

A Divided Iraq

Implications and Options for Turkey

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ACRONYMS

IKR: Iraqi Kurdish Region, which is comprised of Erbil, Dohuk, Sulaymaniyah, and the newly created governorate of Halabja.

IS: Islamic State (alternately, Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)) or Daesh, an Islamic extremist organization seeking to establish a transnational Islamic caliphate in Syria and Iraq.

IOC: International Oil Companies.

ISF: Iraqi Security Forces.

KDP: Kurdistan Democratic Party, the party currently in power in the Iraqi Kurdish Region.

KRG: Kurdish Regional Government, the official ruling body of the Iraqi Kurdish Region.

PKK: *Partiya Karkeren Kurdistan* or Kurdistan Workers' Party, a Turkish Kurdish nationalist party seeking political rights and self-determination for the Kurds in Turkey. Due to its armed struggle against the Turkish government the PKK is designated a terrorist organization by both the American and Turkish governments.

PUK: Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, the main opposition party for the Kurdistan Democratic Party in the Kurdish Regional Government.

PYD: *Partiya Yekitiya Demokrat*, the PKK's affiliate party in Syria.

USG: United States Government.

TPAO: Turkiye Petrolleri Anonim Ortakigi, Turkey's state-owned exploration and production company.

INTRODUCTION:

This paper will consider the implications and options for Turkey if Iraq were to divide along ethnic lines. To date, many scholars have expertly detailed the changing nature of the Iraq-Turkey bilateral relationship¹ and, more recently, begun to factor in the fragility of Iraq's territorial integrity in the face of the Islamic State (IS) threat.² As a complement to such studies I will methodically explore a scenario in which Iraq's northern territories secede from the remainder of the state and how Turkey, a valued U.S. ally, may be impacted. To this effect, I have modeled this piece on the Contingency Planning Memos as published by the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) with one key deviation. Instead of examining the direct implications and options for U.S. policy I will consider implications and options for Turkish policy. I chose to deviate from the typical format in this manner because of the United States' increased emphasis on coalitions as a means of engagement in the Middle East. Turkey is a valuable member of such coalitions not only because of its geostrategic location, but also because of its ascendant appetite and acumen for a leadership position in the Middle East. Unfortunately, the U.S. continues lack the leverage necessary to get Turkey to fully buy-in to its plans for Iraq. Instances of the U.S.' and Turkey's policy divergence on Iraq since 2003 have been well documented³ and put both countries at a disadvantage when dealing with conflict in Iraq. This

¹ Stephen J. Flanagan and Samuel J. Brannen, "Turkey's Shifting Dynamics: Implications for U.S.-Turkey Relations," *Center for Strategic and International Studies* (2008): 9-12, accessed February 15, 2015, http://csis.org/files/media/csis/pubs/080606_turkeyshiftingdyn.pdf.

Soner Cagaptay and Tyler Evans, "Turkey's Changing Relations with Iraq: Kurdistan Up, Baghdad Down," *Policy Focus* 122 (2012): accessed October 10, 2014, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/pubs/PolicyFocus122.pdf>.

² Among others, Michael M. Gunter's article for the Spring 2015 issue of *Middle East Policy*, deeply considered how the instability created by IS could contribute to a redrawing of the map of the Middle East.

Michael M. Gunter, "Iraq, Syria, ISIS and the Kurds: Geostrategic Concerns for the U.S. and Turkey," *Middle East Policy* Vol. XXII, No.1 (2015): accessed March 23, 2015, DOI: 10.1111/mepo.12116.

³ Examples include, Turkey's 2003 parliamentary vote refusing U.S. troops access to its bases for their invasion of Iraq, Turkey's ardent support of Iraq's Iiraqiyya Bloc and the U.S.' support for the State of Law Coalition in the stalemate following Iraq's 2010 parliamentary elections, and Turkey helping the Kurds export their crude oil in 2014 while the U.S. questioned the legality of such export.

unfavorable status quo highlights the need for U.S. policy makers to carefully consider Turkey's motivations toward its southern neighbor and develop a means by which the U.S. can effectively encourage Turkey's cooperation with U.S. policy on Iraq.

Studying the implications of contingency scenarios for Turkey is especially important now because of the power vacuums in neighboring Syria and Iraq and Turkey's own domestic Kurdish considerations. The regional power vacuums have created an arena in which non-state actors thrive⁴ and neighboring states interfere. Two, vastly different, groups of non-state actors have been the primary beneficiaries of this development- the IS and the region's Kurdish groups. One can hope for, and even foretell, the ultimate demise of the former. Its brutal tactics will alienate some the populations it seeks to co-opt⁵ and the coalition assembled against it will prevail—ultimately if not immediately. Conversely, the latter group, the region's sizable Kurdish population, may be able to convert its gains in this time of chaos into a lasting Kurdish state, albeit one limited to the confines of northern Iraq.

Domestically, Turkey's Kurdish population is poised to potentially increase their parliamentary representation in the June 2015 elections, as the pro-Kurdish HDP will be putting forth their own candidate this year (party members previously ran as independents). As discussed below, a Turkish Kurdish drive toward independence remains improbable due to demographic distribution but a semi-autonomous or autonomous Kurdish region in southern Turkey may be a possibility. As noted by Turkish scholar Dr. Gonul Tol, a push for autonomy may become attractive to the Kurds if they fail to achieve representation in the upcoming parliamentary elections, particularly since Erdogan's seeming indifference to the suffering of the Syrian Kurds in Kobani alienated the

⁴ Gunter, "Iraq, Syria, ISIS and the Kurds," 103.

⁵ This assertion is based upon the 2007 *Sahwa* movement, in which Iraq's Sunni tribesmen backed by the U.S. Government rose up against al-Qaeda insurgents in western Iraq whose practices were said to be too extreme for the co-sectarians in Iraq.

Turkish Kurds who may have otherwise voted for the AKP.⁶ Although Iraqi and Turkish Kurds have experienced largely independent trajectories, a scenario in which Iraq's Kurds secede will impact Turkey's ability to reign in Turkish Kurds' ambitions.

In recent history, Turkish policies have evidenced three prevailing concerns toward Iraq: security, its desire to check Iran's influence in Iraq, and its need to access Iraq's hydrocarbon resources.⁷ The changing nature of the Turkish-Iraqi bilateral relationship leaves some ambiguity regarding the Turk's exact reaction to IKR independence, what is clear, however, is that it would negatively impact a slew of Turkish policy priorities.

THE CONTINGENCY: KRG SECESSION- WHY NOW?

In order to examine the implications of IKR secession, it is essential to first understand why the current IS crisis has created, according to some, unprecedented opportunity for the Iraqi Kurds to achieve independence. In fact, many scholars now consider the political conditions in Iraq to favor Kurdish independence.⁸ If the current crisis provides the Kurds with the impetus to make a final push toward independence, their recent acquisition of Kirkuk, an export route through Turkey, and an independent defense relationship with the West may render them well prepared.

