

Rapor No: 7 Kasım 2009

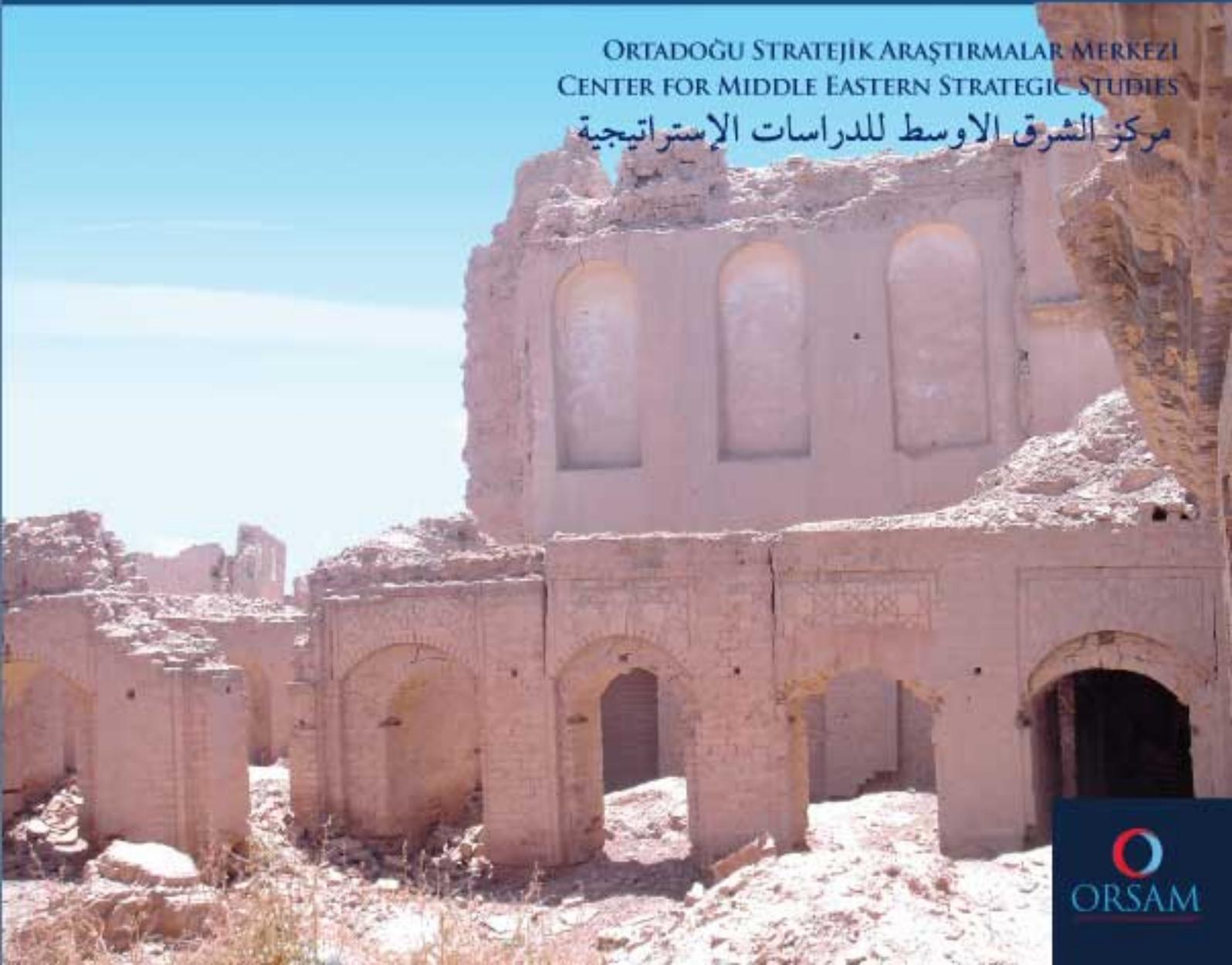
Report No: 7, November 2009

رقم التقرير: 7 تشرين الثاني 2009

UNUTULMUŞ TÜRKMEN DİYARI: DİYALA  
THE FORGOTTEN TURKMEN LAND: DIYALA  
ديالى : المدينة التركمانية المنسية ...

