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IRAQ'S PIVOTAL POINT: TELAFER

IRAK'IN KİLİT NOKTASI: TELAFER

CENTER FOR MIDDLE EASTERN STRATEGIC STUDIES
ORTADOĞU STRATEJİK ARAŞTIRMALAR MERKEZİ

THE IRAQI TURKS SOCIETY FOR CULTURE AND SOLIDARITY
IRAK TÜRKLERİ KÜLTÜR VE YARDIMLAŞMA DERNEĞİ

ORSAM-MIDDLE EASTERN TURKMEN PROGRAMME
ORSAM-ORTADOĞU TÜRKMENLERİ PROGRAMI



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PROGRAMI



ORTADOĞU STRATEJİK ARAŞTIRMALAR MERKEZİ



IRAK TÜRKLERİ KÜLTÜR VE
YARDIMLAŞMA DERNEĞİ

Center For Middle Eastern Strategic Studies

History

In Turkey, the shortage of research on the Middle East grew more conspicuous than ever during the early 90's. The Iraqi Research Institute was established in May 30, 2002 in order respond to this need and to provide relevant information to the general public and to the foreign policy community.

On March 19, 2004, the institute expanded its research domains and its name was changed to "The Global Strategy Institute." The institute then underwent an intensive restructuring process, beginning to concentrate exclusively on Middle Eastern, and was renamed the Middle East Strategic Research Center (ORSAM) on November 01, 2008. ORSAM's research is sponsored by the Turkmeneli Cooperation and Culture Foundation.

Outlook on the Middle Eastern World

It is certain that the Middle East harbors a variety of interconnected problems. However, neither the Middle East nor its people ought to be stigmatized by images with negative connotations. Given the strength of their populations, Middle Eastern states possess the potential to activate their inner dynamics in order to begin peaceful mobilizations for development. Respect for people's willingness to live together, respect for the sovereign rights of states and respect for basic human rights and individual freedoms are the prerequisites for assuring peace and tranquility, both domestically and internationally. Seeking to understand the issues of the Middle East by focusing on just and realistic solutions will encourage initiatives for reconciliation. In this context, Turkey must continue to make constructive contributions to the establishment of regional stability and prosperity in its vicinity. Without involving itself in regional blocs, Turkey should continue to facilitate the establishment of dialogue between parties and to pursue consistent and conciliatory policies so that it can obtain international support and make the most of this support for the common benefit of states and peoples in the region.

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ORSAM, in accordance with its conception of the Middle East, provides the general public and decision-making organizations with enlightening information about international politics in order to promote a healthier understanding of international policy issues and to help them to adopt appropriate positions. ORSAM produces ideas that include a variety of alternatives for action. In order to present effective solutions, ORSAM supports high quality research by intellectuals and researchers that are competent in a variety of disciplines. ORSAM's strong publishing capacity transmits meticulous analyses of regional developments and trends to the interested parties. With its web site, its books, reports, and periodicals such as the monthly Ortadoğu Analiz (Middle Eastern Analysis) and the semi-annual Turkish Review of Middle Eastern Studies, ORSAM supports the development of Middle Eastern literature on a national and international scale. ORSAM facilitates the sharing of knowledge and ideas with the Turkish and international communities by inviting statesmen, bureaucrats, academics, strategists, businessmen, journalists and NGO representatives to Turkey.

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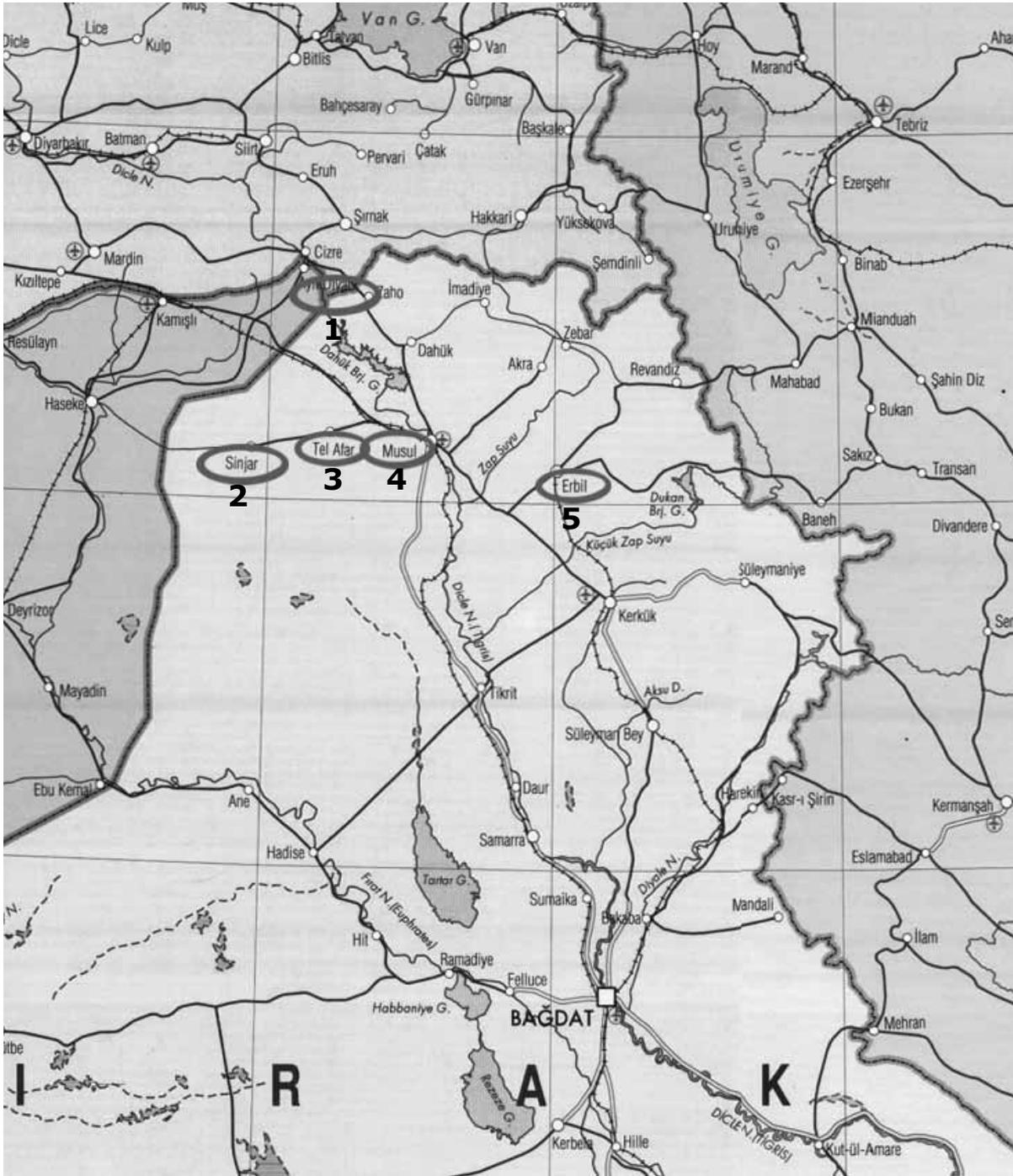
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(1) Ovacik (2) Sinjar (3) Talafar (4) Mosul (5) Erbil