⁶ "The Kurds New Clout in U.S. Ties with Turkey and Iraq," Middle East Institute, accessed May 4, 2015, <http://www.mei.edu/events/kurds-new-clout-us-ties-turkey-and-iraq>.

⁷ This is clearly not an exhaustive list of Turkey's concerns in Iraq and its policies are also likely to be influenced by non-energy economic interests and its own domestic political churn. I have chosen to focus on these three factors because of their salience in Turkish policy over the last several years. David Romano also explored these factors in an article published in *Middle East Policy*; he referred to these considerations as "economic, PKK-related reasons, and regional power politics."

David Romano, "Iraqi Kurdistan and Turkey: Temporary Marriage?" *Middle East Policy* Vol. XXII, No.1 (2015): accessed March 23, 2015, DOI: 10.1111/mepo.12115.

⁸ Kenneth Pollack, "Options For U.S. Policy Toward Iraq," *The Brookings Institution*, July 24, 2014, accessed January 3, 2015, <http://www.brookings.edu/research/testimony/2014/07/24-options-us-policy-toward-iraq-pollack>.

This development is also noted by Till F. Paasche in the Spring 2015 Middle East Policy' special section entitled, "Natural Resources in Kurdistan, Iraq: Enabling Democracy or Increasing Instability?"

Till F. Paasche, "Introduction," *Middle East Policy* Vol. XXII, No. 1 (2015): 66-67, accessed March 23, 2015, DOI: 10.1111/mepo.12112.

The *peshmerga's* July 11, 2014 seizure of Kirkuk and its oil bearing environs from the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) was interpreted by many analysts as the final nail in the coffin for a unified Iraq. The reasoning is that Kirkuk is so well endowed with hydrocarbon resources that, if remaining under Kurdish control, it could render Iraqi Kurdistan an economically viable state. So integral is Kirkuk to Kurdish independence that immediately following the *peshmerga's* territorial gains Kurdish President, Masoud Barzani, asked the KRG's parliament to plan a referendum on independence.⁹ While the capture of Kirkuk was the direct catalyst for this (yet unrealized) referendum, the KRG also laid considerable groundwork for independence by securing an export route through Turkey in 2014.

An export route through Turkey's port at Ceyhan provides the land-locked Kurds with a revenue stream independent of Baghdad, which would be essential to independence. From the perspective of Turkey's ruling AKP, continued domestic economic growth (**Appendix A**) is both essential to staying in power and dependent upon the AKP's ability to secure the necessary oil and gas imports. The IKR is an attractive exporter for the Turks because of its proximity¹⁰ and Turkey's need to diversify its energy imports away from Russia and Iran. Turkey's steadfast commitment to the KRG on this matter, despite Baghdad's loud protestations,¹¹ gave al-Abadi's administration little choice but to settle on an interim hydrocarbons agreement with the KRG in December 2014.¹² Although many scholars considered this agreement to be a step back from

⁹ Kenneth Katzman, et al. "The "Islamic State" Crisis and U.S. Policy," *Congressional Research Service* (2015): 6, accessed March 1, 2015, <https://www.hsdl.org/?view&did=762484>.

¹⁰ Proximity is particularly important for natural gas imports because the infrastructure required is expensive- and a close source ensures that costs do not become prohibitive.

¹¹ Kenneth Pollack, "Five Reasons for the Iraqi-Kurdish Oil Deal," *The Brookings Institution*, December 3, 2014, accessed January 10, 2015, <http://www.brookings.edu/blogs/markaz/posts/2014/12/03-iraq-kurds-oil-revenue-sharing-agreement>.

¹² *Ibid.*

independence,¹³ Middle East scholar, Micha'el Tanchum, notes that, "this agreement recognizes the KRG's sovereignty over extraction and sale of oil and gas in all Kurdish areas. Moreover, since 300,000 bpd will be tapped from the Kirkuk region, and exported via Kurdish and Turkish pipelines, the agreement is tantamount to legally recognizing Kurdish control over Kirkuk and, by extension, other parts of the disputed territories."¹⁴ While the foregoing may be an optimistic assessment, the agreement did finally enable IOCs to operate in the KRG and export through Turkey without fear of legal repercussions.

Another important factor that contributes to the IKR's potential independence is that, as of July 2014, Erbil has received direct military cooperation from western powers including the United States and NATO. The U.S. directly arms the Kurds via a covert channel established by the CIA. This method is utilized as means to skirt a U.S. law that requires all U.S. foreign military sales to be provided to a country's central government, not sub-national forces.¹⁵ This practice was only adopted after initial attempts to expedite the transfer of arms from the central government in Baghdad to the KRG proved too slow.¹⁶ It is unlikely that the Kurds will be willing to relinquish its independent defense relationship with Western powers at any time in the near future and as long as the IS threat remains, they will not be asked to.

Despite the fact that there seems to be more potential for secession now than in the past, the Kurds have vacillated in their calls for sovereignty. As noted above, July's seizure of Kirkuk sparked renewed enthusiasm for a referendum on independence, which, interestingly, never came

¹³ Among others, Barbara Slavin's opinion piece in *Voice of America*, strongly held that the December 2014 interim hydrocarbons agreement between Baghdad and Erbil increased the "chances [of Iraq] remaining a unitary state."

Barbara Slavin, "New Iraqi-Kurdish Agreement Bolsters National Unity," *Voice of America*, December 3, 2014, accessed April 1, 2015,

<http://www.voanews.com/content/new-iraqi-kurdish-agreement-bolsters-national-unity/2544449.html>.

¹⁴ Micha'el Tanchum, "The Kurds' Big Year: The Political Conditions that Favor Kurdish Independence in Iraq," *Foreign Affairs*, January 12, 2015, accessed January 29, 2015,

<http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/142765/michael-tanchum/the-kurds-big-year>.

¹⁵ Katzman, et al. "The "Islamic State,"" 15.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

to pass. While some Iraqi Kurds claim that independence is something “all Kurds dream of,¹⁷” many Kurdish officials downplayed President Barzani’s July 2014 call for independence. One such official was Iraqi Kurdistan’s own Deputy Prime Minister, Qubad Talabani, who stated, “There will come a time when Kurdistan will become an independent state... whether now is the right time is unclear.¹⁸”

This contingency planning memo explores a scenario in which the Kurds do in fact seize upon the opportunity to separate themselves from the rest of the Iraq, although this scenario is not necessarily a forgone conclusion. Below I will discuss the warning indicators that such a partition is on the horizon, the implications of such a partition for Turkey, Turkey’s options to help prevent such an occurrence, and Turkey’s options to help mitigate the negative impacts if partition occurs.

