



Guest Editorial

Turkistan or Kurdistan -- Does it Matter to Us?

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(AINA) -- Once I had a conversation with the representative of an Assyrian political organization on the Assyrians in the future of Iraq. I was told that for him it does not matter which people we should cooperate with or accept as our rulers: "Turkistan or Kurdistan, what does it matter?" he wondered. But for me it matters a lot because there is a crucial difference.

Recently, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan had a fierce altercation with Israeli President Shimon Peres at the World Economic Forum in Davos in a debate on the Middle East. Turkey has in recent weeks been criticizing Israel harshly for the invasion of Gaza.

According to TT's correspondent, Erdogan spoke of the children killed during the war in Gaza and was disrupted by Peres who wondered how Erdogan would react if it rained rockets over Istanbul. Erdogan called for, but was not granted, extended time for a reply. While he was furiously threatening to never again come to Davos, Erdogan took his papers and left the debate.

The reports on the incident say that thousands of people with Turkish and Palestinian flags were waiting for Recep Tayyip Erdogan when he landed at the Ataturk airport in Istanbul. Erdogan was hailed as a hero who dares to stand up for the Palestinian brothers in faith. Even Hamas celebrated its Turkish friend with these words:

"Hamas celebrates Turkey's brave Prime Minister who defended the victims of the criminal Zionist war against our children and women," said a spokesman according to AFP, reported TT.

The anti-Israeli sentiment during the three weeks long war in Gaza has been fiercer and more conspicuous in Turkey than in any Arab country. Why? Is it really so that the Turks burn for Palestine more than other Muslims in general and Arabs in particular?

No, it is unlikely. Israel and Turkey have, after all, had a good relationship for a long time, as both President Shimon Peres and representatives of the Jewish lobby in the U.S. pointed out particularly after the quarrel with Erdogan, in an attempt to play down the whole thing.

The reason for the Turkish Government's frustration against Israel should therefore be sought elsewhere than as a defense for the Palestinian people, who are described as "müslüman kardeshler" (our Muslim brothers). Erdogan's anger would be a sign that his government seems to encounter resistance in their attempts to stop Israel and the U.S. from supporting the creation of a Kurdish state in Iraq. We should not forget that the government in Ankara also has many internal problems to overcome and then it may be important to draw attention away from domestic problems. But the main reason should still be Iraq.

Where do the Assyrians come into the picture in terms of a Kurdish state in northern Iraq? A few years ago Maryam S. Shimoun from Canada wrote an [article](#) in the web magazine Zindamagazine.com on this very subject and explained in a pedagogical way why Masoud Barzani acts as he does when he tries to include the Assyrians in his future Kurdish state.

The author was not happy with the Kurdish leader's intentions, but addressed part of her criticism against her own people's willingness or indifference in the matter. She put however her hopes to Turkey, which she said will prevent a move towards the formation of a Kurdish state in northern Iraq.

I also wrote a [contribution](#) to the debate, and asked the rhetorical question, whether Israel is to form an allied Kurdish state in the Middle East.

The articles can be found in Zinda (April, July, August 2006) together with a [response](#) that I got from an Israeli reader who said that Israel can give training to combat pilots and build dairies and nuclear plants, but that the country is too small to have the capacity to create a new state.

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The big question for us Assyrians is if we, as a people, will let us be incorporated into a Kurdish state as "Christian Kurds" under our religious denominations or if we should attempt to remain outside the Kurdish sovereignty with an own autonomy of any kind, perhaps along with other minorities in Iraq, like the Yezidis (in popular Assyrian language called Chelkoye).

A couple of years ago I had a conversation with the representative of an Assyrian political organization on this subject and then I was told that for him it does not matter which people we should work with or have to accept as our rulers: "Turkistan or Kurdistan, what does it matter to us?" he wondered.

But to me it plays a major role because there is a crucial difference. Arab and Turkish rulers, which have the power over ancient Assyrian lands, want to control its citizens and territory as such. However, many Kurdish organizations and parties which are to form a separate Kurdish state also want to have our Assyrian history and make it theirs.

There is a big difference when Kurdish intellectuals are trying to falsify history by claiming that e.g. King Nemrud, Queen Helena of Adiabene (modern Arbil) and other ancient Assyrian personalities were in fact Kurds. Today it is perhaps laughable and not taken seriously by anyone, but a lie which is repeated often enough will ultimately look like a truth, the saying goes.

We do not need to mention here all the activities which leading Kurdish parties like Barzanis KDP engage in, to attract, but also to pressure, the Assyrians of Iraq to stand on the Kurdish side in the new Iraq as it is taking shape.

What we see is that the pressure against the Assyrians in the last provincial elections has been as hard as in previous elections. Reports from the Nineveh plain, to which many Assyrians fled Mosul last year, say that the refugees who do not vote for the pro-Kurdish slate Ishtar 513 are threatened with withdrawal of aid. The threats are made by the Assyrians who cooperate with Barzani and the Kurdish Regional Government KRG. Their main representative is Sarkis Aghajan, an Assyrian who is finance minister in the KRG.

The intention behind the expulsion of a large number of Assyrians away from the Sunni Arab-dominated city Mosul is, according to local Assyrian representatives, that the Kurds want to incorporate the plain with the three autonomous Kurdish provinces of Arbil, Duhok and Sulaymania, bordering the province of Ninawa. The Kurdish flag with its sun is already waving on schools and public buildings which are also controlled by the Kurdish Peshmerga. The Kurds were a majority in many districts in the Ninewa province, at the last election in 2005, after Sunni Arabs had boycotted it. But that is not the case this time and election results are expected to result in a different representation in local assemblies (AINA [2-1-2009](#)).

At the moment the election results are not clear yet, it can take weeks. But fear and intimidation against Assyrians are not decreasing, even though some have returned to their homes in Mosul, which is Iraq's second major city after Baghdad.

How the Assyrians' and other minorities' situation will develop, we should see in the near future. And what role Turkey will play in the formation of a new Iraq remains to be seen. Judging from Prime Minister Erdogan's sortie in Davos, it is a sign of frustration and powerlessness which we see from Turkish rulers in the game on Iraq.

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