

CARNEGIE ENDOWMENT FOR INTERNATIONAL PEACE

**PREVENTING CONFLICT OVER
KURDISTAN**

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MARINA OTTAWAY: Okay, even if you are not all settled down, we are going to start because we don't have all that much time. Good afternoon, everybody. Welcome to the Carnegie Endowment. I am Marina Ottaway and I am the director of the Middle East program here. In the last few months, we have come to the conclusion that it's becoming increasingly difficult to talk about the Middle East without also extending the discussion, not only, obviously, to Iraq – which we never excluded – but also a bit more to Kurdistan and the further relationship with Turkey.

And we are very glad to have with us as a nonresident associate, Henri Barkey, who has been helping us, in fact, broadening the scope of the work we have been doing. I will keep the introductions to a minimum since we have the bios of all the participants in front of you. Let me just very briefly – Henri Barkey is, as I said, nonresident associate at Carnegie, which for us, it's the most important, of course, of his positions. He's also sort of, secondarily – he's also a professor at Lehigh University and the chair of the international relations department.

Qubad Talabani is going to bring a different perspective to this issue coming as he's a representative of the Kurdistan Regional Government, has been very deeply involved – both in – first in Iraq or in Kurdistan and now here in the unfolding of the story. And finally, Ian Lesser, who is a senior transatlantic fellow at the German Marshall Fund and particularly importantly for this project, he has been leading a major project on the future of U.S.-Turkish relations at the Woodrow Wilson Center before joining the Trans-Atlantic – before joining the German Marshall Fund.

So let me, without further ado, let me give the floor to Henri Barkey, who will speak for about 15 minutes and the discussants will have about 10 minutes later on. Thank you.

HENRI BARKEY: Thank you, Marina. I want you to know that at Lehigh also, I tell them that my primary responsibilities are at Carnegie and not at Lehigh.

(Laughter.)

MS. OTTAWAY: I'm sure they liked it.

MR. BARKEY: I'll see my paycheck this year – well, this month. Let me just say very quickly what this report is about. Most of the details – the devil is of course in the details and we probably won't have that much time to go into the details, and you'll have the report and you can read it, obviously, at your leisure. The two things that this report tries to – two main ideas in this report and its implementation has to do with the fact that as the United States, especially under the presidency of Barack Obama, starts to think about disengaging from Iraq over a certain period of time, it should not take the Kurd issue for granted. This has a possibility of becoming a major spoiler in U.S. plans.

But the other main idea here is that one of the results of the 2003 invasion of Iraq has been to give an additional boost, if you want, to Kurdish nationalism in the region and to nationalist – I mean, to Kurds in all four countries where they reside: Iraq, Turkey, Syria and Iran. And whether we like it or not, this is a fact and the issue here is that events in one part, especially, of this region in Iraq tend to affect all the others.

So the other point that this report is trying to make is that instead of our traditional way in the United States of looking at the Kurdish question as a piecemeal from a country-specific perspective that maybe there is a way of thinking about this in a much more general, unified way, because we cannot separate its different components. Clearly the most important result of the 2003 invasion was the creation of a federal Iraqi state. Now, most of us know the Middle East better than I do in some respects. And to have a federal state in the Middle East is quite revolutionary.

That doesn't mean that this federal state has consolidated itself. This doesn't mean that the federal state – we still don't know the future. But clearly, this is one of the major developments. And to the extent that the Kurdistan Regional Government is now recognized constitutionally within Iraq and Kurdish is the second language, you can almost think of Iraq now as a – almost as a bi-national state. And this has consequences, obviously, for the region.

But from an American perspective, the most important, and the first priority is how do we manage – as we pull out, how do we manage the Kurdish federal region in Northern Iraq, primarily because, as the reports – and everybody knows – suggests, that the relationship between the KRG and Baghdad has not been completely solidified.

There are still major issues, the most important one of which is what to do with the disputed territories. And I should say the disputed territories that people mostly focus on – Kirkuk – is only one part of it. There's Kirkuk the city, there's Kirkuk the province, or Tamim as Saddam renamed it. But if you look at the map that's provided in this report, the disputed territories actually extend quite a bit, and then go above Mosul all the way to the Syrian border in Sinjar to Hanekin (ph) and below on the Iranian border.