ORTADOĞU STRATEJİK ARAŞTIRMALAR MERKEZİ  
CENTER FOR MIDDLE EASTERN STRATEGIC STUDIES

مركز الشرق الاوسط للدراسات الإستراتيجية



# **The Forgotten Turkmen Land:**

## DIYALA

**Report No: 7**

**November 2009**

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## 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 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 re-structuring 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**

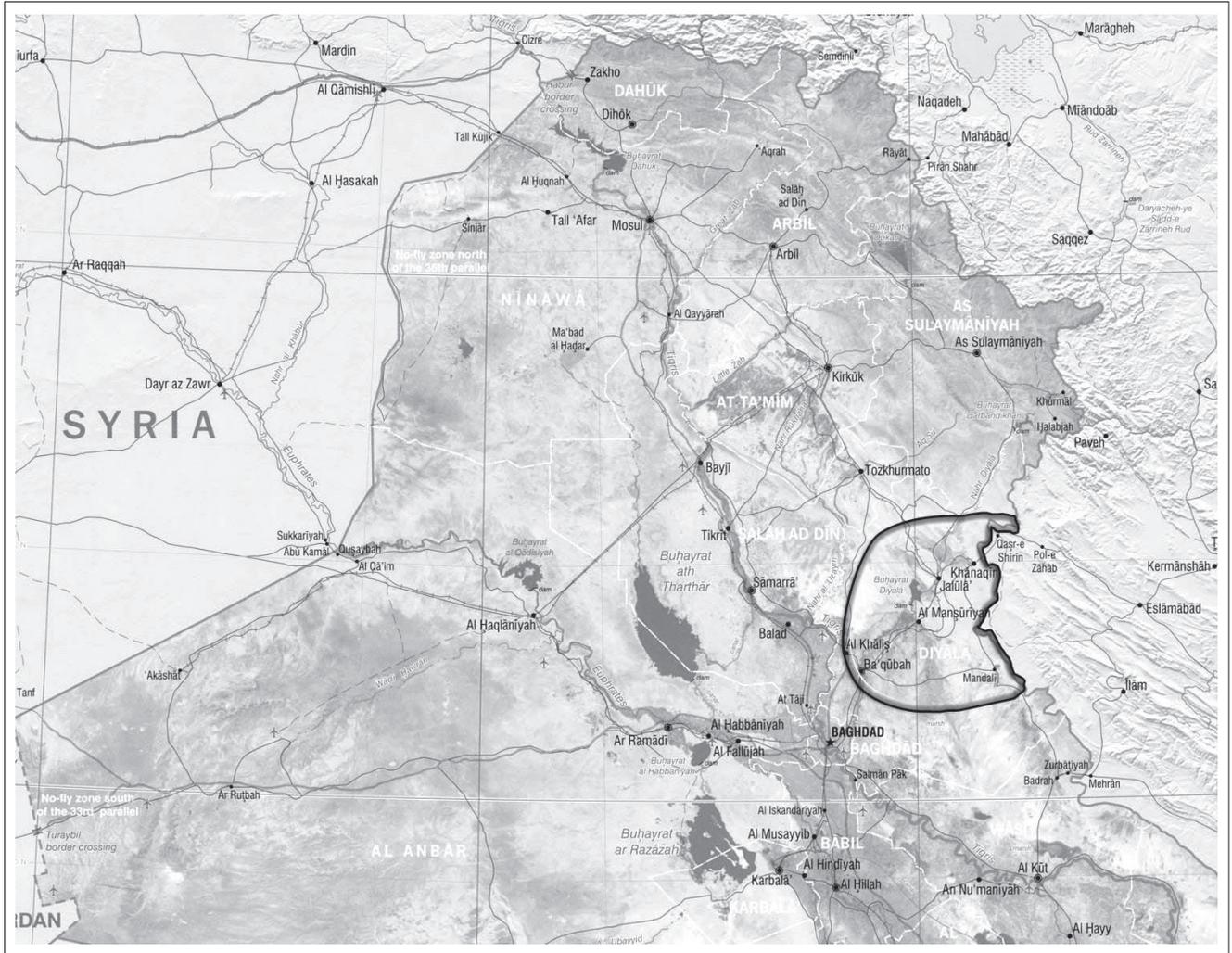
*It is certain that the Middle East harbors a variety of interconnected problems. However, neither the Middle East nor its people ought to be stigmatized by images with negative connotations. Given the strength of their populations, Middle Eastern states possess the potential to activate their inner 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. In this context, Turkey must continue to make constructive contributions to the establishment of regional stability and prosperity in its vicinity.*