WARNING INDICATORS:

The warning indicators that division of Iraq is imminent include the following developments:

Consolidation of Kurdish hold over the disputed territories: By consolidating its control over the disputed territories from the IS and the ISF, the *peshmerga* could effectively shape a new reality on the ground with the legality of such control to follow (as has nominally been the case with Kirkuk). Control over these territories and especially over the super-giant oil field in the environs of Kirkuk would significantly increase the number of reserves located within Iraqi Kurdish territory and potentially render it an economically viable independent state.

¹⁷ Christian Caryl, “The World’s Next Country,” *Foreign Policy*, January 21, 2015, accessed May 4, 2015,

<http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/01/21/the-worlds-next-country-kurdistan-kurds-iraq/>.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

Increase in global oil prices: Approximately 96% of the KRG's revenue in 2013 came from oil,¹⁹ and as long as the price of Brent crude remains low, the Kurds won't be self-sufficient even with Kirkuk production. Conversely, a price rebound would be indicative of greater potential for independence.²⁰ An increase in oil price still wouldn't increase the IKR's wealth relative to the rest of Iraq- therefore it wouldn't signify that Kurdish independence would be the best financial option, but with higher prices it would at least be a feasible option.

Continued fighting between IS and U.S. led coalition/Shiite militias/ISF: A continually destabilized Iraq will be unable to broker the political agreements necessary to retain control over the KRG. Additionally, if the Kurds were to hold a referendum on the disputed territories while IS remains a threat, they could do so without worrying that the western powers might reduce their defense support.

Decreased international opposition to a divided Iraq: Decreased international opposition to an independent Kurdish state would be a significant development for the Kurds. To some extent this is already occurring unofficially,²¹ but an official statement by Turkey and the U.S., two

¹⁹ Peter Schwartzstein, "Plunging Oil Prices Hurt Iraqi Kurds' Bid for Independence," *National Geographic*, December 23, 2014, accessed April 1, 2015.

<http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/energy/2014/12/141223-energy-news-iraq-kurdistan-oil/>

²⁰ Kenneth Pollack, "Five Reasons."

²¹ Two days after Barzani's referendum announcement, Huseyin Celik—then deputy chair of the AKP told the *Financial Times* that Turkey would not oppose KRG independence.

Daniel Dombey, "Turkey Ready to Accept Kurdish State in Historic Shift," *Financial Times*, June 27, 2014, accessed December 20, 2014,

www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/65ae9ac2-fe00-11e3-bd0e-00144feab7de.html#axzz3Ua802uR2.

Additionally, on April 30, 2015, the U.S. House Armed Services Committee passed a defense bill that included a provision which allocated a significant portion of a \$715 million tranche for training and equipping Iraqi forces to the Kurdish *peshmerga*- despite the fact that the USG typically must coordinate arms transfers through the sovereign central government.

Patrick Goodenough, "House Defense Bill Sends 25% of Iraq Funding to Kurdish, Sunni Fighters," *CNS News*, May 1, 2015, accessed May 4, 2015,

<http://www.cnsnews.com/news/article/patrick-goodenough/house-defense-bill-sends-25-iraq-funding-kurdish-sunni-fighters>.

states historically opposed to division, would lend itself to wider international recognition and acceptance.

Iraqi central government reneges on the interim hydrocarbons agreement: A failure to provide the Kurds with the (again) promised 17% of the national budget, would irreparably damage the central government's ability to regain the trust of the KRG and significantly diminish the incentive for the Kurds to remain a part of a larger Iraqi state. The December accord is already beginning to show signs of strain, as it was reported last month that the Kurds were threatening to halt shipments due to Baghdad's non-payment.²²

Iraqi central government fails to provide the peshmerga with promised funding: Failing to pay the promised \$100 million per month for *peshmerga* salaries and weapons purchases, would further push the KRG outside the control of the central government. This is slowly becoming more likely as the Iraqi central government faces financial issues due to increased military spending and decreased oil revenues.

The U.S. agrees to provide heavy weaponry to the Kurds: These heavy weapons may help the KRG and *peshmerga* forces to retain control of Kirkuk and gain control of the other disputed territories. Although Ankara and Baghdad are adamantly against the U.S. providing the Iraqi Kurds such weapons, it may become necessary given the IS' aptitude for seizing U.S. military equipment as they did on August 3, 2014 during their attack on Mosul.²³

IMPLICATIONS FOR TURKISH INTERESTS:

Turkey's official policy, like that of the United States, is in favor of a unified Iraqi state. This policy has been consistent throughout Turkish history due to Turkey's perception that an independent Kurdish state formed from the provinces of northern Iraq would; strengthen the

²² "Baghdad Salvages Kurdish Oil Export Deal," *The Maritime Executive*, March 1, 2015, accessed April 1, 2015,

<http://www.maritime-executive.com/article/baghdad-salvages-kurdish-oil-export-deal>.

²³Gunter, "Iraq, Syria, ISIS and the Kurds," 104.

resolve of Turkey's own Kurds to secede, propel southern Iraq into Iran's sphere of influence, and complicate Turkey's ability to secure hydrocarbon resources from Iraq.

Security Implications of an Independent IKR: PKK and PYD

An independent IKR may be less likely to negatively impact Turkey's security than in the past. This shift is due to Turkey's on-going (and KDP-supported) negotiations with the PKK. The potential negotiated solution and alliance with an independent IKR could diminish Turkey's PKK-related security concerns associated with the secession of the Iraqi Kurds. Additionally, the much explored linkage between an independent IKR and a push for Turkish Kurdish independence²⁴ may be overblown. Particularly since, while a preponderance of Iraq's Kurds are located in an Iraqi Kurdish region, the majority of Turkey's Kurds live in Istanbul and may neither support nor necessarily want to live in an independent Kurdish region in Turkey.²⁵

This is not to say, however, that an independent IKR won't have any negative repercussions on Turkey's security. By achieving independence the IKR may provide inspiration for the increasingly separatist PYD, which is located on the Turkish border with northern Syria (**Appendix B**). In this context, the PYD may also be able to attract fringe elements of the PKK who oppose to a peace deal with Ankara.²⁶ This is a particularly practical concern because the Ankara- PKK negotiation process hinges on the premise that Abdullah Ocalan (the PKK's leader) has complete control over all PKK factions, which is unlikely to be the case.²⁷ The power vacuum in Syria may provide the type of springboard for PKK attacks into Turkey that the IKR

²⁴ "Set the Kurds Free," *The Economist*, February 21, 2015, accessed March 1, 2015, <http://www.economist.com/news/leaders/21644151-case-new-state-northern-iraq-set-kurds-free>.

²⁵ Yasar Yakis (former Turkish Foreign Minister) in discussion with the author, April 2015.

²⁶ Bill Park, "Turkey-Kurdish Regional Government Relations after the U.S. Withdrawal from Iraq: Putting the Kurds on the Map?" *Strategic Studies Institute* (2014): 6, accessed January 4, 2015, <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/display.cfm?pubID=1190>.