So we're talking about a fairly significant piece of territory. And as United States disengages from Iraq, the last thing it wants to see is conflict over the future of northern Iraq, of the KRG and what to do with these disputed territories. Let me just – before I go into more details – and what I will mostly here is policy prescriptions for the new administration to the extent that I have the audacity, so to say, to call somebody to suggest it to them.

But there are three aspects to the Kurdish problem that potentially can create, you know, a violent conflict. Obviously the most important is the future boundaries, as I intimated here with respect to the KRG. Together with that, obviously, is also the resolution of the oil-rich and oil resources. And remember that within – as part of the constitution of Iraq, the central government and the KRG had agreed, essentially, to have a referendum in Kirkuk by the end of 2007. And we are now a year and a month-and-a-half almost since the end of that deadline and the referendum has been postponed now over a certain period – well over a year. And it doesn't look like it's going to be implemented any time soon.

For one thing, it's not just a referendum that has to be done, but it's the normalization of Kirkuk. And the normalization of Kirkuk involves not only the return of all refugees from Kirkuk – that is to say, not just Kurds, but Turcomans and anybody else who were cleansed, if you want, by Saddam Hussein. The removal of the people that Saddam brought to that part of Iraq, but also most importantly, the back or the reverse gerrymandering of the province of Kirkuk.

Saddam had taken the parts of Kirkuk that were heavily Turcoman or heavily – or Turkmen as I used in the report – Turkmen or Kurdish and taken them out of that region to make it more Arab so that there would not be secessionist demands on Kirkuk. So that has to be reversed. And once you've done this, you have to have a census. And after the census, you can – it's only then that you can have a referendum. And you can see that these issues are still very much alive given the fact that we had provincial elections this past Sunday in – not this Sunday, the Sunday before – in Iraq.

And in the provincial elections, certain parts of the country did not participate, and Kirkuk was one of the areas that did not participate, precisely because of the sensitivity of this thing. And in Kirkuk, you have, obviously, not just the Arab-Kurdish dimension, but you also have the Turkmen-Kurdish problem within the city of Kirkuk. But the danger of Kirkuk is that it can spill over to other parts of northern Iraq – not just the Kurdish areas, but into cities, like Mosul, which is primarily majority Arab but has large Kurdish populations and also Nineveh province.

And I think that the election results – I haven't seen the detailed breakdown yet, but – show that there is already – Nineveh province, which Mosul belongs to – has been won by essentially a very anti-Kurdish Sunni party. So that's one problem. The other problem, of course, is the relationship between the KRG and Turkey. For a long time, that relationship was very fractured. The Turks tried very hard to prevent the creation of a federal Iraq. And what they don't want now is obviously for northern Iraq to go independent and certainly for Kirkuk not to become part of the KRG, for the simple reason that if Kirkuk becomes part of the KRG, then Kirkuk will have oil resources and therefore it will be able to secede.

This is also a fear that the rest of Iraq has about. But the problem with the KRG is not simply the fact that – it's not just the issue of Kirkuk, but it is also the fact of the demonstration effect it has on the Kurds of southeastern Turkey. And there's no question that when you look at the politics of Turkish Kurds, there has been a degree, if you want, of self confidence as Northern Iraq has become more solidified and more independent, if you want. But there is also the problem of the PKK, which is partially based in Turkey and partially based in – this is the Kurdistan workers' party – in Northern Iraq.

And for a long time, the presence of the PKK was a major sore point between the United States and Turkey because the Turks pointed out that they had legally the right to intervene in northern Iraq because people were coming from northern Iraq and attacking Turkish targets and United States did not want to upset the delicate balance in the North. But this seems to be at least – has been resolved, to some extent – starting in December 2007, when United States gave a green light to the Turks to start doing cross-border incursion – mostly by aircraft through targeted bombings with intelligence that United States also has given the Turks.

But this – northern Iraq still remains as a flashpoint. And in many respects, northern Iraq has become, in the Turkish imagination, the one major problem between the United States and Turkey, because many people in Turkey do genuinely believe that United States went to war in Iraq for one and one purpose only, and that is to create a Kurdish state in northern Iraq and maybe a Kurdish state in Turkey itself.