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Iraq's Pivotal Point: TALAFAR

Summary

Located in one of the most pivotal points of northwestern Iraq, the story of Talafar is one of the most interesting in post-invasion Iraq. Geographically, the district's closest borders are with Turkey and Syria, and for this reason alone it may be considered one of the most strategic locations in the Middle East. However, beyond this, the fact that it serves as a buffer between the Iraqi Kurds and the Syrian Kurds, and is located on the route of nationalists or radical Islamist militants coming to Iraq, shows Talafar's importance. For these reasons, it was the scene of severe conflicts between 2004 and 2008, and it contains on a micro scale all the forms of conflict going on throughout Iraq. No other Iraqi conflict zones have experienced as many examples of conflict as Talafar, from Al Qaeda fighters skirmishing with US troops to nationalist Arabs, Sunni-Shiite conflict and the indirect political struggles of Kurds, Arabs and Turkmens. Like Fallujah, Talafar was besieged, bombed and its inhabitants forced to migrate. Like Baghdad, it was the scene of Sunni-Shiite conflict. and like Kirkuk, it experienced the power struggles of Kurds, Arabs and Turkmens. Nevertheless, Talafar could attract neither the attention of the Middle East, nor that of the international community. The attention given to Talafar been limited to analyzing US military operations and announcing some of the acts of violence. However, post-conflict trauma syndrome has affected Talafar more than many other places in Iraq. However, the recently observed improvement in Talafar's security situation in presented Talafar, one of the largest districts in the Middle East, with the opportunity to take a breath and to recover.

Along with Kirkuk, Talafar is one of the most important settlement districts for Turkmens in Iraq, and it is eye-catching, not only for its geostrategic position, but also for its identity. Talafar emphasizes its Iraqi identity in spite of the fact that almost all people live in the center are Turkmens. The highly developed concept of being "Talafarian" is not based on ethnicity or sectarian identity. For this reason, although this district suffered from a conflict with a strong sectarian dimension, the reconciliation efforts currently being conducted can yield success. Having been destroyed by conflicts and military operations, Talafar's recovery period is proving to be extremely slow and painful. However, the principal reason behind this is the fact that the flow of resources insufficient to implement the projects needed. Talafar is in need of substantial investment in areas such as irrigation, sewerage and road construction, and expects emergency aid from Turkey, Iraq and the international community.

For all these reasons the ORSAM recently been concentrating its efforts on Talafar, on situation in the city apart from the perspective of conflict, and within the framework of an effort to find solutions for its current problems. Consequently, the ultimate result and critical point is that Talafar must be immediately promoted to the status of a province so that contribute to the search for stability within its local, national and regional context and overcome its economic, social, infrastructural, administrative, security and political problems.

Introduction

Talafar is one of the most important cities for Iraqi Turkmen. After the invasion of Iraq, it did not receive the interest it expected. In Turkey, there is very little information or research on Talafar. Studies of Talafar were overshadowed by the scrutiny of the strategic problems in Kirkuk and Turkish policy concerning northern Iraq, and remained limited to US military operations in Talafar. However, if Talafar is analyzed in depth, it is clear that the issue is at least as complicated as in Kirkuk, and its long-term implications are just as important. For these reasons, in order to pioneer efforts to fill Turkey's information gap concerning Talafar, and to put the problems of Talafar on the agenda, ORSAM conducted field research in the region, and drew up a report in light of information accumulated. The information presented in this study is based on the examination of academic works and comprehensive research conducted in Talafar. The figures referenced were obtained from officials in Talafar, or from people from Talafar conducting research on the subject. Throughout the field research, we travelled around the district, holding meetings with prominent tribe leaders, religious figures, bureaucrats and politicians. Some formulations were derived from a review and comparison the data acquired, and we attempted to address the problems of Talafar through data analysis.

1. The Importance of Talafar

Our understanding of the data acquired during

the study indicates that Talafar's strategic importance for Turkey and Iraq can be summed up in four headings:

1. Talafar is the only geographical and administrative region buffer between Sinjar, located between the Kurdish administration of northern Iraq and Iraq's Syrian border and the Kurds in Syria.
2. Talafar is the only, and the most populated residential area in Iraq, of which the overall population is constituted by Turkmen.
3. This identity is why Talafar has been perceived as a threat, not only by the Kurds, but also by the Arabs, ever since the establishment of the Iraqi state. For this reason, intense systematic pressure has been imposed on it for nearly 80 years, along with attempts to keep it under control and block its development.
4. Talafar is the only area where direct relations can be established between Arabs, Turkmen and Turkey without the control of the regional administration in northern Iraq.