### **ORSAM's Think-Tank Research**

*ORSAM, 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. 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, 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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## The Forgotten Turkmen Land: DIYALA

### *Summary*

The stability and security haven't been restored completely in Diyala, one of the most complicated and problematic provinces of Iraq. Turkmen haven't been mentioned so far in Diyala that has many problems and hasn't gone off the boil yet. The Turkmen population in Diyala has got exhausted with the effects of the conflicts, wars, repressions and poverty since the city was under pressure in Saddam's term and passed through the Iran-Iraq War. Diyala is one of the most intensive activity areas of Al-Qaida in Iraq and Turkmen have suffered from this group a lot.

Most important of all, Diyala should be remembered again and the interest shown for them should be increased despite its distance from Turkey. The Turkmen population in Diyala is lower when compared to other ethnic groups living there. Although Diyala is a big province and in the past there used to be more Turkmen clans in the city, the assimilation and changing identity are higher than any other region. Some Turkmen are insisting to keep their identities still it is very hard due to the heavy pressure on them. The life based on territory is very strong in Diyala. The Turkmen of Diyala who have a strong tribal identity are discreet people. Despite the extensive Sunni-Shia conflict in Diyala, Turkmen have never had a Sunni-Shia division among themselves or any kind of hostility towards each other. Turkmen in the region live on agriculture but poverty is increasing due to lack of water resources, ongoing conflicts and primitive agricultural techniques. Diyala has been neglected until today. Nobody has taken a close interest in Diyala and no service has been taken there. Therefore, Diyala's order of priority must be increased like Telafer, medical treatments and educational services should be improved. This way, the neglected natives of Diyala can get at least some psychological support.

## Introduction

Stability and security haven't been restored completely in Diyala, one of the most complicated and problematic provinces of Iraq. We haven't yet discussed the Turkmen in Diyala, which has many problems and is still in a state of chaos. The Turkmen population in Diyala has been exhausted by the effects of the conflict, wars, oppressions and poverty since Saddam's regime and the Iran-Iraq War. Diyala is one of the most intensely active Al-Qaida areas in Iraq, and Turkmen have suffered a lot at the hands of this organization. But, most importantly, Diyala should be recalled and interest in the city should be increased, despite its distance from Turkey. For this reason, ORSAM aims to clarify the Turkmen's situation and needs by conducting field research in Diyala. Most of the Turkmen populated-areas have been visited and interviews have been held with locals in the still unsafe region. These interviews and information based on observation are discussed in this report. Based on this information, we will offer suggestions concerning the strategic importance of Diyala, Turkmen regions and their problems.

## General Information

There are three main routes to Diyala. The first one is the road east from Baghdad to the center of Diyala, Baqubah. This route is about 50 km, but because of traffic, it takes an hour to go there. This route isn't completely safe. The control points on the route aren't tight enough. It is also said that people from Al-Qaida used to make ID checks, stopping the vehicles on this route as recently as a year ago. However, the partial success of Iraq's military operations in Diyala has provided relative security in the region again. The other route to Diyala starts from Tuzhurmatu. It's longer but safer than the first one. The third option is going to Sulaymaniyah by plane, and then reaching Diyala through Kifri. This route is also safe. The routes from Tuzhurmatu and Sulaymaniyah pass right through the Kifri junction.