²⁷ Omar Taspinar and Gonul Tol, "Turkey And The Kurds: From Predicament To Opportunity," *Brookings Institute*, January 22, 2014, accessed December 2014, <http://www.brookings.edu/research/papers/2014/01/22-turkey-kurds-predicament-opportunity-taspinar-tolOmar>.

did in the 1990s. In this sense, Turkey's past security problems will not be resolved but will have rather just shifted arenas.

Regional Implications of an Independent IKR: Balancing Iran

An independent IKR may also contribute to the increasing Iranian influence over southern Iraq, an influence Turkey has been historically interested in limiting. By seceding, the Iraqi Kurds would alter the demographic makeup of the rest of Iraq and the military forces fighting within. With the Kurdish *peshmerga* forces refocused on solely defending their own territory,²⁸ the U.S. refusing to commit ground troops, the ISF continually proving ill-equipped, and the U.S.-supported notion of a multi-sect "national guard" yet to be addressed in the Iraqi parliament,²⁹ the Iranian funded Shi'ite militias are likely to become the primary fighting force within Iraq. The secession of the Kurds would bring into sharp relief the sectarian reality of the Iraq they left behind. Without a third demographic to be considered (of which elements are simultaneously tied to Shi'ite Iran and Sunni Turkey) the Iraqi Sunnis and Iraqi Shi'ites would be left to compete for power against one another. It is within this arena, while the struggle against the IS lingers, that Iranian influence would continue to increase.

This scenario would prove detrimental to Turkey, as it would undermine the future stability of the truncated Iraqi state because of the type of tactics used by Iranian-backed Shi'ite militias in Iraq. As noted by Iraq scholar, Michael Knights:

The approach driven by Iran and its proxies stresses the blunt-force application of firepower and sectarian cleansing, the dominance of Shia militia actors in government offenses, and a continuation of the Maliki-era policy of collective punishment and disarmament of Iraq's Sunnis. When such forces capture an ISIS-held area they often seek to prevent Sunni families from returning to the area, destroying their habitation and carrying out sporadic murders against Sunni Arab military-age males and harassing

²⁸ Michael Knights (Lafer Fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy) in discussion with the author, March 2015.

²⁹ Michael Knights (Lafer Fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy) in discussion with the author, March 2015.

Sunni families. Iran's proxies are carrying out a war with utmost savagery, threatening to greatly intensify the destructive wake of the fight to defeat ISIS.³⁰

This description stands in stark contrast to how Knights characterizes the U.S. led coalition's approach, which:

Stresses discriminating use of firepower, the Sunni-led liberation of lost areas, and ethno sectarian power sharing through a process of "functioning federalism."³¹ Through beset by difficulties and contingent upon mutual compromises by key actors, this path at least offers a means of effectively managing and hopefully ending the conflict.³²

The strategy and tactics employed during the war against the IS in Iraq will impact the region for years to come. Turkey, with its substantial investment in Iraq and geographical proximity, stands to lose if sectarian forces succeed at pulling apart the Iraqi state as it is currently delineated.

Such an outcome would heighten regional sectarian tensions, which could have domestic repercussions for Turkey. Relations between the AKP-led government and Turkey's substantial Alevi population have long been strained.³³ The Alevis, which are non-Sunnis that adhere to a more liberal and Sufi-inspired approach to Islam,³⁴ were a significant component to the anti-AKP protests of spring 2014. Their distaste for the Erdogan administration stems from both a

³⁰ Michael Knights, "The Long Haul: Rebooting U.S. Security Cooperation in Iraq," *Policy Focus 137* (2015): 4, accessed March 23, 2015, http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/pubs/PolicyFocus137_Knights4.pdf.

³¹ "Functioning Federalism" is defined by the U.S. Government as a system that would "empower local populations to secure their own areas with the full resources of the state in terms of benefits, salaries, and equipment."

Deputy Assistant Secretary Brett McGurk, "Senate Foreign Relations Committee Hearing: Iraq at a Crossroads: Options for U.S. Policy," *U.S. Senate*, July 24, 2014, accessed April 1, 2015, <http://www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/McGurk%20Testimony%20072414-Final%20Version%20REVISED.pdf>

³² Knights, "Long Haul," 4.

³³ Daniel Dombey, "Turkey's Alevi Minority Fear Future under Erdogan Presidency," *Financial Times*, July 27, 2014, accessed April 1, 2015, <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/4834f8fc-134e-11e4-84b7-00144feabdc0.html#axzz3XQQ15ejg>.

³⁴ Soner Cagaptay, "Turkey's Slow-Burning Alevi Unrest," *The Washington Institute*, March 24, 2014, accessed March 23, 2015, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/turkeys-slow-burning-alevi-unrest>.

perception that it is promoting an “Islamization” of Turkish society, and its anti-Assad stance. This already tense situation stands to be exacerbated by increased sectarianism in the Middle East. As noted by Bill Park, "given the Sunni roots of Turkey's ruling party, and the sense of exclusion felt by Turkey's substantial Alevi population, regional sectarian tension could have unsettling domestic repercussions in Turkey also."³⁵ This development, combined with an influx of refugees, could culminate in a sizable, potentially disruptive population within Turkish boundaries.

Additionally, larger sectarian rifts in the region will strengthen the division between a Tehran-Baghdad (and Damascus) axis and the Turkey- Gulf Arab coalition.³⁶ Signs of this increased regional sectarian division are evident in the Sunni Joint Arab Force countering the Iranian-funded Houthi rebels in Yemen. While the secession of the IKR would not necessarily *cause* increased sectarianism, it may in fact contribute to it.

Oil and Gas Implications of an Independent IKR: Access to Hydrocarbons

Baghdad’s reaction to an independent IKR may also complicate Turkey’s ability to secure exploration and production contracts in southern Iraq. This is particularly problematic for Turkey, as its own rapid economic growth has precipitated a greater need for oil and, particularly, natural gas inputs.³⁷ Because of Turkey’s well-known import needs, the central Iraqi government’s oil ministry has frequently attempted to use oil and gas exploration contracts as political leverage. This was precisely the case when Turkey’s TPAO was expelled from operating in southern Iraq’s Block 9. Iraq’s oil ministry made it clear that its reasons for expelling TPAO from Block 9 were political and not technical in nature (two oft-cited reasons for this expulsion are Turkey’s refusal to extradite Tariq al-Hashemi back to Baghdad and

³⁵ Park, “Turkey-Kurdish Regional Government Relations,” 39.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ “Country Overview: Turkey,” Last modified April 17, 2014, <http://www.eia.gov/countries/cab.cfm?fips=tu>.

Turkey's involvement in KRG energy projects). Furthermore, the central government also has, on occasion, expelled or attempted to expel oil companies from southern Iraq for signing contracts to operate in the IKR (including Exxon). Although, to date, Turkish companies are still operating in southern fields the complicated bi-lateral relationship between Baghdad and Ankara has and may continue to affect Turkish companies' ability to operate in Arab Iraq.³⁸ This circumstance requires that Turkey at least consider a scenario in which operations in southern Iraq prove untenable.