2. An Overall Picture of Talafar

Talafar is the a part of Ninawah Governorate in Iraq. Located 60 kilometers west of Mosul, it is one of the most important residential districts in Iraq, both in terms of population and geographical area. Talafar is in ruins. Internal conflicts, terrorist activities, the US and Iraqi military and the peshmarga operations had extremely negative effects on life in Talafar. However, the wreckage in Talafar surpasses that of these armed conflicts, deriving from the fact that no investment in development and infrastructure has been made there since the establishment of Iraqi State. The streets of Talafar are dirty and its roads are rough. There is a sewage system in the 2% of the district. Dirty water flows in the streets, electricity is available according to the principle of "six hours off/two hours on," and water is supplied to houses only for limited periods.

3. Basic Information about Talafar

3.1. Administrative Organization

The Talafar district consists of the district center, three sub-districts attached to the district center (Iyaziye, Rabia and Zummar), and 120 villages attached to these sub-districts and the Talafar center. In the province, which is under the administrative authority of the Mosul Provincial Assembly, there is the governorate, the provincial assembly and many provincial directorates (security, passport, national education). The local authorities in Talafar are trying to increase the number of directorate generals in the province. The basic motive for this is to prove that Talafar is capable of governing itself, and to carry out administrative operations for those people of Talafar who are unable to go to Mosul due to security issues. Although the elections for the Provincial Assembly of Talafar with 20 members, one of whom is district governor need to be repeated in June of this year, just as in the rest of Iraq, conditions in Iraq will determine if elections the elections can be held. Since Talafar is under the administrative authority of the Mosul Provincial Assembly, all essential operations and projects are funded by Mosul. As will be discussed later on, this situation is a serious hardship on Talafar. The Talafar Municipality has a special position in Iraq. After the 15 provincial municipalities (seats of the governorates) that are outside the regional administration of northern Iraq, Talafar is the in the second largest category. No other municipality falls into this category. The third category is made up of the other district municipalities. In other words, we should call the provincial municipalities, the A category, and Talafar falls into the subsequent B category. The remaining district municipalities in Iraq fall into the C category.

3.2. Demographic Structure and Distribution

Talafar's population makes it one of the largest districts in Iraq. According to the fieldwork data obtained from the birth registration office and district governorate, the total population of Talafar was 395,150 in November 2008. While

the population of the Talafar center along with those of the villages attached to it is 215,905, the total population reaches the figure above along with sub-districts and villages taken into account. Since Iraq is supposed to conduct a census in October in, no efforts to explore the 2009 data have yet been made.

The ethnic and religious distribution of the population mentioned above is as follows: the population of entire central area is comprised of Turkmen, who are Muslims and speak Turkish. Although both the Shiite and Sunni Turkmen claim that they have the majority in the province, considering the number and size of the tribes, and the size and distribution of the settlements in the district center, it is clear that the ratio is somewhere near 60-40%. But a 5% margin of error should be reserved for this estimate. While a large number of the villages in the district are inhabited by Turkmen, some villages are inhabited by Arabs. Moreover, some of the Turkmen in Talafar are Allawites.

The whole population of the central Iyaziye sub-district and a large majority in its villages are Turkmen. One tribe alone (Kassap) makes up the vast majority of the population of the central part of the sub-district. While Arabs (the Shammar tribe) constitute the majority in the Rabia sub district, in Zummar there are Gergeri, as well as Turkmen and Arabs.

Judging from the distribution above, we can conclude:

Although the whole population of the centre of Talafar is made up completely of Turkmen, the population of the Talafar province is approximately 70% Turkmen, and the remaining consists of Arabs and other small communities.

Those who are from Talafar originally, but were forced to emigrate by internal conflicts in the province and problems that arose due to the occupation of Iraq should be considered as well in addition to the current population in Talafar. In light of the initial studies in Iraq, it has been

suggested that 1,600 families migrated to Mosul, or moved to another settlement in Talafar, 2,150 families migrated to villages and sub districts in Talafar, and 225 families migrated to other provinces. The cases counted more than once have been sorted out, thanks to the studies by the commission for migrants, which was founded at the provincial center, and takes into account those who turned back their hometowns. It has been established that the first figures were exaggerated. The results show that 225 families migrated to other provinces, 4,160 families returned, to in and around Talafar, or to Mosul. Accordingly, 4,385 families fall into the category of migrants as a result of migration since 2003. Given the social structure in Talafar, these figures need to be multiplied by at least seven to find the close number of migrants.

3.3. Social Structure

Talafar has the characteristics of self-enclosed agricultural society. The district's population comprised of tribes. Everyone belongs to a tribe, and the tribes are subdivided into families. Although a family may have a special name and appear to be a tribe, they are actually only a branch of a huge tribe. The religious sects of a tribes need not be one and the same. It is possible for Shiites, Sunnis and Allawites to belong to the same tribe, even the same family. Sectarian affiliations are not the only determinant factor for the identity of a tribe. This is a very natural fact and indicates how inappropriate it is to resort to identity politics based on religious sects. Sectarian differences between people from Talafar who descend from the same family, tribe, or relatives were trivial up until recent years, and were not grounds for discrimination among people. This diversity persists in families even today.

The building block of provincial identity is being *Talafarian*. Though the priorities may vary if one is a Shiite, Sunni or Turkmen, the fundamental identity is always Talafarian. Other identity features always come after that. Additionally, due to its being self-enclosed society, the Talafarian does not embrace outsiders. Ta-

lafarian people are extremely generous to their guests, but substitute this attitude with its opposite when a group of people try to settle in the region. The most important component of the Talafarian identity is language. Everyone in the province speaks Turkish. Even people and tribes who claim to be of Arabic origin due to the Arabization policies implemented by the Iraqi state from 1970s onwards speak Turkish, and most of them do not know Arabic.