So you have a great deal of lack of trust, if you want, between Turkey and United States even though there is now there has been a rapprochement. Part of the answer to this is to get the KRG and the Turks to cooperate more. And it's interesting when I started writing the report – and of

course it has nothing to do with it, but and I started a long time ago – relations between the KRG and Turkey were quite difficult. And since then there's been a great deal of improvement.

There has been a change in Turkey, at least in the government and also within the military that they should deal with the KRG. Until recently they did not want even to – they don't recognize the KRG still to this day – but they did not want even to talk to the KRG. But that has changed and there's a great deal more cooperation between the KRG and Turkey and this is actually one of the most positive parts of the story.

Finally, Iran and Syria, and this is part of the least focused in the report. Iran and Syria are very worried about northern Iraq. They're worried for the obvious reasons that their own Kurdish populations are also getting incited, if you want, by the presence of northern Iraq and the achievements that northern Iraq has made. And there has been events in Syria where Kurds have rebelled, where Kurds have demonstrated I should say, rebelled is probably too strong.

In Iran you do have the PKK offshoot, the Iranian offshoot of the PKK, Pejak, which is based in northern Iraq, which has used Iraqi territory to attack Iran. But there's a great deal of unhappiness among Iranian Kurds. So what is it that the United States needs to – how does the United States need to think and what its priorities should be? Clearly for the United States the most important priority is maintaining the territorial integrity of Iraq. And to do that how do you get there?

It seems to me that the provincial election results of last week make sure that there is more of a tendency now for a recentralization of Iraqi politics in Iraqi society. But I would argue that the best possible solution for Iraq is for that federal structure – and the boundaries is something we can discuss later – for that federal structure to be really consolidated, because without a consolidation of that federal structure, then you will have potential, the tendency of Kurds to go for secession.

You have to remember that the Kurds have been running their territory since 1991 so for all intents and purposes for 18 years now they have been independent. Yes, the conditions have not always been great in northern Iraq. Sometimes the PUK and the KDP, the two main parties, have fought with each other, but nonetheless there is now not much of a memory of central Iraqi government control in northern Iraq; in education, in all variety of structures.

So trying to – as the United States thinks of leaving it has to make sure – and I go into the details of what the United States in northern Iraq of consolidating northern Iraq – number two: It has to improve Turkish-KRG relations. As I said this has started but it is always hostage to domestic politics, whether in northern Iraq or in Turkey and it is, I think, United States engagement to this day hasn't really happened, to make sure that Turkey and the KRG continue to cooperate.

Both sides have a great deal to gain. The only exit for the KRG is Turkey into the modern world. If you ask – and you can ask Qubad after, if you ask the Kurds what choice do they want in terms of exit, is it Turkey, Syria or Iran or the rest of Iraq, they will all tell you that it's Turkey. Turkey is the country that is actually closest in many respects to the Kurds who are much more secular than the rest of Iraq, and certainly Iran.

But also in terms of trade Turkish economy is far more advanced. Turkish economy is closer to Europe. For all these reasons it is important. But for the Turks as well, I mean the KRG

actually, the Turks have always looked at the KRG as a potential hostile area, but in fact that approach can be reserved.

Yes, I'm not saying that Kurds and Turks love each other and that there is a great deal of – but there are a lot of commercial interactions between the two sides and that has created a bond. And most importantly politically Turkish Kurds do look to northern Iraq as a potential area for which they are very proud of. And it is a place they can – it actually help enhances their identity as Kurds, but also it reduces necessarily their desire to have a separate Kurdish state. But there are unquestionably problems in Turkey, which I will get to in a minute, so that's number two.

Number three and critical to this second step is the demilitarization of the PKK. The PKK has remained in northern Iraq in part in areas that are quite inaccessible to the KRG forces and the United States has done nothing to remove them, in part because it cannot afford to send troops there. That said, there is a way to demilitarize the KRG, which I go into, and that's a very important way of removing from a Kurdish perspective the single greatest hindrance to KRG-Turkish rapprochement, because the Turks have been very suspicious of the KRG's approach, until recently I should say, to the PKK and I think now they are starting to be convinced that both the KRG Barzani and the Iraqi President Talabani are serious about doing something about the PKK. But the truth is that even the PKK issue I don't think can be resolved – cannot be resolved without U.S. intercession.