To this end, Turkey has already laid considerable groundwork with the KRG in order to secure some of its energy needs at a discounted rates from northern Iraq³⁹ in the form of contracts with its own IOC, Genel Energy, pipeline construction, and export agreements. The contracted rates for these imports have been described as "the most favorable terms in the history of the republic."⁴⁰ Additionally, if secure borders between Turkey and the KRG are ever achieved, the IKR will also provide new opportunities for Turkish oil and gas exploration. This has been noted by Turkey's Oil and Gas Minister who has expressed interest in exploring for oil in the KRG's notoriously unsafe Qandil Mountains, a safe haven for PKK rebels.⁴¹ If this exploration proves successful it may at least partially mitigate Turkey's potential loss of access to Iraq's southern reserves.

³⁸John Lee, "Iraq Expels Turkey's TPAO, Asks Kuwait Energy to Replace," *Iraq Business News*, November 7, 2012, accessed April 1, 2015, <http://www.iraq-businessnews.com/tag/4th-round-oil-licences/>.

³⁹Humeyra Pamuk and Orhan Coskun, "Exclusive: Turkey, Iraqi Kurdistan Ink Landmark Energy Contracts," *Reuters*, November 29, 2013, accessed April 1, 2015, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/11/29/us-turkey-iraq-oil-idUSBRE9AS0BO20131129>.

⁴⁰Amberin Zaman, "Can the Kurds Bank on Turkey?" *Al-Monitor*, June 19, 2014, accessed April 1, 2015, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/06/zaman-iraqi-kurds-turkey-mosul-kirkuk-isis-krq-barzani.html>.

⁴¹"Put the Weapon Down," *The Economist*, March 7, 2015, accessed March 8, 2015, <http://www.economist.com/news/europe/21645849-call-peace-pkks-leader-could-mean-new-deal-turkey-put-weapon-down>.

However, currently (and in the foreseeable near term) the Kurdish region of Iraq possesses only a fraction of the reserves southern Iraq does, even if an independent Iraqi Kurdistan includes Kirkuk.⁴² Southern Iraq accounts for five of the seven super giant oil fields in Iraq (**Appendix C**) and continuing to pursue an energy relationship with an independent Iraqi Kurdistan may deny Turkish oil companies' access to (and discounted oil and gas from) any of them. It is, therefore, in the Turks best interest to advocate for a unified, and peaceful, Iraqi state in which Turkish oil companies can exploit both southern and northern reserves.

PREVENTATIVE OPTIONS:

Given the linkage between the current Iraqi civil war and the increased viability of an independent Kurdish state, resolving the current war against the IS and strengthening the Iraqi central government should be the first priority in any efforts to prevent an independent Iraqi Kurdistan. The Turkish and American governments can also impress upon the Kurds that the threat presented by the IS is, more than anything, a reason to augment or delay Kurdish aspirations. As noted above, Iraq's current tumult has indeed presented the Kurds with an opportunity, but the question of whether they should take it is another matter entirely.

The Turkish government can pursue the following options to prevent IKR independence:

Stop Accepting Kurdish Hydrocarbons for Export at Ceyhan: This is the most direct way Ankara can ensure the continued territorial integrity of Iraq. By reversing the Turkey-KRG hydrocarbon export agreement, Ankara will destroy the IKR's only significant revenue stream independent of Baghdad and ensure that the Kurds remained financially tethered to the central government. Such a move would be effective but likely cause significant damage to the burgeoning Ankara-Erbil relationship, and potentially make it more difficult for Turkey's Genel Energy to export its production from the Tawke and Taq Taq fields in the IKR to Turkey.

⁴² Park, "Turkey-Kurdish Regional Government Relations."

Make Turkish support for the peshmerga contingent upon the Kurds remaining in Iraq: By making Turkish support⁴³ for the *peshmerga* contingent upon the Kurds remaining with the rest of the Iraqi State, the Turks will be able to leverage their military assistance to the Kurds to ensure that the Kurds table any plans for independence. The Kurds would likely accept such an offer, because of the *peshmerga*'s weakness compared to the IS forces, as was exposed during the IS offensive on Kurdish territory from August 1-3, 2014. In this battle, *peshmerga* forces not only lost newly seized territory but also long-held lands.⁴⁴ Michael Knights, links this failure to the poor disposition of Kurdish forces, intra-Kurdish rivalries, inexperience, inability to deal with tactical surprise, poor equipment and logistics, and importantly, the alienation of the Sunni tribes. Because of these weaknesses the *peshmerga* forces will need to rely on the international community to help arm, train, and provide them with intelligence for some time yet.

Emphasize the financial implications of IKR secession: Turkish officials should be quick to point out to the KRG that it can ill afford to secede and that their allotted seventeen percent of the Iraqi budget (or even the twelve percent the KRG claims it was getting)⁴⁵ is still considerably more money than they can generate via their own hydrocarbon exports.⁴⁶ Experts note that, an independent IKR would generate approximately \$7 billion per year, which is almost a third less than what they received when allocated twelve percent of Iraq's total oil revenue. This is

⁴³ To date, Turkish support for the Kurdish *peshmerga* against the IS has included military training and light weaponry.

Mewan Dolamari, "Turkish Foreign Minister: Ankara to Continue Supporting Peshmerga," *Basnews*, January 1, 2015, accessed April 1, 2015,

<http://www.basnews.com/en/news/2015/01/15/turkish-foreign-minister-we-will-continue-supporting-peshmerga/>.

⁴⁴ Michael Knights, "The Long Haul," 30.

⁴⁵ At the center of the KRG's dispute with the Iraqi central government over oil and gas, is a claim that the KRG was receiving approximately 12 percent of Iraq's total oil revenues when it was supposed to be receiving 17 percent. For its part, the central government in Baghdad claimed it was justified in withholding a portion of the KRG's revenue share because the KRG's energy dealings with IOCs are in violation of Article 108 and 109 of the Iraqi Constitution.

Craig Bonfield, "Kurdish Push for Independence Derailed by ISIS?" *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, August 28, 2014, accessed December 3, 2015,

http://csis.org/files/publication/140828_Kurdish_Push_Independence_ISIS.pdf.

⁴⁶ Matt Amitrano (Deputy Economic Chief, Iraq Desk, U.S. State Department) in discussion with the author, March 2015.

particularly unsustainable in the face of the current IS crisis, which has increased the KRG's fiscal burden to almost \$300 million per month. Lastly, and importantly, the substantial drop in oil prices means that the Kurds would need to produce and sell (at market prices) nearly twice as many barrels per day to break even.⁴⁷ The Kurds are only producing about ten percent of the country's oil, and with IOCs predicting a substantial production increase out of the fields near Basra,⁴⁸ the Kurds would be better served, financially, to accept a smaller piece of the larger pie than the entirety of a small pie. It would be in the Turks best interest to emphasize this to the Kurds as a means of discouraging their independence.