One of Talafarian most important recent developments regarding to social structure is the Sunni-Shiite division which is promoted by some conflicting groups. Indeed, kinship connections established by marriages between families or tribes from different sects are widespread. Sectarian affiliations could be said to bear no great importance under normal circumstances; however, the conflict that broke out in 2004 and evolved into a kind of sectarian conflict has resulted in an insecure atmosphere, and all sorts of identities and social relations have been damaged, causing sectarian connections to gain importance in some factions. It seems unlikely that the political dimension of these identities, which has become evident due to the conflicts experienced in Talafar, will disappear in the short term. For the Talafarian, the bloodshed during the conflicts has given the parties wounds that do not seem to heal easily. Blood money for those killed during the conflicts has yet to be paid, and that keeps wounds from healing. People are tired of conflict, but while they seek stability, and ostracize those who intend to prolong the conflicts, it may be said the Sunni and Shiite Turkmen still do not trust each other completely. Moreover, Talafar can reclaim the social spirit it had before 2004 by establishing security in the region, by creating employment opportunities with the inflow of investments, and initiating social projects to heal wounds.

In addition to the social problems caused by sectarian politics, an ethnic identity problem also exists in Talafar. Not all the Shiite Turkmen fully embrace their Turkmen identity, and some Sunni Turkmen describe themselves as

Arabs. While this is the sort of problem with ethnic origin to be found among the Sunni Turkmen, with time sectarian affiliation has become a serious issue for the Shiite Turkmen. Almost all of the Shiite Turkmen who define themselves as Shiite and Turkmen will stress one or the other identity depending on their tribes and their political affiliation. There are a few Sunni Turkmen who define themselves as Arab. However, except for these tribes, ethnic identity is prioritized over sectarian affiliations for the majority of Turkmen.

Another feature of Talafar's social structure is the role of religion. Spiritual authority has an immense influence on Shiite Turkmen. For a large majority of the Shiite Turkmen in Talafar, the spiritual authority is Ali al-Sistani in Najaf. Since he distances himself from politics, people can act more freely. Some of the local religious functionaries in Talafar play favorable roles in influencing the opinions of people. For instance, Sheik Jawad, one of Talafar's most prominent Shiite religious leaders, advocates peace. In his sermons he stresses that Sunni and Shiite Turkmen must overcome their differences. He has also sponsored a peace initiative between the prominent figures of Sunni and Shiite Turkmen communities in Talafar. It would be hard to claim that there is a similar religious guide among the Sunni Turkmen.

Like the Shiite Turkmen, the Sunni Turkmen do not blindly conform to the conduct of their tribes. For example, the tribes cannot be said to have a single stance on the Sunni-Shiite conflict. Although the conflict that broke out in Talafar was predominantly sectarian in nature, it is known that several prudent Talafarians protected friends and neighbors who belonged to other sectarian groups from some attacks during the incidents in Talafar.

3.4. Economic Structure

Talafar's economy is mainly based on agriculture and trade. A large part of population lives by agriculture. Industry has not been developed, and apart from some small businesses,

there are no factories. The unemployment rate reaches as high as 60%. The conflicts that began in 2004 led to the closure of the province's main market, very badly affecting the economy was. 11.5 million square meters of land can be used for agriculture. Today, approximately 2.5 million square meters of this land is being used. The main harvests are barley and wheat. Annual production is between 1 and 1.5 million tons. Moreover, fruit trees and gardening are under cultivation. There are still about 175,000 fig trees and 50,000 pomegranate trees in Talafar. Most of their harvest is sold in regional markets and in Mosul. Talafar was one of the important grain production centers during the Ottoman Empire, but lost this attribute because of insufficient irrigation, droughts caused by climate change, violence and immigration. However, the province has abundantly fertile soil, convenient flat land, and with adequate irrigation, it can fulfill its great potential.

Cattle breeding is in crisis, like all the other sectors. The number of sheep and goats declined from 1.5 million before 2004, to 150,000, and the number of cattle declined from 15,000 to 1,000. This decline also affected dairy production. While dairy items produced in Talafar were being sold in neighboring towns and provinces before 2004, now the production is not even adequate for Talafar.

Trade, which was the main source of income beforehand, has been affected badly by incidents of violence. With the closure of Talafar's big market, which had been the main shopping center west of Mosul before the conflicts, shopping scattered to neighborhood stores, and merchants coming to the province from other towns and villages began to seek business elsewhere. While there were approximately 7,500 shops in province before 2004, nowadays this number has declined to 2,500. While the livestock market's daily trade volume with other provinces was 300 million dinars daily before 2004, recently this number has declined to 20 million dinars.

Transportation, a crucial dimension of the economy, is also in bad condition. Before 2004, there were 3000 long vehicles in Talafar; but now the number is 300. Before the occupation, Talafar owned one of every six tractor trailers in Iraq, but now the province has fallen far below this figure. This is mainly due to the fact that security issues have impeded transportation. Additionally, unemployment forced many people had to sell their vehicles so that they could survive on the money they obtained. As long as new vehicles cannot be bought to replace the old ones, those who worked in transportation either moved to other fields of endeavor or were unable to buy a new vehicle after selling. Nevertheless, construction has begun to increase in the city, and the number of work machines is growing.

Looking at the general situation of Talafar, the main economic problems are as follows: There is almost no investment in the city. For this reason, the unemployment rate is very high. With insufficient irrigation, a large portion of the agricultural land cannot be cultivated, and therefore yields have declined. A large portion of the resources set aside for government projects is being used by the Mosul Province Council. Of the budget allocated by the Iraqi government for the Ninawa Province, Mosul uses 20% for strategic projects. Strategic projects in Mosul (such as hotels, large hospitals, universities, sport complexes and irrigation projects) are being conducted with this budget. The remaining 80% of the budget is distributed among 10 cities, including Mosul. Moreover, the decline of oil prices has reduced the overall Iraqi budget, and this is reflected in the municipal budgets. This causes the deterioration of Talafar's economy to continue, since the money required to initiate and complete urgently needed infrastructural projects is not available.