## What is the Strategic Importance of Diyala?

1. The Diyala province is important because it is an area where the Kurdish Regional Government in Northern Iraq can acquire more territory. Iraqi Kurds include an important part of the Diyala province in their ideal borders for an eventual Kurdish state. The most indispensable part of the Kurdish scenario extending from Sincar in the west of Mosul to Hanekin is the province of Diyala, since annexing that province would enlarge not only the territory, but also give the Kurdish government a new border with Iran. Increased border trade with Iran would increase Iran's influence on the Kurdish region.

2. The Diyala province is very important for balance in the Kurdish region. A new Kurdish state extending from Hanekin to Tuzhurmatu, and including Arbil, Duhok and Sulaymaniyah, would not only enlarge the influence area of Iraqi Kurds, but also help the PUK, which has been losing power over the last few years, to counterbalance the KDP concerning the number of provinces.

3. The oil found in Hanekin, which is a district of the Diyala, and whose center is mainly composed of Kurds, makes this region important.

4. Since the Iraq invasion, the complex region of Diyala is the place where it is likely that civil war or a split up scenario could be triggered. Diyala is the only center where all the potential ethnic and sectarian tensions as well as conflicts can be found. For example; in Kirkuk or Mosul there may be Kurd-Arab or Kurd-Turkmen conflict; in Baghdad, Sunni-Shiite conflict; in Mosul or Salahaddin there may be conflict between the old regime's supporters and the Iraqi government or U.S. troops; Al-Qaida may fight against the government forces in Anbar. One or two of those conflicts may be seen in certain provinces at a given time. However, Diyala has an ethnic and sectarian structure that sets the stage for all of those conflicts. That's why it

comes first among the most complicated and conflict prone provinces of Iraq.

### **The Social Situation**

Turkmen and Kurds live mostly in eastern and northern Diyala, while Sunni-Arabs live in the west and south part of the city, and Kurds live mostly near the Iranian border. The Turkmen population in Diyala is lower than that of the other ethnic groups living there. Although Diyala is a large province, and there used to be more Turkmen clans in the city, the rates of assimilation and identity loss are higher here than in any other region. The most important reasons for this are its distance from Turkey; the cultural and political influence of the Arab majority; emigration, especially from Mandali, during the Iran-Iraq War; and integration with the state due to being a war zone. In addition, the spreading fear that the region will fall under the Kurdish mandate and the consequent redoubled efforts to integrate with the state have speeded up the process of identity loss.

Territorialism is very strong in Diyala. Almost all the Diyala Turkmen are members of a clan. Clan identities are highly powerful in this region, and collective identities are dominant in the region. Inter-marriage is very common between Sunnis and Shiites. However, families do not have Sunni and Shiite brothers or sisters, or a clan is separated into Sunni and Shiite branches. It may be claimed that 60% of the Turkmen in Diyala are Shiite, and the rest, Sunni. The reason we mention this is that Diyala has seen some of the most intense Sunni-Shiite conflict in Iraq. Despite extensive Sunni-Shiite conflict in Diyala, Turkmen have never had a Sunni-Shiite division among themselves or any kind of hostility towards each other. This situation is extremely important, and it shows that there is no sectarian division among Diyala Turkmen.

Diyala Turkmen are very much under the cultural influence of the Arabs. A lot more Arabic words appear in the language of Diyala Turkmen than in others. Furthermore, Arabic tra-

ditional attire is more common in this region than in others. This is extremely common even in the places of Diyala where mostly Turkmen live. Assimilation into Arab identity among Turkmen speakers is very common. For Shiite Turkmen incidents during the Iran-Iraq War, and for Sunni-Turkmen living in the Arab region and being a minority have speeded up the process of becoming Arab. Despite the existence of a minority that still protects its Turkmen identity, it is very likely that a certain portion of this minority will change their identity due to oppression, fear and assimilation. In the regions under Kurdish control near the Iranian border this occurs as assimilation into the Kurdish identity, but in the regions under the control of the Iraqi army we see assimilation into the Arab identity.