Endorse lasting political solutions between Erbil and Baghdad: Despite the fact that much has been made of the December 2, 2014 hydrocarbons agreement it is, in fact, only an interim deal and a final comprehensive solution with permanent revenue sharing mechanisms remains elusive.⁴⁹ By endorsing lasting political solutions to the quarrels over hydrocarbon resources and the disputed territories between Baghdad and Erbil, Ankara would fully commit itself to supporting a re-engineered central government representative of Kurds, Sunnis, and Shi'ites.

Cooperate with the United States in creating and bolstering a functional central Iraqi government: This is the crux of the greater U.S. strategy toward containing and ultimately defeating the IS, and Turkey can play a valuable role in this plan. The IS was able to gain traction because of the lack of a strong Iraqi central government,⁵⁰ and struck at a time of particular political volatility following the April 30, 2014 elections that re-elected Nuri al-Maliki.⁵¹ Therefore, bolstering the Iraqi central government and encouraging its inclusiveness is essential to limiting the continued alienation of the Sunni population and curtailing the gains of the IS. Such an option will require Turkey to use whatever leverage it can muster to push the central Iraqi government to more fully embrace Iraq's Kurdish and Sunni citizens. Once such a

⁴⁷ Luay al-Khateeb and Ahmed Mehdi, "The Kurds Can't Afford to Leave Iraq," *The New York Times*, November 9, 2014, accessed April 1, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/10/opinion/the-kurds-cant-afford-to-leave-iraq.html?_r=0.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ Matt Amitrano (Deputy Economic Chief, Iraq Desk, U.S. State Department) in discussion with the author, March 2015.

governing force has been established it could then coordinate a campaign against the IS. A functioning central government will be a key component of encouraging the Kurds to remain part of a greater Iraqi state.

Encourage Sunni Iraqi leaders to invest in the central Iraqi government: Ankara is said to have a milieu of political proxies operating within Iraq,⁵² including the powerful Nujaifi brothers.⁵³ Ankara should encourage the Iraqi Sunni politicians with whom it has close relations to operate within the established bounds of the central government to achieve more balanced representation.

Repair relations with Baghdad: Repairing relations with Baghdad would go a long way in bolstering the central government's control over its sovereign territory. Iraq's Kurds realize that they cannot be an independent entity without the consent of at least one neighboring country. As noted by the KRG Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani:

First of all, we have to convince at least one country around us. Without convincing them, we cannot do this. Being land locked we have to have a partner, a regional partner, a regional power to be convinced and internationally, a big power to be convinced to support that.⁵⁴

In repairing its relationship with Baghdad, Ankara would signal to the KRG that Turkey is not the regional partner for the Kurdish independence project. Things seem to be moving in that direction, as Ankara has more hope of a positive relationship with Haider al-Abadi than it did in Nuri al-Maliki.⁵⁵

Reach out to Sunni tribal leaders, dissuade them from cooperating with the IS: The recent battle for Tikrit highlighted two, obvious weaknesses, of the U.S.-led coalition against the IS. That is,

⁵² Michael Knights (Lafer Fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy) in discussion with the author, March 2015.

⁵³ Atheel al-Nujaifi, Governor of Iraq's Nineveh province and his brother Osama al-Nujaifi, the Vice President of Iraq are both known to be quite close with Erdogan's administration in Ankara.

⁵⁴ Park, "Turkey-Kurdish Regional Government Relations," 45.

⁵⁵ Yasar Yakis (former Turkish Foreign Minister) in discussion with the author, April 2015.

the coalition is not cohesive and the coalition lacks on the manpower on the ground. As the fight pushes west into the Sunni-inhabited Anbar province, the coalition has two options in terms of securing manpower; cherry pick some Shi'ite brigades that the coalition believes to possess the discipline necessary to operate effectively in Sunni provinces or encourage the Sunni tribes to participate.⁵⁶ Of the two options, the second seems like the most likely to succeed- and did in the *Sahwa* movement against al-Qaeda in 2007-2008. This option would also prevent the fighting from falling into clearly sectarian lines. Unfortunately, these tribes are suspicious of the government in Baghdad because successive regimes since 2003 have marginalized their interests. Turkey, as a regional Sunni power may be the right coalition member to encourage Iraq's Sunni tribes to participate. By diminishing the IS' ability to recruit from these tribes and use their territory, Ankara will check the IS' ability to advance toward Baghdad. This type of outreach seems consistent with Turkey's approach, as noted by David Romano, "Turkish policy makers seem to have figured out what is now almost a truism in the counterinsurgency literature: in-group policing is the most effective way to tame an insurgency."⁵⁷ Helping to defeat the IS, while limiting the sectarian overtones of the war will not ipso facto prevent the Kurds from seceding but may contribute to their ability to stay with the rest of Iraq, succinctly put, "the longer [Iraq's Arabs] fail to govern their bit of the county the less right they have to stop the Kurds from governing theirs."⁵⁸

MITIGATING OPTIONS:

The war against IS shows no signs of abating as foreign funds and fighters pour into the conflict and as a result the likelihood of an independent Iraqi Kurdistan must be considered. Conceiving of a strategy that focuses on mitigating the negative impacts associated with an independent Iraqi Kurdistan would be practical planning for Turkish policymakers. Interestingly, the Turkish government has already undertaken tangible steps toward this end.

⁵⁶ "Lessons Learned from the Battle of Tikrit," *Stratfor Global Intelligence*, April 10, 2015, accessed April 15, 2015, <https://www.stratfor.com/analysis/lessons-learned-battle-tikrit>.

⁵⁷ Romano, "Iraqi Kurdistan and Turkey," 97.

⁵⁸ "Kurdistan's Right to Secede," *Economist*.

The continued dysfunction of the Iraqi central government has propelled Ankara to devise a “plan b,” in which uses its economic relationship with the IKR’s KDP-led government to ensure that *if* there is an independent IKR, it will be an IKR heavily dependent on Turkey for its financial security. To that end, Turkey continues to officially promote a unified Iraq while simultaneously increasing its leverage over the IKR by offering up its own territory as an export route for Kurdish hydrocarbons and utilizing resource-based lending schemes.⁵⁹ These developments serve both an economic and geopolitical purpose; they help offset Turkey’s oil and gas import needs and foster the IKR’s dependence upon Turkey. The USG is wary of this relationship because relying on Turkey allows the KRG to remain nominally solvent while bypassing much needed economic reforms.⁶⁰

In addition to the steps it has already taken, the Turkish government can do the following in order to mitigate the impact of an independent IKR on the region generally and Turkey specifically:

Promote a stable and non-violent partition/ velvet divorce: If division becomes inevitable, Turkey should actively support a stable partition. Turkey can play a vital role in this scenario because throughout the disputed territories there are both Turkmen and Sunni populations who may feel threatened by being officially under Kurdish control.