4. Daily Life and Problems in Talafar

4.1 Municipal Services

The Municipality of Talafar has immense problems. Waste collection is not carried out in the district. Furthermore, only a few places have

proper roads. Roads are currently being constructed with cement. The biggest problem of the municipality is the inadequacy of the budget. Of the municipal budget 20% is taken by Mosul, and the remainder of the funds are distributed to other municipalities, therefore important infrastructure works cannot be undertaken. While the budget of the municipality was 3 billion dinars (2.5 million dollars) in 2008, the budget decreased to 1 billion dinars (850,000 dollars) this year. Furthermore, Talafar received 3 billion dinars from Bagdad in 2008, however this quantity is allocated for reconstruction, and it was stipulated that such funds would be given only once.

The poor condition of the infrastructure must not be exclusively associated with the conflicts. According to our observations, the biggest problem in Talafar is poverty. It does not seem possible that the problems of Talafar (which has not hosted an important project since the foundation of the Iraqi state) will be solved in a short time. In Talafar where even tree planting was banned until a short time ago, a forestation project is being led by the mayor today. However, the trees planted in the framework of the project are weak and inadequate. Talafar faces droughts due to inadequate irrigation and climate change, so its forestation projects need support.

One of the district's important requirements is electricity. Electricity which is distributed via accumulation in Iraq causes problems in Talafar similar to other regions of the country.

Although Talafar needs 100 megawatts of electricity daily, it only gets 40. Therefore, the electricity frequently cuts off and electric machines cannot function. After 6 hours of power outage, the electricity is available for 2 hours. However, whether electricity is available or not, it get cut off again at eleven in the evening.

Tap water is potable in Talafar. However, in territories where orchards are irrigated, the dirty and clean water does mix. There is no waste water treatment system in the district. Water re-

sources are inadequate. Furthermore, one of the most important problems of Talafar is drought and insufficient irrigation projects. Due to the lack of irrigation, a huge portion of the its arable land lies fallow. When rain is available, agriculture is viable, but if the winter is dry, agriculture becomes impossible. Agriculture has been on the verge of ceasing for the last two years, due to scarce rainfall and conflicts. Irrigation channels could solve the district's most important problems, poverty and unemployment.

As has been shown above, Talafar does receive adequate support from the Iraqi government and Mosul, and the best solution for Talafar would be for prominent cities or districts in Turkey to declare it a sister municipality. Thus, it will be easier to conduct cooperations so as to benefit from the technical, educational, and financial assistance and the aid projects available from prominent organizations in the world.

4.2. Health Services

In Talafar, there is 1 hospital and 7 health centers. Talafar's public hospital (locally referred to as the "General Hospital") has 215 beds. Construction is ongoing in some parts of the hospital. Still, emergency service, a pediatric clinic, a maternity ward, surgery, an internal disease clinic, and cardiology clinic are available. The hospital has 8 ambulances, 33 specialist doctors and 18 general practitioners. The number of doctors varies at the health centers. While some have 3-4 doctors, some do not even have a doctor. The most prevalent forms of disease in Talafar affect children. The rapidly increasing birth rate, the inadequate number of schools and environmental pollution play key roles in the occurrence and prevalence of pediatric disease. According to the chief physician, the extended family structure and the high number of students in classes cause the rapid spread of disease. Medicines reach Talafar by way of Mosul. It has been stated that there is no medicine shortage. Furthermore, there is an efficient vaccine campaign in the district. Therefore, pediatric diseases such as measles, chicken pox and polio have been prevented. The district's cancer rate is low; however, heart and bone diseases are prevalent.

Although efforts have solved some of Talafar's health problems, the treatment of serious disease has its difficulties, and many diseases cannot be treated there. People who are unable to get treatment at the Talafar hospital's seriously limited facilities try to get treatment in Mosul, Dohuk and Erbil. However, health service problems are prevalent all across Iraq, and it is extremely difficult to get treatment in those hospitals, too. There is a glimmer of hope for patients who come Turkey. Currently, approximately 3 patients come to Turkey each month, and the increase of this figure is important. Furthermore, courses for Talafar's doctors should be augmented and repeated in Turkey, since this would a great advantage for them. Talafar's doctors have stated that they gained important experience from a course opened by TIKA (Turkish International Cooperation and Development Agency), and they are now able to conduct operations that the doctors in Mosul cannot handle. Consequently, there is no shortage of medicine in Talafar, but there is a lack of medical equipments and important medical tools, so it should be noted that contributions in this field would be helpful for Talafar.

4.3. Educational Services

Education continues to be carried out in Talafar, despite the difficulties. According to information acquired from studies being conducted, there are 75 primary schools, 17 elementary schools and high schools in the city of Talafar. In the district and villages, there are 35 primary schools and 4 elementary-high schools in Iyaziye; 35 primary schools, 3 elementary-high schools in Zummar; 43 primary schools and 5 elementary-high schools in Rafiya. In total, there are 228 primary schools, 39 elementary-high schools and 2 kindergartens in the Talafar district. Of the high schools in the district, one is a technical high school, and the other is a vocational religious high school. Of the students in Talafar, 11,760 are middle and high school students, 38,425 are primary school students, totalling 50,185 students. One of the important educational problems is that in a single school building, many schools are in service. In some cases, one school building hosts classes from two

or three different schools. Classes are crowded, and there are hygiene problems both inside and around the schools. Due to water shortages and storage tank problems, toilets are unusable and they are in a very bad condition.

There is a shortage of books and supplies in the schools. The supplies are very old, and chalk boards are still in use. Furthermore, inspectors have stated that there is a shortage of Turkish books. The district has no problem in with a shortage of teachers. With the help of the NGOs, 17 schools have received computers in Talafar, and computer rooms have been created. Many schools do not have computers.

In interviews with young people, teens over 15 have difficulty in comprehending and talking in Turkish. However, a large portion of the children between 7 and 12 years of age can speak Turkish easily. This may be the result of watching of Turkish TV channels and attending Turkish courses in schools.