So, finally, the two points I would like to make before she stops me – the Turkish-Kurdish question, ultimately, I would say, is the 800-pound gorilla in this issue. Why? Because Turkey for the United States is the single most important country in the region. Turkey, as you know, is a NATO – Turkey is a country that is trying to become a member of the European Union, and until then and unless it does resolve this issue of its own domestic Kurds, the Europeans are going to find reasons not to let the Turks in because for them this is actually a very critical issue.

So helping resolve the Turkish-Kurdish question is important. I'm not saying that we can do it, and I'm not saying that this is easy; it is in many ways the most difficult part. But there are things that we can do from, as I said earlier, in terms of demilitarize the PKK to help NGOs and track-two diplomacy help bring the two sides and Turkey together. But again, the details are –

Finally, on Syria and Iran, I mean, the one thing, one of the fears of course after 2003 in Iran and Syria was that in the words of the former John Bolton was, take a number, if you remember what he said about Iran and Syria; that they were going to be next after we clean up Iraq. Well, first of all life has not turned out to be that way but to both Iranians and Syrians, and especially Iranians, who fear that we are going to be using or actually are using, if you believe Seymour Hersh, the Iranian Kurds as a potential destabilizing element in Iran.

Now, President Obama is talking about a completely new approach but I also suggest that it is important to send a clear message to Iranians and the Syrians that we are not interested in fanning the flames of Kurdish nationalism all over the region, not in Turkey. We want a legitimate resolution of the problems but we are not about to – we are not thinking about using the KRG in northern Iraq as a means of undermining both of these regimes.

And, finally, in terms of implementation and remember, I mean you will see that when you read the report, that I talk about somewhat the restructuring of policy-making in the State

Department at the NSC with respect to this. And, of course, I wrote this before – (chuckles) – not only that, not before yesterday, before this was this proliferation of special envoys. And one of the things I do recommend is not necessarily a special envoy but some kind of coordinator because, politically thinking, you know, Turkey is part of Europe so European folks deal with Turkey.

The European military command deals with Turkey but Iraq and Iran obviously are under NEA or CENTCOM and sometimes getting our part of the – different parts of our government to talk to each other is more difficult than getting, let's say, the KRG and the Turks talking to each other. You can actually say, look at this table you have people from the Turkish Embassy and the KRG at the same table.

But getting CENTCOM and EUCOM together – (laughter) – in that sense. So part of what I was recommending was a special coordinator but of course I suspect this is not going to be very well-viewed, but the other thing that occurred to me again yesterday is that maybe Denis Ross can do it since he needs more than Iran to be able to be acceptable to the Iranians. Thank you.

MS. OTTAWAY: Thank you and thank you for not having to be interrupted. (Laughter.) Okay, Qubad, please.

QUBAD TALABANI: Thank you, thanks to the Carnegie Endowment for putting this event together and putting this great report together and congratulations to the author. It's a pleasure to be here. I'll keep my remarks short so that we can have a more engaging Q&A. But, the issues that Henri has outlined in this report are all very critical to the viability of the Iraqi state and in particular for the U.S. administration as it tries to develop a sound policy for Iraq. We hope that the U.S. will treat Iraq in a more strategic way – deal with Iraq in a more strategic way – as it has done in the past if it wants to get out of Iraq quietly, peacefully.

And if it wants to leave behind an Iraq that is functioning and stable, then several of the issues that is outlined in this report must be addressed. Those include the resolution of the disputed territories in Iraq which Kirkuk, as a province, is one of them. There has to be the development of a sound natural-resources policy that is not just about agreeing on a hydrocarbons law and on a revenue-sharing law, but the actual implementation of this law, the actual distribution of revenues in a fair and equitable way to all people of the country; to the regions, to the provinces in a transparent way that gives people in the region the trust that the federal government in Baghdad is actually functioning.

This comes to the next point which is the implementation of federalism and moving beyond this abstract concept that federalism is to most people in my part of the world to actual something tangible and physical that is implemented that people begin to see its institutional structures and begins to govern the country in accordance to law and to applying the rule of law in Iraq; not just the rule of a personality that holds a powerful position in a country and makes decisions alone on behalf of that country.