### **Diyala's Turkmen Populations and Demographic Structure**

Official numbers couldn't be obtained from a civil registry office or an equivalent government department since Turkmen living in Diyala are widely distributed. However, Diyala's villages, towns and districts were visited, and the numbers obtained during these visits are used in this report. The total Turkmen population in Diyala is estimated to be about 70,000. This is the approximate number of the Turkmen registered as Turkmen in the census, but, it may be that the actual Turkmen population in the region is over 150,000.

These are the most important areas where mostly Turkmen live, which we had the opportunity to visit during our trip to Diyala:

**Astoken Village:** Astoken Village is entirely Turkmen, and has approximately 120 households. The village is the first stop on the way from Tuzhurmatu to Diyala is quiet inside. This village is far away from the center and its road is extremely rough, so it is isolated from the security problems thanks to its geography. There is only one school in the village, and teaching is in Arabic. Agriculture still relies on rain for irrigation. However, since there is no rain, pro-

duction is impossible. As you can guess, there is a serious unemployment problem. For this reason, most of the population goes to Kifri, Tuzhurmatu and Kirkuk to work in construction. Electricity comes from Iran and is limited. The water wells don't function because of the lack of electricity. There is no health center and no doctor in the village. Patients go to Tuzhurmatu and Kirkuk. The Turkmen consciousness among the people is strong.

**Karatepe Sub-district:** Karatepe, with a population of approximately 40,000, is a sub-district where Turkmen, Arabs and Kurds live together. 62 villages are bound to Karatepe. 10 of those villages are Turkmen, 46 are Arab, and 6 are Kurdish villages. 60% of the sub-district's population is made up of Turkmen. An important part of the center's population is composed of Turkmen, also. Arabs and Kurds mostly live in the villages. The names of the villages which are bound to Karatepe are Hadeli, Yukari Alisaray, Asagi Alisaray, Kuscu (4 different villages), Gocmenler, Silsafa and Sinyer. The problem of identity loss that we have seen in other places is also found here. According to the local people, although many people speak Turkmen, the number of the people who see themselves as Turkmen is half of what it could be. It has already been indicated that there is generally no Shiite-Sunni conflict between the Turkmen in Diyala. However, there has been Shiite-Sunni conflict in this sub-district (except among the Turkmen), and many people have died in those conflicts. After the deployment of troops to this region by Iraqi army, Kurdish influence over the region began to decrease, and the influence of the Islamic Dawa Party has increased.

Karatepe has 6 schools, and classes are held in Turkmen until fourth grade. It is said that the school buildings aren't good enough, but the number of course books is sufficient. Local Turkmen's recent visits to Turkey have increased the nationalist feelings of Turkmen and their affection for Turkey.

**Celevle:** Celevle, with its population of about 70,000, is a place where many people speak Turkmen. As a larger sub-district of Diyala, an important part of Celevle's population is composed of Kurds and Arabs. Since only 20% of the inhabitants speak Turkmen, it can't be said that consciousness of the Turkmen identity is very common in Celevle. Most of the Turkmen in Celevle live in et Al-Taliya quarter, and a small portion of the population lives in Al-Shuada. 4 of the 20 district council members are Turkmen in Celevle, but not many Turkmen are given government jobs, so economic problems and unemployment are very serious.

**Kizlarbat:** Kizlarbat is part of the district of Hanekin and its total population is about 44,000. There are 15 villages in Kizlarbat. 4 of them are Turkmen villages. The names of those villages are Asriye, Zeva, Mercane and Hinni. The center of the sub-district is mostly made up of Kizlarbat Turkmen (approximately 70%). There are traces of the Ottoman Empire in Kizlarbat. Kizlarbat was able to insulate itself from Diyala's conflict and lack of security until 2007. Peshmergas were kept away, plus Al-Qaida and Iran were driven back from the town thanks to the governor of the sub-district, Mohammed Osman Ismail. Nevertheless, since his arrest, Kizlarbat has become one of the most problematic areas in Diyala. Sunni-Shiite war has started, and there have been killings on both sides. According to the locals, groups from Iran and Al-Qaida are behind incidents that have cost many Turkmen lives. Apart from Turkmen, Shiite-Arabs and Kurds called "Feyli" live in the sub-district near the Iran's border. Although the incidents began late, they have lasted until recently. It is even said that they are still going on. The Iraqi army's intervention in 2008 calmed down the conflict, but didn't totally end it.

