reaching its capacity, limiting it to 250,000 barrels a day.^{xliv} Turkey and Iraq recently renewed the pipeline agreement for 20 years.^{xlv} This pipeline was Turkey's first step towards becoming a major energy hub and will continue to be crucial. The tension between the central

government and the KRG over the status of Kirkuk adds layers of complexity to the procurement of oil in the disputed region. However, both Baghdad and Erbil had extensive agreements with Turkey in order to maintain the pipeline, and this will continue to be a vital piece of Ankara's energy puzzle.^{xlvi}

There is also an abundance of oil in the KRG-controlled provinces of northern Iraq. According to Musa Mohammed, an economics professor at Salahaddin University in Erbil, "Turkey knows very well that Kurdistan is not a sea of oil; it is an ocean of oil." He continued to remark that Iraqi Kurdistan needed Turkey to build its outdated or, in some cases, non-existent oil infrastructure and as an export partner.^{xlvii} Turkish oil companies have benefited greatly from a number of fortuitous circumstances. The primary benefit is Turkey's proximity to Iraqi Kurdistan, facilitating the transport of heavy equipment. Another key advantage is the KRG's tense relationship with Baghdad over its right to export its own oil. The major oil companies such as ExxonMobil, BP and the China National Petroleum Company have been wary of risking Baghdad's ire in order to be best-positioned to develop Iraq's lucrative southern oil fields near Basra. Hence, they have not positioned themselves in Iraqi Kurdistan, leaving small- to medium-sized Turkish, Canadian and Norwegian companies to take advantage of their absence.^{xlviii} This is an ironic situation given Turkey's key policy of insisting on KRG agreement with Baghdad over oil to cement Iraqi Kurdistan's status as a federal region of Iraq.

Turkish oil companies, the major beneficiaries, were amongst the first to enter the market for Iraqi Kurdish oil. The Iraqi interim government awarded its first two contracts to Turkish and Canadian firms in December 2004.^{xlix} However, as early as 2003, the *New York Times* reported that Pet-Oil and Genel Enerji were drilling and producing oil from the Taq Taq oil fields—29 km east of Kirkuk.¹ According to University of Kentucky Professor Robert Olson, "There's no way this deal could have happened without the support of the Iraqi, Kurdish or Turkish sides, including the [Turkish] Armed Forces."^{li} Pet-Oil plans on investing \$50 million in Iraqi Kurdistan's oil sector.^{lii} Güntekin Köksal, general manager of Pet-Oil, declared in July 2005 that he expected to find "billions of barrels" in Iraqi Kurdistan, as his company began to lift oil from the Kifri region in partnership with an American company.^{liii} Pet-Oil and Genel Enerji signed contracts with the KRG in 2008 to develop fields in Iraqi Kurdistan. Ali Ak, Pet-Oil's current general manager, justifies these deals in both political and economic term, explaining that:

"It is politically good for Turkey and good for Turkish-Kurdish relations. When you invest in northern Iraq, this means you will stay there for years. Turkish companies will earn money, and Turkey will benefit from pipeline revenues. And if you have so many companies there for years, you will have a say in that country's politics."^{liv}

The biggest obstacle to Turkey's investment in Iraqi Kurdistan's oil sector is the lack of a federal hydrocarbons law, which would set guidelines for Kurdish deals with foreign oil companies. Turkey is adamantly refusing to help export the KRG's oil until it reaches an agreement with Baghdad. Ankara is wary of facilitating the export of Iraqi Kurdistan's oil outside the purview of the Iraqi central government because it does not want to facilitate any greater autonomy for the KRG.^{lv} However, as recently 6 December 2010, Iraqi Oil Minister Hussein Al-Shahristani declared the row over unilaterally agreed KRG contracts with foreign companies over, indicating that Iraqi Kurdistan could export 150,000 barrels of oil per day by 2011.^{lvi}

Nabucco Pipedream

Compared to Syria or Iraq, Turkey offers the most stable route for Iraqi Kurdistan's potentially abundant and vastly unexplored natural gas reserves.^{lvii} By the 2016 completion of the pipeline project, Iraqi Kurdistan's natural gas could be key to the Nabucco pipeline supplying Europe through Turkey.^{lviii} Construction of an Iraqi feeder line to the Nabucco pipeline, which would take Iraq's gas to the city of Ahiboz in Turkey, is underway. BOTAŞ, a Turkish state-owned company, is completing the construction.^{lix} Along with Azerbaijan and potentially Turkmenistan, Iraq, slated to supply ten billion m3 of natural gas, will be one of the main suppliers to the Nabucco pipeline.^{lx} Indeed, the Nabucco group said that out of its three suppliers, Iraq was its most viable partner for future gas. According to Dimitar Abadjiev, head of corporate affairs of the Nabucco Gas Pipeline International, "Iraq is bigger, and it's just on the border with Turkey. It's easier. It's much less dependent on Russia. We've had preliminary talks [...] and I'm optimistic."^{lxix}