And, again, we strongly believe in improving the relationships between the Kurdistan Regional Government and Turkey. And I'm proud to say, if you look back one year ago today there was a hundred thousand Turkish troops amassed on our border. In fact, this may have been the launch of one of the incursions into the Kurdistan region a year ago today. And the relationship was in a very dire situation.

Thankfully, the situation is a lot better now. There is an improved level of dialogue between the two sides. The discussions are ongoing and the atmosphere is a lot better. We still have a long way to go but I think the U.S. should be cognizant of this fact that the better the relationship between Turkey and the Kurdistan region, the more stable Iraq is going to be, the more greater peace of mind is going to be within the United States. And I think that it has to be in the U.S.'s strategic regional interest for there to be a strong relationship between Turkey and the Kurdistan region of Iraq. We understand that and that's why we have forged ahead with our dialogue with the development of the talks and we're hoping that this development will continue.

I chuckled as I read through the report when Henri talks about the interagency issues and the fact that the EUR Bureau and the NEA Bureau. And as somebody that for nine years has tried to navigate that bureaucracy, it really did hit home because these bureaus rarely talk to each other, they all communicate up to their chain of command and by the time it gets to the undersecretary level a lot of points are missed.

So we would strongly welcome a special coordinator for these issues that would have senior-level access to the secretary of state or to the president. We don't care if it's called an envoy or a representative or a rapporteur, whatever it can be called, but to have some kind of focal point that can deal with these issues, again, on a strategic level because the issues are vast, there are many different issues.

There is the politics of Baghdad and the implementation of a federal system in the country; there are some technical issues which have strong political components such as the resolution of the disputed territories and then you have some things that have broad economic influences on the country which is sound natural-resource policy for the country.

These cannot be addressed ad hoc they have to be thought of in a more strategic way and I think to have a focal point in the U.S. government to try to address these issues will be that strategic way of thinking and of finding a way of addressing these problems. Each one of those issues if left unresolved could potentially destabilize Iraq. Each one of them is as important as the other and I think this administration would be wise to look into this in a very clear and concise way. This cannot just be kicked down the road now. Every year that we do not resolve the issue of the disputed territories tensions raise, the tensions are exacerbated and enemies of the state are able to manipulate the tensions that are exacerbated.

Every year that Iraq does not develop a sound natural-resources policy, the country as a whole suffers but, again, resentment raises. A lot of people have criticized the Kurdistan Regional Government for entering into production sharing agreements with international oil companies. But now it is clear that what we have done is actually beneficial to Iraq. Iraq has invested \$8 billion dollars in the infrastructure of its oil resources, yet production has declined. This is unacceptable; this has to be unacceptable. It's certainly unacceptable to us.

Through our efforts in signing these production-sharing agreements we're hoping to boost production of Iraqi oil and now that the price of oil in the market is nowhere near what it was a year ago I think there is going to be a greater tendency and a greater urgency coming out of Baghdad to find a resolution to this issue.

So each one of these issues are important; we stand committed as the Kurdistan Regional Government to work with the U.S., to work with our partners in Baghdad to resolve these issues. We stay committed to working with our neighbors in particular Turkey to improve and build on the environment that has been created to actually develop tangible policies that will lead to lasting peace and, more importantly, we are certainly committed to the title of this publication which is, "Preventing Conflict over Kurdistan," because we have seen too much conflict.

We have had our fair share of conflict; our internal and international conflicts. And we are now at a point where we're developing our infrastructure, we're developing our economy, we're developing our institutions of government in the Kurdistan region and it is something that we are certainly proud of. We're hopeful that the United States should be proud of it because of your contribution to our development. And we're hopeful that Turkey is in fact proud of it because Turkey and Turkish companies do make up the majority of the investment in the Kurdistan region.

There are over 700 Turkish companies today operating in Iraqi Kurdistan whereas there are only nearly probably around 40 American companies in the North. So there is benefit to all sides in a prosperous and stable Kurdistan region of Iraq. We are the most democratic force in the country. We do need to develop our democratic institutions and I think, again, what is in this report is welcomed by the Kurdistan region when it talks about an elevated U.S. presence in the Kurdistan region.