4.4. The Security Situation

Talafar passed through a period of great conflict between 2004 and 2008, but crucial improvements have been made in recent months. Kurdish groups in Iraq wanted sovereignty over the province, and resistance against them began immediately after the occupation of Iraq, but after a while it began to target the U.S troops supporting the peshmerga. However, starting at the end of 2005, the resistance against the occupation forces and the peshmerga turned into an internal conflict among Turkmens, and against the US, Kurdish groups, Sunni Arab insurgents, some Islamist Shiite militia, Iran and Al-Qaeda, in short, a sectarian war, similar to what occurred in the rest of Iraq. According to the hospital figures, 2,800 people died, 1,000 have lost body parts, and 6,000 have suffered major and minor injuries in the Talafar incidents. In the Talafar conflicts, where Turkmens were played the key role, a small number of foreigners took part as well. Some Sunni Turkmens allied themselves with Nationalist- Baathist Arabs and radical Islamists to fight against US forces, the Iraqi army, the peshmerga and Shiite Turkmens.

Meanwhile, some Shiite Turkmens supported directly or indirectly by the Badr Brigade, Moqtada Al-Sadr's militia and the Iraqi Government fought against the Sunni Turkmens.

Unfortunately, many operations during the most heated period of the conflicts targeted civilians, and many innocent people on both sides had lost their lives. For instance, the El Wahde town incident in 27th March 2007 in Talafar was one of the bloodiest incidents in Iraq. The town had long suffered from a shortage of flour. Tons of explosives were loaded onto a truck that came to the town to distribute flour, and it exploded when people approached the truck to receive their share. More than 120 Shiite Turkmens died in the incident. Then those who lost relatives in the incident conducted a revenge attack and killed 74 people, the majority of whom were not connected to the bombing. The effects of this incident are still remembered by both sides.

Traces of the conflicts are still fresh in most sections of Talafar. Bullet holes and the ravages of bombs can be seen on many buildings, and there are demolished houses on the sides of the roads. Street battles occurred between Turkmens in most of the streets of the town. Towards the end of conflict, precautions were taken to prevent the entrance of cars without special identity to southern subdistricts.

The factors that created the clashes and bloody sectarian conflicts in Talafar may be listed as follows:

- The general context of conflict in Iraq was reflected in Talafar. Talafar became an extension of the conflict between US forces and Sunni Arabs because of its unique geographical position and social structure. The Arabs did not want to leave Mosul under Kurdish and US control, so they began to resist. Moreover, the Shiite Turkmen community of Talafar is the only Shiite presence (except some very small communities) in the north of Iraq. For this reason, the Shiite Arabs (especially ISCI and Sadrists) wanted to create a power center in the north by using

Talafar. Again, since the town is on the Syrian border, it was open to infiltration. Radical Islamist militia turned the town into a conflict zone for their own purposes. On top of all this, the Iraqi Kurdish groups' desire to keep US forces in the region by creating instability so as to change the demographic and political structure of Mosul also fueled the conflict.

- Shiite and Sunni Turkmens were provoked into enmity using political instability and power struggle between groups.

To sum up, the Talafar conflict was entered on four axes: the Mosul based resistance against the US and the new Iraqi government; the Iraqi Kurds' efforts to reach the Syrian Kurds and Sinjar; conflicts between the US and radical Islamists; and Sunni-Shiite centered conflict spreading from Baghdad.

Considering all these factors, Talafar turned into a web of conflicts between 2004 and 2008. On one side of the conflict, there were Sunni Turkmens supported by Al-Qaeda and Sunni Arabs struggling against Shiite Turkmens, the U.S army and the peshmerga; and on the other side, there were the Shiite Turkmens, directly or indirectly supported by ISCI, the Kurds and the Iraq government. For this reason, the conflict began as a kind of Turkmen resistance against the peshmerga and US, and later it lost its identity and became a domestic conflict between Turkmen Sunnis and Shiites.

Today, it is clear that the security situation is improving rapidly. Because of the bombings, street battles and assassinations, it was really dangerous to go outdoors even during daytime until six months ago, but now it is even safe to go out even at night. No considerable fighting or attacks have occurred in recent months. In addition to the Iraqi army, 1,400 police men and 2,500 rapid response team members control the town. The incidents which caused tension between the police and the people have almost ended. The security situation in Talafar is now under control, thanks to the contributions of

the army and the police. However, Talafar's people believe that the violent groups who triggered the conflicts are still hiding in Mosul, and that they might be killed if they go to there. That is why they avoid going to Mosul. It is also believed that those who were involved in conflicts in Talafar are still alive, but they put their guns away. The long duration of the conflicts created distrust on both sides. It does not seem to be possible to erase this distrust in a short time. While no one believes that the street battles will begin again, some Turkmens are afraid of the possibility that the bomb attacks may be renewed.

The factors which played a role in ending the conflicts may be listed as follows:

1. The fact that tensions declined in the Baghdad.
2. The fact that the conflict between U.S and Arabs gave way to unity, and the Sunni Arabs began to be included in the system under the name of the "awakening councils."
3. The fact that the Kurds realized that they would not be accepted in the region and stepped back.
4. Al-Qaeda lost power in Iraq.
5. The numbers of those who want the domestic conflicts between Turkmens to cease has increased.

4.5. The Political Situation

While chaos prevailed in most parts of Iraq right after the occupation, Talafar remained quiet and stable. Public buildings were not plundered and local administrators and bureaucrats managed to keep business running as usual. During the first few months when the state lost authority, the Council replaced the government's place in Talafar. The Council consisted of tribal leaders, prominent figures and intellectuals. Thanks to the Council's management, none of the public buildings were damaged, and even the money in the cites only bank was kept safe. Unfortunately, political fragmentation and polarization began when the conflicts began.

Today, the most influential political parties in Talafar are the Iraqi Turkmen Front, ISCI, the Sadr Movement, the Iraqi Islamic Party and the Hadba List. In the Provincial Council elections held on January 31, 2009, the overall turnout was 40,000 in Talafar, where registered voters number 92,000. The main factors that influence Talafar, in terms of political parties and political atmosphere are: sectarianism, tribalism and close ties with Turkey.