Come to an agreement with the PKK: Finalizing a settlement between Ankara and the PKK while maintaining a relationship with the KRG will lessen the potential security implications of an independent Iraqi Kurdistan. Similarly, Ankara must take steps to limit the ability of PKK rebels to join the PYD and launch attacks into Turkey from Syrian territory.

⁵⁹ Matt Amitrano (Deputy Economic Chief, Iraq Desk, U.S. State Department) in discussion with the author, March 2015.

⁶⁰ Approximately 60% of the Kurdish Regional Government’s monthly expenditures go to a “bloated 700,000-strong bureaucracy, including 200,000 *peshmerga* soldiers.” “Iraqi Kurdistan’s Financial Trap,” *Stratfor Global Intelligence*, July 21, 2014, accessed April 1, 2015, <https://www.stratfor.com/analysis/iraqi-kurdistans-financial-trap>.

Bolster relations with Iran: In the instance of an independent Iraqi Kurdistan, Iran may have increased influence over southern Iraq. In order to ensure that this development does not unduly increase tension in the region, Ankara should strengthen its diplomatic ties with Iran. Efforts toward this end are already being taken by Erdogan, as evidenced by his April 2015 visit to Iran to meet with President Hassan Rouhani.⁶¹

Take measures that will increase political buy-in of the Alevi population: The Alevi's constitute somewhere between ten and twenty percent of Turkey's population. In order to protect its domestic population from an increasingly sectarian region, Ankara must take measures to be inclusive of its own Shi'ite population.⁶² To that end, the Turkish government can pursue an "Alevi opening" as Erdogan indicated he would in the past. A step toward this would be officially recognizing the Alevi's *cem evi*s as religious leaders and cease to require that they pay taxes.⁶³

Continue promoting exploration and production in the KRG: Ankara should prepare itself for decreased access to southern Iraq's hydrocarbon resources. Continuing to develop strong energy ties with the KRG will prove essential to its ability to secure the necessary oil and gas inputs for its economy at discounted rates.

CONCLUSION:

As was true in the past, Turkey's interests would be best served by a unified Iraqi state. The logic behind this statement has altered slightly due to the IS challenge, domestic policies, and the increased sectarianism of the region. For example, the primary concern for Turkey is no longer the ability of the PKK to launch attacks from the IKR but, rather, the threat presented by the

⁶¹ Emre Perker, "Turkish President Seeks Closer Economic Ties on State Visit to Iran," *The Wall Street Journal*, April 7, 2015, accessed April 8, 2015, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/turkish-president-on-state-visit-to-iran-seeking-closer-economic-ties-1428411176>.

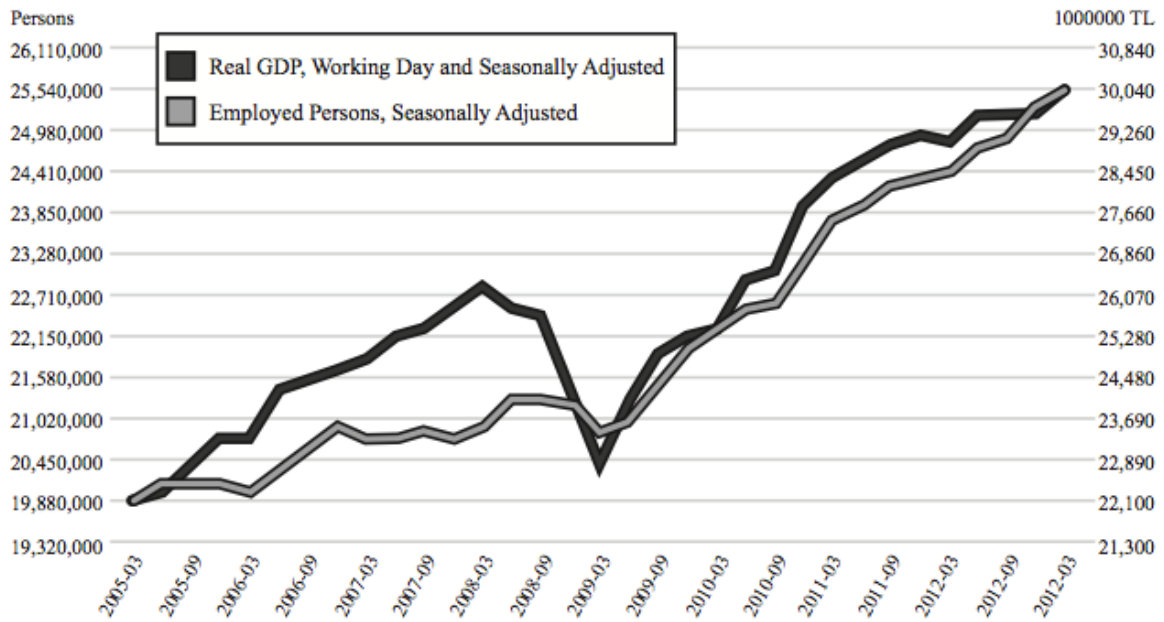
⁶² Alevism is frequently considered to be a type of "spiritual Shi'ism" or "Sufi Shi'ism" although categorizations vary.

⁶³ Dombey, "Turkey's Alevi Minority."

PYD. Additionally, although the threat of Iranian influence in Iraq has always loomed large for the Turks, it is now swiftly becoming a reality on the ground. Lastly, Turkey's newfound energy relationship with the IKR may help to blunt the force of Baghdad's threats to expel Turkish companies from southern Iraq. Despite such changes, Turkey's long-held preference for a unified Iraq will remain. Turkey has made great strides in improving its relationship with the neighboring IKR, which will likely prove advantageous for years to come, but its geopolitical calculus toward Iraq and its Kurdish region has not decisively changed. In order to pursue a strategy that supports this preference, Turkish policy makers and politicians will have to think carefully and act deliberately when engaging with the vastly complicated Iraqi state.