The regional reconstruction team that is there today are doing a fantastic job with very little resources, but elevating that kind of presence to a more traditional consular-type representation will not only be beneficial to the U.S., and especially if it has a strong commercial office, to attracting investment in the Kurdistan region, but it can also be helpful to us as we develop our civil society, as we develop our institution, where we can work with the various different NGOs and take the kind of expert advice that we can get on issues such as transparency, the rule of law and good governance.

So I commend the Carnegie Endowment for this effort and we stand ready to assist anyone that wants to help us to get to where we want to be, which is to live in peace and prosperity and live with our neighbors and live with each other. But we do have major and significant challenges that do require significant external involvement and engagement. And I'll end my remarks there. Thank you.

MS. OTTAWAY: Thank you, Ian.

IAN LESSER: Marina, thank you very much. Well, first of all let me just again add my congratulations to Henri and to the Carnegie Endowment for the report, for choosing the issue, for the analysis and for the recommendations which I found really right on the money. Let me just make a couple of observations to follow on what has already been said really in three areas.

First on this question of the meaning for Turkey specifically, secondly on the Turkey-KRG relations, and then finally on the EU-U.S. strategy piece of this. On the internal side, I mean, I share Henri's assessment absolutely that this question of how Turkey deals with its own Kurdish issue, how it deals with it across the border, is absolutely a bellwether in terms of Turkey's evolution in many, many ways: socially, politically in terms of its foreign policy.

Not only is it interwoven in Turkey's own debate in action but also in how others will see Turkey as well. There's clearly been a cycle, which Henri talks about very accurately in the report, at a certain phase over the decades the situation inside Turkey on the Kurdish issue has actually been very bad; and I think many Turks would acknowledge that, and many Kurds in Turkey would acknowledge that.

There has been a fairly dramatic improvement recently. Whether it extends into the kind of geopolitical and strategic realm or it remains confined to the cultural realm remains to be seen. But, I mean, there has been a tremendous expansion of broadcasting in the Kurdish language and so on. I'd be interested in your thoughts about how significant that really is and how it's seen across the border, but people are taking note of that.

I think one of the quite interesting things, remarkable things really about, this very difficult problem in Turkey, challenge of the last decades, is that it doesn't ever seem to have acquired a true inter-communal character. There has been tremendous violence, there has been tremendous unrest, unhappiness, dislocation, human-rights issues, all the rest of it, but one thing you've really not seen in recent decades anyway in Turkey has been violence between Kurdish communities and Turkish communities over issues of identity per se. I'm leaving aside here the PKK phenomenon, which is obviously quite different, but in neighborhoods in Istanbul, you know, you really don't see this.

One of the things, I think, Turks do worry about is that conditions could go back again to something much worse, to the kind of violence the Turks saw in the mid 1990s that could, under these circumstances today, with higher nationalism, feelings of nationalism and so on, in Turkey and in the region, produce that kind of inter-communal violence. I don't predict that at all but I think it's one of the pieces of this that leads to the Turkish stake, which is really very high.

The economic piece of this, I think, is also very remarkable along the lines that you've just mentioned. I think Turkey's really very dominant position in terms of investment and trade with northern Iraq, which is acquiring very important not only national but very specific regional implications inside Turkey.

I was just in Gaziantep a few weeks ago and some of you may be familiar with this but Gaziantep is one of the cities in Turkey that is very well-known for its entrepreneurial culture and its small- and medium-sized enterprises and its export-driven economy and so on. They have a very high percentage of their trade with Syria but in particular with Iraq and northern Iraq; they're very close, not very far away. The truck traffic is very heavy and so on. So there is this interdependence and a real acknowledgement of it when you talk to people in Gaziantep.

Now, I think this takes on some even more important meaning when you think about the effects of the economic crisis, which are beginning to be felt very strongly in Turkey. The point was made to me by several people, and it sounds right, that at a time when Turkey as a whole is suffering a shrinkage of its export markets, mainly to Europe, these markets in the Middle East become even more important. And if that goes on for a few years, as I'm afraid it probably will, in terms of the global crisis, many other kinds of ties, cultural, political and so on could be reinforced and it's worth thinking through the meaning of that.

My second point would be on the Turkish-KRG relationship. I think Henri captures these dynamics very well in the report and they've been elaborated on here. Let me just mention a couple

of other things. In terms of Turkey's own perception, the depth of this suspicion about Western policy, anxiety over what might happen across the border, and anxiety about Kurdish separatism and potentially irredentism I don't say that's necessarily a real fear but the fear is very real in Turkey.