It is impossible to separate Turkey's desire to diversify its oil and gas imports without discussing it in the context of its relationship with Russia. Davutoğlu has spoken very frankly in the past about the limits to Turkey's flexibility caused by its overreliance on Russian energy. In response to condemnations of Turkey's muted response to Russia's invasion of Georgia in 2008, he implored the international community to "understand the geographical conditions of Turkey" and went on to admit that "Turkey is almost 75-80 percent dependent on Russia [for energy]... We don't want to pay the bill for the strategic mistakes by Russia or Georgia."^{lxxii} Turkey is hindered by its dependence on Russian energy. This dependence on a historic rival with whom Turkey is competing for influence in the Caucasus is deeply inhibiting. It can flex neither its political nor economic muscles without resolving this issue. Therefore, Iraqi Kurdish gas and oil are critical in weaning Turkey off its reliance on Russian energy.

As is the case with trade and infrastructural development, Turkey also aims to utilize its oil and gas interests in Iraqi Kurdistan to exercise influence over the KRG. Indeed, the KRG's agreement with Baghdad could very well be a result of Turkish pressure, given that they have refused to export the KRG's oil. By investing so heavily in Iraqi Kurdistan's energy sector, Turkey has taken control of the KRG's strongest potential weapon which would have been key in any attempts to gain greater autonomy or independence.

GATEWAY TO IRAQ

"The [Iraqi Kurdistan] region is a gateway for business in Iraq... The region can be a good bridge for Turkey to enter the Iraqi market."—Falah Mustafa Bakir, Head of KRG Department of Foreign Relations^{lxiii}

Prior to the 1990 invasion of Kuwait, Iraq used to be Turkey's number one trading partner but today is its fifth largest. Deniz Kutlu, the commercial attaché at the Turkish Consulate in Erbil, believes "there is no reason why they couldn't be number one in five years."^{lxiv} While Turkey's business is largely focused on the Kurdistan region, Ankara highly values the Iraqi market as a whole. In fact, there has been much infrastructural development completed in the rest of Iraq, though not on the scale of that in Iraqi Kurdistan due to the volatile security situation.

The Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs proudly lists its contributions to Iraq on its website. The total worth of works undertaken by Turkish companies in Iraq is over \$4 billion. Over 50 percent of Iraq's refined oil products were supplied through Turkey. Turkey also supplies 275 mw/hour of electricity to Iraq with plans to increase it to 1200 mw/hour. A Turkish company has even undertaken the restoration the Al-Askari mosque, a Shi'a Muslim holy site.^{lxv}

In light of a recent report by Iraq's National Investment Committee which states that there are 750 projects valued at \$600 billion ready to be implemented, Turkish companies have recognized lucrative opportunities in the rest of Iraq.^{lxvi} The Iraqi Export Promotion Center noted that the Iraqi construction sector recently boomed because of the volume of demolished buildings waiting to be rebuilt and a demand for infrastructural projects such as highways, bridges and harbors. Schools, hospitals, water purification plants and power plants are also being built. The Eurasia Industrialists and Business Association (ASİAD) claims that in Basra alone, there is a need for 44,700 new houses and 9,000 buildings to be built.^{lxvii} Over 65 percent of the Turkish construction companies in Iraq are operating out of Erbil. In 2007, there were 39 separate projects by Turkish investors valued at \$565 million, and 72 projects valued at \$1.2 billion were completed by 2008.^{lxviii} In an un-

precedented move, the World Bank insured an investment by the Turkish company Karo Dis Ticaret ve Sanayi to build a PET plant (where the raw material used to manufacture bottles is processed) to the tune of \$5 million against risks of war and civil unrest.^{lxix}

From a secure base in Iraqi Kurdistan, Turkish companies can finally re-enter Iraqi markets. Again, the AK Party is hoping Turkish and Iraqi businessmen create networks based on a common Islamic heritage. When Saddam Hussein's regime fell, Turkey found itself unable to influence events because of its non-involvement in previous decades. In a reprisal of the activist policy prescribed by President Özal in the Gulf War era, Ankara is trying to establish levers of influence in Iraq in order to be able to influence change which will inevitably happen.^{lxx} The Turks primarily want the Kurds to become their main allies in Iraq, but they are also seeking to establish ties with Iraq's Sunni and Shi'a Arabs in a realm they know best—the private sector.