The political effects of factionalism are seen in this sub-district, which has become one of the most important zones of Al-Qaida-Shiite conflict. While the Iraq Accord Party received 6,000

votes, 2,180 voted for the Kurd List and 1,150 voted for the Iraqi Turkmen Front (ITF). The majority of the votes in this region went to the Iraq Accord Party. The most important reason was the rise in Sunni-Shiite conflict during the last few years.

There are also security problems in the villages outside the center in Kizlarbat. The situation has improved relatively, but Al-Qaida attacks were extensive in the villages, and fear and oppression still lingers.

**Mandali:** Formerly one of the most important Turkmen settlements, today Mandali has few Turkmen. Because of emigration during the Iran-Iraq War, the total population of Mandali is about 30,000, although it used to be near 240,000. 30% of the current population is Turkmen, 60% is Arab, and 10% is Kurdish. There are 5 villages in Mandali. 4 of those villages are Arab, and one is Kurdish. Turkmen live in Neftci, Tepe, Dortsokak, Calkirmizi, Dervase, Heybekir, Taklati, Bayakli and Buyukcarsi quarters. The biggest Turkmen clans in Mandali are the Bayat, Neftciler, Cuhadar and Sequin clans. All the Turkmen in Mandali are Sunni, and the Kurds are Feyli. The security situation in the district is good, and most of its workers are in the military or police officers. Despite its proximity to Iran border, trade is very limited because of the rough roads. There is a severe drought in Mandali, and agriculture depends on the rain in Mandali. Betel nut production is extremely high under normal circumstances. However, the production has decreased substantially as a result of the drought. Unemployment is very high in Mandali. Regarding the political structure, the Iraq Accord Party, the Kurd List and the Saleh Mutlak group were the top three in the last elections. The Iraqi Turkmen Front ranked fifth with 400 votes. We saw that Turkmen locals vote for the Kurdish and Islamist Arab parties. Turkmen support the Kurds because the Kurds offer them jobs as civil servants in exchange for their votes like we also saw in certain parts of Diyala. Local Turkmen wanted an Iraqi Turkmen Front and Iraq

Accord Party alliance in the elections. During the visits before and after the election, many promises were made to the Turkmen, but none of them have been realized.

**Kazaniye:** A sub-district of Baladrooz, Kazaniye's population has been decreasing rapidly due to drought, although its population was 18,000 just a few years ago. Today its population is around 13,000, and there are between 5,000 and 5,500 Turkmen. Arabs live in Kazaniye's 16 villages. The Kurds there are Kakais, and their population is approximately 1,500 to 2,000 people. The Islamic Dawa Party won 2000 votes; SCIRI, 1000; Taki Al-Muderrisi's candidate, 800; the Kurdish list, 500 votes. The Iraqi Turkmen Front was only able to win 100 votes. The sub-district hasn't had an important security problem since the invasion, and its economy is dependent on agriculture. However, the vast majority want to be civil servants.

### **The Economic Situation**

Diyala is one of the poorest provinces of Iraq. Its economy depends mostly on agriculture. Except for the Hanekin border crossing near Iran and oil industry, the vast majority of its people earn their living from either agriculture or government jobs. The border gate is under Kurdish control. For this reason, they are relatively rich, but this is not the case for the general public. We've seen that many Turkmen in this region earn a living from agriculture, but because of the drought, conflict and backwards agricultural techniques, people are getting poorer. People turn to government jobs because they are seen as guaranteed jobs. Therefore, many people want to pull strings. As already mentioned, the border crossing is under Kurdish control, and an important amount of trade is conducted with Iran. Nonetheless, Iran thinks the goods are expensive and of poor quality, and the people living in Diyala don't want to use the goods made in Iran because of their negative feelings towards Iran. However, the interest in Turkish goods is high, and that's why the locals want to develop trade with Turkey.