Most of the Shiite Turkmens in Talafar voted for Shiite political formations such as ISCI, the Dawa Party and the Sadr Movement. This mainly due to the sectarian polarization which occurred as a result of the Sunni-Shiite conflicts in Talafar.

Although Talafar has no Kurdish population, KDP offices were opened. The KDP has 5 offices in the city, but got only 117 votes in the elections. It can be claimed that the KDP didn't expect to win in Talafar, and that is why it aimed to separate Talafar from Mosul, and annex it to Sinjar so that it would lie within the borders of the northern regional government. In order to achieve this aim, they are working among the Turkmens affected by the conflicts for the annexation of Talafar to the more stable and safe Northern Regional Government (NRG), instead of in Mosul where Sunni Arabs form the majority. Although, these ideas were initially favored by Shiite Turkmens who couldn't step out of Talafar for fear of being murdered, now the situation seems to be changing.

The Sunni Turkmen section of Talafar favors a different set of parties. The Iraqi Islamic Party is one of the most significant ones. This Sunni Islamist party is favored by the Talafarian Turkmens who consider themselves Arab. The Iraqi Turkmen Front (ITF) is undergoing a critical transition process. The ITF representative office had trouble communicating after the conflicts. It has developed a unique structure. While both Sunni and Shiite Turkmens were affiliated in the beginning, later on, the ITF turned into an organization where only Sunni Turkmens would participate. ITF offices were opened on almost

every corner in Talafar immediately after the occupation, and became centers of attraction for some tribes and prominent figures. But those offices were all closed at the end of 2004, and only one office in the northern region remained open. Consequently, tribes and power elites who were initially attracted, drifted away from the ITF. This process continued until the end of 2007. In July 2007, the ITF began to recover, and the negative traces of the past are fading slowly. The ITF opened a new representative office in the south section of the district. A list was prepared for the provincial elections which included names from both the southern and northern parts of the region. Although the list was criticized, ITF managed to come first in Talafar. From this point of view, the ITF can be considered partially successful. The ITF managed to come in first in Talafar, but only with one-sixth of the overall votes. This shows that the ITF still has a lot of preparation to do for the coming Iraqi elections. In order to achieve a clear victory in Talafar, both the ITF and the Turkish public opinion must show more interest in the issues of Talafar.

Despite its large voter potential, except for the Hadba List, Talafar was unable to send any representatives to the Mosul Provincial Council, due to the division of Turkmen opinions. But, since ITF came first, and contrary to their claims, Kurdish groups received only a few votes, Talafar is no longer considered a disputed region. It is known that this fact was mentioned in the UN's "disputed internal borders" report, although the full content of the report has not yet been published. Considering information obtained, the report denies requests for Talafar's annexation to the KRG. For now, this development can be seen as a strategic gain for Talafar.

The last and predominant fact in Talafar's politics is Turkey's great influence on Talafarians. Any kind of Turkish support and aid is greatly appreciated by the Talafarians. The treatment of their patients in Turkey elicits an especially positive reaction among Turkmens. If Turkey were to show the city more interest, make investments, and initiate enterprises with immediate concrete results, its citizens would hold even more esteem for Turkey.

5. Conclusions: Some Suggestions for Resolving Problems and Improving Life in Talafar

In Talafar, where longstanding problems became even more severe after the occupation of Iraq and economic and security issues are prevalent, short and long term strategies need to be developed and implemented in order to solve the issues as quickly as possible. Some short and long term suggestions to contribute to the solution of Talafar's problems are discussed below:

5.1. Short Term Suggestions for Talafar

As stated previously, Talafar is an economically backward region where even basic services are almost nonexistent. Before anything else, people want to see improvement in their living standards.

- Turkey's influence in Iraq might be useful for realizing large infrastructure projects. The most immediate needs are irrigation, infrastructure projects and investments that create jobs. Millions of dollars are needed to cover these expenses. The most urgently needed project is the irrigation project. Irrigation projects have been planned for Talafar in the past. The actualization of these projects would cover the water demands of the region and greatly increase the region's welfare by beginning agricultural production.
- Employment projects must be generated for Talafar. The establishment of small-scale production facilities such as yoghurt, tomato paste and flour factories in the city should be encouraged and Turkish companies in Iraq should be encouraged in this regard.
- Health service is insufficient in Talafar. Patients are eager to come to Turkey for treatment. For this reason, it would be helpful to initiate a health initiative which may include: the procurement of at least one ambulance for Talafar, the establishment of a hospital or health care center at the centre of the city, supplying the public hospital with necessary medical equipment, increasing the number of Iraqi patients in Turkish hospitals and providing additional access especially for patients from Talafar.
- Providing additional placement and vacancies in Turkey for Talafarians in the fields of education, health and commerce is also important. The people of Talafar can visit Turkey in various ways:
 - It would be helpful to open technical training courses in Turkey for different occupational groups; i.e., medical doctors, teachers and agricultural engineers to improve the quality of their services in Talafar.
 - Second, the number of students from Talafar in Turkey can be increased. Currently, there are few students from Talafar studying in Turkey. Efforts should be made to increase this number and students should be encouraged to study in fields such as medicine, pharmacy, teaching, dentistry and engineering so that they can serve their country.
 - Third, the number of patients in Turkey should be increased.
 - Finally, entrance procedures for touristic and commercial purposes can be eased.
- Another way to give a hand to Talafar is to initiate a sister city project. A Turkish municipality can become sister city to assist Talafar by providing aid, technical services and training. Talafar hardly has any trees, and Talafar's forestation project is merely the weakest of attempts. Forestation support can make visible changes in Talafar. Building playgrounds and public parks for the children of Talafar would be a major contribution to their development.
- There is a large population of young people in Talafar, most of them unemployed. These young people are mainly interested in football and other branches of sports. The

basketball team of Talafar plays in Iraq's premier league, but they cannot travel to some of their matches, due to financial difficulties. There is neither a sports facility, nor any financial support for athletes. Supporting the sports activities of young people, who may be the group most affected by the conflicts in Talafar, might be a considerable contribution for the people of Talafar. Building a small sized sports facility and distributing sports gear, gym shoes and equipment would be encouraging.