Additionally, as Iraqi Kurds emerge as the kingmakers in Iraq, Ankara's influence over Erbil will translate into influence over Baghdad. According to Joost Hiltermann, Turkey views Iran's influence in Iraq as “threatening,” so a key component of their Iraqi Kurdistan policy is to “maintain a strategic position after the US withdrawal.”^{lxxi} The influence Turkey seeks over the Iraqi Kurds is similar to that which the Iran has fostered over decades with Shiites in Iraq.^{lxxii}

ASSESSING ALTERNATE INTERPRETATIONS

There are three major interpretations of the AK Party's policy on Iraqi Kurdistan and Ankara's extensive economic relations with Erbil. One of the interpretations, that of Turkey's hegemonic ambitions, has already been discussed at length and appears to be the most convincing of the three possible assessments. The second interpretation is that Turkey's economic ties with Iraqi Kurdistan do not represent a shift in its traditional strategic culture valuing caution abroad to facilitate domestic reforms and development. The third assessment is inspired by a liberal view of international relations: Turkey is pursuing an EU-like network of economic interdependence via its extensive investments in northern Iraq in order to establish stability and order in a historically volatile region.

Same objective, different style

Observers may note that there has been no change at the core or objectives of Turkey's foreign policy as much as there has been an employment of different methods. Based on this interpretation, the AK Party, led by its charismatic leaders Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu,

have adopted the foundational objective of “Peace at Home, Peace in the World” so fervently espoused by Turkey’s founders who valued domestic political reforms above all foreign policy concerns. In other words, the AK Party wants to limit the ability for conflict and instability in its region to hinder its domestic reforms and economic development. Due to the effects of globalization as well as the clear and present dangers of terrorism and subversion from beyond its borders, it is now impossible to hunker down and remain at the sidelines of regional events as it would have been earlier in Turkey’s history. Therefore, according to this assessment, Erdoğan and Davutoğlu seek to foster stability in their region through extensive mediation of political disputes and the promotion of economic interdependence in order to limit the ability of foreign actors to utilize their ethnic make-up to break up their nation.

With regards to deepening economic ties with Iraqi Kurdistan, this analysis would indicate that rather than seeking to extend a Turkish sphere of influence in northern Iraq, the AK Party wants to promote economic stability in the region in order to restrict any foreign or Kurdish desires to upend the plethora of domestic reforms sought by the ruling party, including the limitation of the involvement of the Turkish Armed Forces (TAF) in domestic politics and the development of more inclusive democracy in line with the European Union’s demands for Turkey’s accession.

On the surface, this appears to be a compelling school of thought. However, this particular interpretation does not take into account the extensive risks involved in this allegedly cautious foreign policy paradigm. As previously mentioned, acknowledgment of ethnic differences in the make-up of Turkey are diametrically opposed to the Kemalist-nationalist ideology promoting one unified, homogenous Turkish identity. Liberalizing trade between Turkey and Iraqi Kurdistan, and indeed the trade between Iraqi Kurds and the Kurds of southeastern Turkey, runs the risk of reenergizing Kurdish nationalist and separatist ambitions. Additionally, the risk of being economically intertwined with Iraq, an unstable country with an uncertain future, would also be considered too high for Kemalist-nationalists to accept.

Liberal economic-interdependence

Some view Turkey’s economic integration with Iraqi Kurdistan in the context of its promotion of a network of interdependence in the Middle East. Turkey’s opening to Iraqi Kurdistan should be seen in a functionalist, liberal light according to this interpretation. The AK Party seeks to establish an economic union similar to that of the EU, hence fostering everlasting peace and stability amongst previously warring nations. Similarly to the booming trade and removal of visa requirements

with Syria and Iran that are often used as examples of Turkey's attempts to liberalize trade in its region, Turkey's vibrant economic relationship with Iraqi Kurdistan is regarded as a core of the AK Party's dedication to free trade and enterprise. As evidenced by alleged plans to rebuild the Baghdad-Hejaz railway, the infrastructural development is also viewed in this light. Turkey aspires to foster connections in the greater Middle East as well as the Caucasus and Balkan states with Turkey at its center.