The suspicion of the kind of role the West is playing in that has clearly grown over the years; it's not new. I would just underscore that this is not just public opinion although public opinion counts in Turkey; it's also among elites who really are genuinely suspicious of American policy towards this issue. Even as far as imagining that somehow the United States would countenance, you know, separatism on Turkish territory. Why we would want that for a NATO ally is impossible to fathom. But people who should know better will sometimes make this argument.

So this problem of suspicion and linked to it, I think Henri's very important point about the importance of second-track diplomacy, beyond just government-to-government discourse, to try to get at some of that is absolutely critical, but it's a big issue, especially as nationalism is growing. Before the most recent PKK upsurge in PKK violence there was a debate that was growing in Turkey about whether perhaps Turkey in some way could strategically live with an independent Kurdistan.

There was a fairly open debate about this at a certain point among the strategic class in Turkey. It stopped after a certain point but people were seriously talking about this. Not only in terms of the economic relationship but, you know, just simply perhaps if this was going to come in some fashion, or at least an increasingly autonomous Kurdish region in Iraq perhaps Turkey could not only live with that but somehow find a way to take advantage of it. This is not a mainstream view by any means but the fact that you have had debates that started about this in Turkey is, I think, quite telling.

On the PKK, again, I think it's important to underscore just how searing an experience PKK violence, especially in the 1990s was, for the Turkish public and Turkish elite. Something like, perhaps, 40,000 we can debate the numbers but there were very high, individuals on all sides were killed in the 1990s as a result of the insurgency and the counterinsurgency and so on.

This really was a searing experience and there was always behind this the potential for something that would more closely resemble urban terrorism in Turkey as an offshoot of the PKK phenomenon. Now, that never really did get going but it could under other circumstances and so I think when one starts to think through strategies for either containing or demobilizing, whatever the term you choose might be, for the PKK you have to sort of think that, you know, you may not solve the whole problem. There may be a real PKK out there or however they may turn themselves who will carry on the fight in other ways and keep this thing going.

Finally, my last point is on the European Union and the U.S. You know, again, I think Henri gets this exactly right. As far as Turkey's own troubled European Union candidacy is concerned, whatever that relationship looks like in 10 or 15 years' time, and it is that kind of timeframe, this issue is going to be quite central, not only in terms of its role as a marker of where Turkey is in terms of internal liberalization but also in terms of Europe's sort of cost-benefit analysis of what it means to have Turkey as a member.

An unstable Iraq, an unstable northern Iraq, a continuing insurgency and counterinsurgency is not – these are not the kind of conditions that a Europe already skeptical about Turkish

membership is going to want to see. So it's an important stake for Turkey, for Europe, for the U.S. to manage this.

Can the U.S. do the kind of things that Henri identifies and be trusted in doing them? It's a somewhat separate question and it ties into the broader issue of how the U.S.-Turkish relationship evolves in the coming years. But I think if they do have this climate of suspicion, that is very pervasive, it's going to be very difficult in detail to do some of the things that you quite rightly point to as being useful. So there is both a detailed piece to this but also an atmospheric piece to this in terms of building trust.

My own view is that, you know, we have not done nearly enough with Turkey outside the issue of the PKK, which has been important, beyond that on Iraq diplomacy generally and the Baker-Hamilton report pointed to the need to bring in partners. We debate heavily in Washington the wisdom of, and making this a central issue with Iran, for example if there was a détente with Iran. This could require a revolution in American foreign policy. It doesn't require a revolution in American foreign policy to engage Turkey as a NATO ally on this question; so my point there is: PKK plus other things.

And then finally on this question of the envoy, well my reaction, you know sort of half humorously was exactly the one we've heard. Well, another envoy, you know, we have a few already but I understand the point that's being made about the utility. I would simply leave as an open question whether going down that road of appointing a special envoy is a coupling or decoupling, if I can use that term, in terms of integrating this issue within the larger picture of U.S. Middle East policy; it may or it may not. Maybe it's better to put it in the bureaucracy and do it actively and properly with the attention of the administration and so on.