- Educational aid and support to Talafar needs to be increased. There are 50,000 elementary and secondary school students in Talafar and only 4,000 Turkish school books. This gap must be filled in order to maintain successful Turkish education in the district. The extant school buildings need maintenance. Thus, a restoration project could be carried out during the summer holidays, while the schools are closed. To increase the number of Talafari students receiving education in Turkey would also be helpful.
- Measures must be taken to build mutual trust among the people. Although the conflicts have ended, the lack of trust between the Sunni and Shiite communities persists. Therefore, large peace and reconciliation meetings should be organized to end this mistrust. Besides prominent local figures, Turkish representatives should participate in these meetings, too. Such initiatives could be organized gradually as a series of events. Tribal leaders, religious leaders, influential figures and political party representatives should be invited to these meetings, and the importance of finding solutions should be emphasized. These meetings could be organized in Talafar or in Turkey. Resolving the blood money issue is also a necessary measure for restoring trust. Talafar has a tribal social structure, and blood money payments could solve the issue. The blood money demanded for each person is about 12-20 million Iraqi dinars,

or 10,000-15,000 US dollars. Payments for similar incidents have already been financed by the Iraqi government. Turkey could make official overtures to Iraq's government to solve this issue in Talafar.

5.2. Long Term Suggestions for Talafar

During our Talafar research we were confronted again and again by the fact that the most efficient way to solve Talafar's problems would be to modify its administrative structure and to connect the region directly to Baghdad by making it a province. Similar to those living in other regions of Iraq, the Turkmens of Talafar are Iraqi citizens who are strictly loyal to their country. Therefore, the need to change Talafar's structure as a district only derives from the desire to obtain all the necessary service and assistance from Baghdad, directly. Making Talafar a province, in addition to Iraq's extant 18 provinces, seems to be the simplest way to help the people of Talafar achieve a modern, prosperous and humane way of life. Unfortunately, Iraq and some other countries in the region are unaware, both of the historical facts and the situation's importance, and therefore, they do not fully understand the importance of the idea of making Talafar a province. To make things as clear as possible, we will list the reasons:

1. Talafar has been left as a backward region since the establishment of the Iraqi state. There wasn't any investment since 1964 and the previous regime kept the city under systematic pressure. Since the city was subject to Arabization policies during Saddam Hussein's reign, Talafar should be included in the scope of "damaged regions" in Iraq, as some of the other regions in Iraq and the problems should be handled with a special approach. Talafar needs large projects, particularly in the field of irrigation and it appears to be unlikely that the city's investment needs can be met as long as it remains as a county of Mosul. The Mosul Provincial Council keeps the budget allocated by the

government under control within the scope of strategic projects and transfers it for the needs of the province center. Therefore, the only way to re-construct Talafar is to assign it as a province.

2. Talafar is the city most qualified to become a province candidate in Iraq, both in terms of its geography and demography, and considering its historical background. The idea of making Talafar a province has been put on the agenda twice, in 1977 and in 2002. Four cities has been planned to become provinces in 1977; Najaf, Duhok, Tiqrit and Talafar. Three of these cities became provinces, but not Talafar. Talafar's population is the largest of all these cities. In fact, the idea of making Talafar a province is not a new idea. It was already determined that the only way to solve Talafar's administrative issues would be to make it as a province, but the suggestion was not accepted by the Baath regime.
3. Talafar proved to be economically attractive before 2002. Economically, the city is not connected to Mosul. After Turkey opens its border at Ovacık, the city will become the main intersection of the borders shared by Turkey, Iraq and Syria, and will be well positioned to establish its own economic hinterland. After the opening of Ovacık border and being instated as a province, Talafar will become a major Iraqi trade center, and will be able to resolve its own infrastructural issues and conflicts.
4. Most of Talafar believes that Mosul is exporting violence to the city. It is a fact that the operations in Talafar began when armed groups from Fallujah spread into the region. The only way to resolve Talafar's security issues is to prevent Mosul's violent groups from coming to Talafar. It is also a fact that the nationalist Arab formation in Mosul creates pressure on Talafar's identity. That is why having a separate province would help the Turkmens of Talafar to protect their identity.
5. Considering the arguments above, discussions leading to Talafar's instatement as the 19th province of Iraq must be initiated immediately. Such an initiative would help the Iraqi Turkmens to achieve prosperity, would contribute to political reconciliation in Iraq, and would improve the living standards of Talafarians who were left behind by the former regime.

ENDNOTES

1. Meeting with the Vice District Governor, Ahmet Ibrahim, March 16, 2009. The data has been confirmed by the studying the records of identity cards issued by the Talafar Birth Registration Office.
2. Interview with Talafar District Council Migration Affairs Managing Member, Seyyid Muhammet Ali Abdulmuttalip, March 16, 2009.
3. These figures were obtained by field research.
4. Interview with researcher Fuat Ömer, March 18, 2009.
5. Interview with Muhsin Çolak, Mayor of Talafar, March 17, 2009.
6. Interview with Muhsin Çolak, Mayor of Talafar, March 17, 2009.
7. Interview with Talafar power administrator, Mr. Ali, 18 March 2009.
8. Interview with Talafar State Hospital Chief Physician, Salih Haddo Haydar Efendioğlu, March 18, 2009.
9. Interview with Talafar State Hospital Chief Physician, Salih Haddo Haydar Efendioğlu, March 18, 2009.
10. Interview with Mosul provincial directorate of education, and Turkish language inspectors, Abdulgani İlyas Efendi and Muhammed Abdurrahman, 18 Mart 2009.
11. Interview with Telafer State Hospital Chief Physician, Salih Haddo Haydar Efendioğlu, March 17, 2009.
12. Interview with Telafer Chief of Police, Ali Hadi Ubeyd, March 16, 2009.



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