This analysis does not take into account that it is historically a region's dominant power who seeks free trade to utilize its economic advantages in new markets and exert political influence through trade and investment. There are now 16 cities in Turkey which generate over \$1 billion in trade,^{lxxiii} and Turkey's gross national product could grow to \$1 trillion by 2015.^{lxxiv} They have extensive access to Western markets and higher-quality manufacturing than any of the other major regional actors, with the exception perhaps of Israel which does not have access to most Arab markets. Turkey is the best candidate to be the dominant player amongst the large regional actors. Iran, perhaps the nation with the biggest manufacturing capacity in the region outside Turkey, suffers from harmful sanctions, unrest over subsidy reforms and isolation from the international community—all of which diminish the quality of Iranian products compared to Turkish goods. Erbil views Ankara as a better partner than Tehran and Baghdad largely because of higher quality of Turkish goods.^{lxxv} The AK Party is pursuing economic interdependence because they are confident that their enterprises would dominate a regionally integrated economy and further enhance their burgeoning hegemony. The trade balances are likely to be in favor of Turkey, and Ankara will not hesitate to flex its economic muscles should its interests be threatened.

Additionally, in a liberal point of view which historically values actors outside of the state structure, there may very well be pressure on the AK Party from its constituents and supporters in the Turkish business community, especially among Anatolian Tigers—the entrepreneurs from medium-sized cities who rose to prominence—who want to explore new markets in Turkey's near-abroad. Western European markets are less interested in products emanating from Turkey's construction sector and semi-advanced industries such as textiles, so these business communities want to reach out to the Greater Middle East, starting with the burgeoning market of Iraqi Kurdistan.^{lxxvi} With real estate valued at an estimated \$10 billion, relative security and immense energy potential combined with an accommodating investment law, there are a plethora of opportunities for Turkish investors to explore.

Entrepreneurs, led by the Anatolian Tigers, have been increasingly influential, but the politics of Turkey would be sorely misunderstood if one were to believe that they were the major drivers behind Turkey's national security policy—a

cornerstone of which is the AK Party's policies in Iraqi Kurdistan. Turkey aspires to use these entrepreneurs as agents of its influence in Iraqi Kurdistan.

CONCLUSION: "LITTLE AMERICA"

It is important to remove the concept of Turkish regional hegemony from the negative connotations of such a powerful word. Hegemony over a region, according to Tufts University Professor Malik Mufti, implies that regional actors in fact internally accept the hegemon's dominance.^{lxxvii} Iraqi Kurds overcome their troubled history with Turks because they have internally accepted that Turkey is the prime candidate to play the "big brother" role that Iraqi Kurdistan so desperately needs. While Iraqi Kurds sympathize with the plight of their kin in Turkey, they still manage to find enough commonalities in culture and interests to overcome any guilt revolving around doing business with the oppressor of the Turkish Kurds. The author of a *Business News Europe* article on Turkish trade with Iraqi Kurdistan dryly noted that "blood may be thicker than water, but not oil."^{lxxviii}

Turkish foreign policy in Iraqi Kurdistan is the culmination of a decades-long diametric shift in paradigm. Most argue that Erdoğan and Davutoğlu are successors-in-thought to Özal. While this is true, one cannot underestimate the influence of Democrat Party of the 1940s and 50s, led by Prime Minister Adnan Menderes and President Celâl Bayar. Bayar made public his desire for Turkey to become a "little America"—a democratic bastion of capitalism and free-trade which would exert itself as a hegemon in its own region.^{lxxix} Turkey, in many ways, has become a "little America." It has acquired the American sense of self-confidence and entrepreneurial enterprise with a desire to look beyond its borders for new places to conquer through the market, rather than through its military might alone. These are all evident in Turkey's policy in Iraqi Kurdistan. Through Ankara's partnership with the private sector, they seek to capitalize on the strength of their economy and industry in a way unimaginable in the dark days of the 1980s—when civil unrest and economic hardship were the norm in Turkey.

Turkey, under the AK Party, now unashamedly accepts its status as the successor state to the Ottoman Empire and is willing to take on fellow former empires Russia through its pursuit of Iraqi Kurdish energy and Iran through its involvement in the Iraqi private sector. Fears over a potential coalescing of Kurdish identity which would come with greater integration with Iraqi Kurdistan are dismissed by the AK Party, who sees strength in a multicultural Turkey, just as the Ottomans saw strength in its multicultural empire. Should Kurdish nationalist sentiments get out of hand however, Turkey appears to have acquired the right levers to temper it if need be.

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