Appendix A⁶⁴

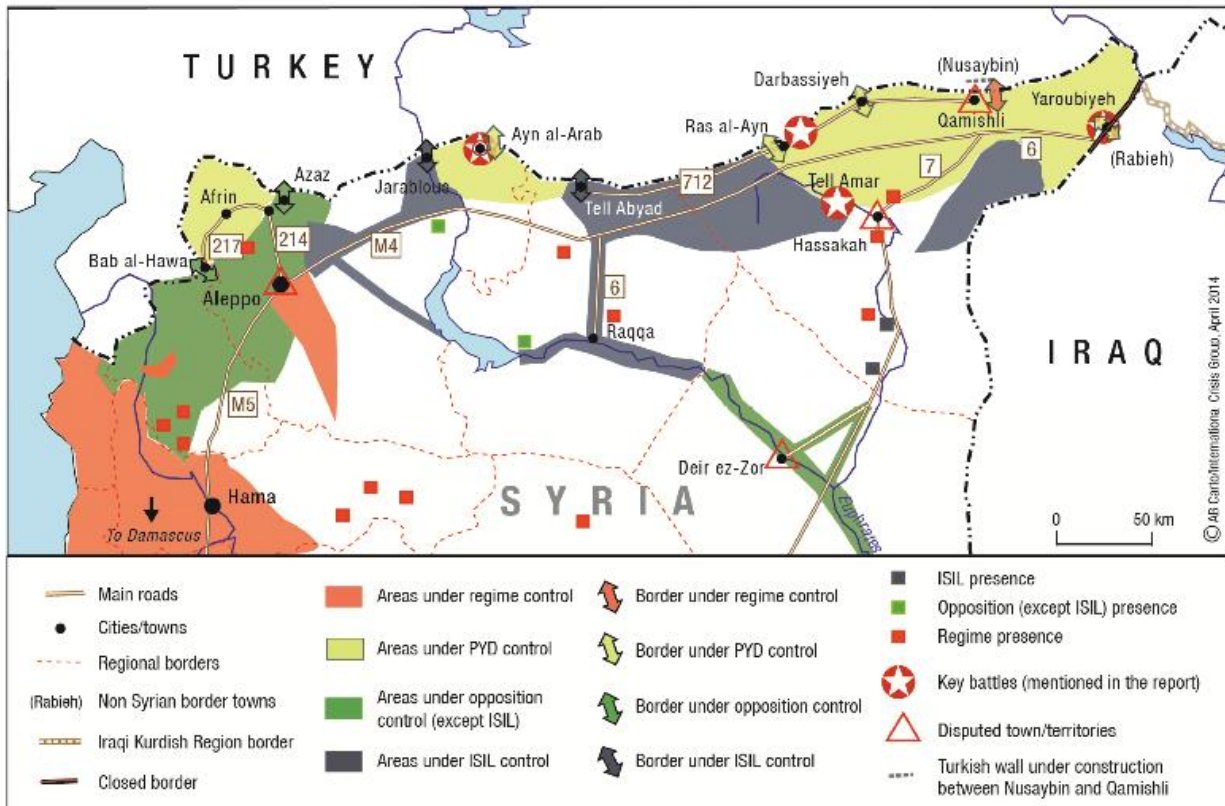
FIGURE 1. Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and Employment



Source: Turkey Data Monitor

⁶⁴ Romano, "Iraqi Kurdistan and Turkey," 90.

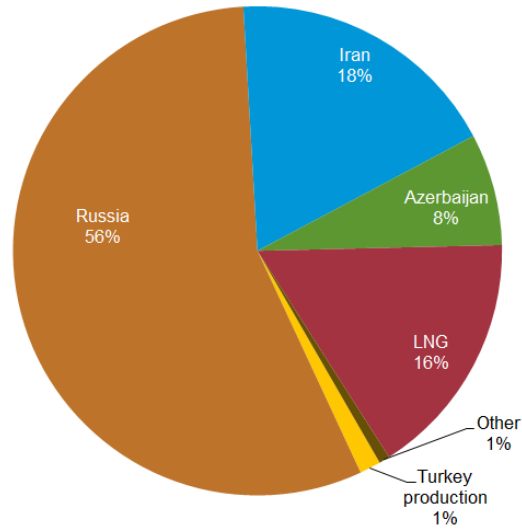
Appendix B⁶⁵



⁶⁵ International Crisis Group, “Flight of Icarus? The PYD’s Precarious Rise in Syria,” *Middle East Report* 151 (2014): 26, accessed March 23, 2015, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/Middle%20East%20North%20Africa/Iraq%20Syria%20Lebanon/Syria/151-flight-of-icarus-the-pyd-s-precarious-rise-in-syria.pdf>

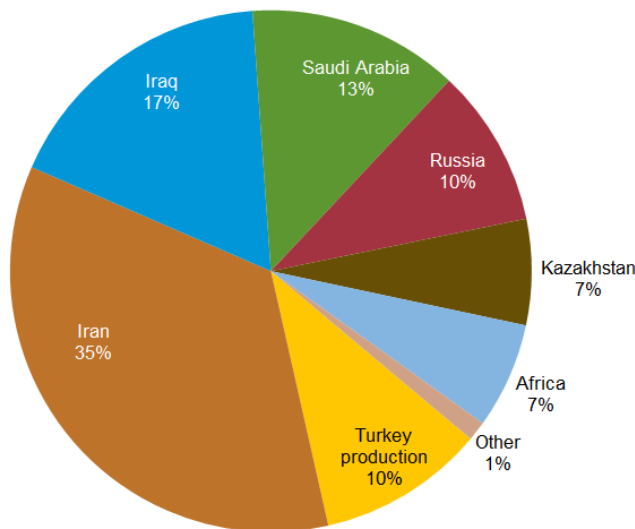
Appendix C⁶⁶

Turkey natural gas supply mix, 2012



Source: U.S. Energy Information Administration, *International Energy Statistics*, Eastern Bloc Research, Cedigaz

Turkey crude oil supply mix, 2012



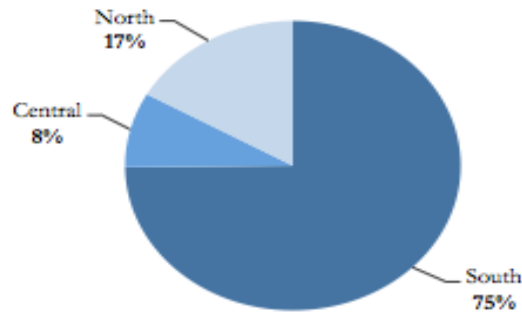
Source: U.S. Energy Information Administration, *International Energy Statistics*, Eurostat

⁶⁶ "Country Overview: Turkey," Last modified April 17, 2014, <http://www.eia.gov/countries/cab.cfm?fips=tu>.

Appendix D⁶⁷



Proven Iraqi Oil Reserves by Region Percent share of total*



* based on end-2011 reserve
Source: IEA data

Super-Giant Fields in Iraq with Reserves Greater than 5 Billion Barrels

Field	Region	Proved Reserves at end-2011
West Qurna	South	43
Rumaila	South	17
Majnoon	South	12
Zubair	South	8
Nahr Umr	South	6
East Baghdad	Central	8
Kirkuk	North	9

Source: IEA World Energy Outlook 2012

⁶⁷ Center of Global Energy Policy, “Issue Brief: Iraq’s Oil Sector,” *Columbia University*, June 14, 2014, accessed February 15, 2014, http://energypolicy.columbia.edu/sites/default/files/energy/Issue%20Brief_Iraq%27s%20Oil%20Sector.pdf.

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