### **Comments on the Political Situation**

1. The real political power rift in Diyala is between Kurds and Arabs. Turkmens' place in this general balance is weak. Sunni-Shiite Islamic parties and Kurdish groups dominate the politics in the places where Turkmens live mostly. In certain regions, Kurds even try to overcome the demographic disadvantage before Arabs by aligning themselves with Turkmens and giving them some privileges. In regions that Kurds value and try to protect (Hanekin, Celevle, Mandali, Kazaniye) Turkmens seem to be closer to Kurds. However, as long as the Iraq army provides more security in Diyala and the peshmerga forces are being eliminated, the power and control of the Kurds decreases, and the Arabs' area of influence expands. This will lead Turkmens to become closer with the Arabs for the sake of their interests and security since they are free from pressure by the Kurdish. However, Kurds greatly value Hanekin and its surroundings. That's why they try to develop good relations with Turkmens.

2. The organization of the Iraqi Turkmen Front (ITF) in Diyala is relatively weak for the following reasons:

a. Turkmens in Diyala are distributed over a vast area and disorganized. It's difficult and costly to establish a power base. It requires major resources.

b. The conflict in Diyala continues in certain regions. As mentioned above, Diyala is a province of many conflicts. Far from organizing, many people barely survived the conflict and security situation. Relatives of people working for the ITF have been killed, and this has powerfully affected the organization.

c. Diyala has been neglected until today. No one has a deep interest in Diyala and no assistance has been given there. For this reason, many Turkmens have had to cooperate with the dominant groups in the region.

3. We saw that the general political tendency of the Turkmens in the region leans towards the Islamist parties. Sunni-Shiite Islamist par-

ties have been supported by Turkmens many times. We also saw cooperation with nationalist Arabs a few times. According to the field research, Turkmens tend to vote for religious parties. The vote that the ITF received is one-fifth of the potential vote in proportion to the population. The most important cause of this may be Turkmen cooperation with the active and dominant powers because of the sectarian conflict and political pressure.

4. Very few women participate in the political arena in Diyala, and electoral turnout is extremely low. Although they say that local women don't go to polls because of the security reasons, the real reason is the political and social exclusion of women as a result of the traditional social life. Furthermore, it should be stressed that the inactivity of the women's branch, which may play a vital role in the development of the political and social awareness among women, is a very common and important problem.

5. Recently, the most popular party in Diyala is Prime Minister Maliki's Dawa Party. Support for Maliki in Diyala especially among Shiites, reached a high point after the amelioration of the security situation when many areas were put under the control of the Iraqi army.

6. Hardly anyone tries to violate or steal Turkmen lands by force in Diyala. Yet, during the government forces' withdrawal from Diyala, Turkmens seized certain state buildings and stayed there for a while. However, the exact opposite situation obtains in Tuzhurmatu. The region resists oppression, but they use their military capabilities for personal or small group interests because of the low level of politicization.

### **Suggestions for the Amelioration of the Situation in Diyala**

Since the Turkmens in Diyala have been neglected for a long time, it may be useful to start working as soon as possible in order to succeed in the census and the general election. These are the suggestions that may be useful:

1. The Diyala region should be raised to the level of Tal Afar on the priority list of Turkmen, and be the first to receive medical treatment, education facilities, effective visits from Turkey and minor assistance. This will provide psychological support to the Turkmen in Diyala who feel that they have been ignored for a long time.

2. Aid from Turkey has more effect than expected. It's extremely important to help poor families and people hurt in the conflicts, and the continuity of such aid is also important.

3. Diyala's people's visits to Turkey are as important as those of other Turkmen. Visits to Turkey not only affect the the visitor, but also create or concretize a powerful Turkey image in the minds of his or her associates. However, Turkey's interest in the region and the distribution of aid should be carried out in a balanced manner.

4. Many promises have been made to Diyala before the provincial council elections, but they have never been realized. They should be realized immediately.