I don't know the answer to that, it's just it seems to me an important open question. There are some others like getting Europe and the United States on the same page with this which I won't touch, but, again, let me just end by congratulating you on really a terrific analysis. Thank you.

MS. OTTAWAY: Thank you, Ian. Henri, do you want a few minutes to reply?

MR. BARKEY: No, thanks.

MS. OTTAWAY: Then I think we are going to open it up. I'll take a few questions at a time. Let me start back there, here and here. You will be the first three. There should be a microphone coming your way, it's coming from there. And, please, all of you identify yourselves.

Q: My name is David Phillips. I'm faculty of Columbia University, and the director of the Atlantic Council's new Turkey initiative. Congratulations to you on a good report. I think we all agree that the two flashpoints for conflict are really the Kirkuk question and the PKK. Since there already is a constitutionally mandated arrangement for addressing Kirkuk, I'd like to pose a question to each of the panelists on the PKK matter.

Qubad, you've talked about your improved relations with Turkey. A year ago when the hundred thousand troops were massed on the Iraqi-Kurdistan border there was a lot of pressure on the KRG to do more, and you made certain commitments at the time. Could you enumerate those

commitments, evaluate their implementation and suggest additional commitments that could be made coming forward?

Ian, you talked about a DDR strategy for the PKK and, you know, clearly that involves some process for addressing the enormous human suffering of the 1990s. Has the German Marshall Fund or other groups studied comparative truth and reconciliation processes. And of course such a process would need to involve some kind of amnesty arrangement. So have you looked at staged amnesty arrangements and amnesty qualifications based on the degree of involvement of PKK fighters?

And then my question for Henri has to do with your recommendation for what you called U.S. intercession. There clearly has been efforts in the past to have high-profile American diplomats or special envoys, usually with a security background, work in Iraqi Kurdistan. How would you evaluate their success, if that is a negative evaluation why have they failed, and would that U.S. special envoy have a broader regional mandate focusing also on democratization and development issues for Turkey, which is indeed a root cause of the conflict? And, if so, how could the Turks be assuaged that that in fact is not a step towards a U.S. support for greater Kurdistan?

MS. OTTAWAY: Okay, Professor Phillips, you caught me by surprise and I let you have three questions. I'm not going to continue letting everybody having three questions or we never get through. (Laughter.) Okay, there was a question over here, the microphone, and your name please.

Q: Thank you, my name is Aydin Selcen and I am a consular at the Turkish Embassy here in D.C. In fact Professor Phillips covered a few of my issues, my questions. But I would make few brief comments, few sentences if I may. First, very briefly, concerning the U.S. – Turkish relations through the Iraq perspective; now, of course, after hitting rock bottom in 2003, now our relations with Iraq can be marketed here, in fact, I'm able to market those as a model of cooperation. This concerns both the KRG piece and our relations with Baghdad in general.

So I guess I understand that the report is a bit dated as Henri suggested, but now is, there is, this is not a sticking point anymore in Turkish – U.S. relations; this is one point. Secondly speaking, approaching the so-called Kurdish issue without taking into consideration the existence of international borders and so on so forth, I guess it's that we should make it as a approach in general. We should take a difference between the cultural issue, the counterterrorism issue, I mean PKK, and then the political relations between Turkey and Iraq.

PKK is a terror organization and we have to be able to cooperate with the regional government and with Baghdad to eradicate PKK. But this is not a question we should be, I guess, put into the other general issue. My question would be, in addition to the, I was going to ask also about the comment said, the counterterrorism aspect, but also I was going to ask: How do you think, any of them can answer, but especially Qubad, the energy aspect – How do you see the interplay of the Bagdad regional government taking into consideration that the hydrocarbon law and the revenue sharing law is being debated? And take into consideration Turkish contribution to the passage of SOFA, Status of Forces Agreement, and the provincial elections law, how do you see the interplay between Ankara, Baghdad and Erbil in the future; especially with a focus on energy issues. Thank you very much.

MS. OTTAWAY: Let's start taking these, because there are so many questions here and you'll get the next one. (Chuckles.) Okay, go ahead.

MR. TALABANI: I'll answer David's question first and I'll come on through Aydin's, vis-à-vis what the KRG has done to try to solve, not solve this issue, but work towards reducing the tensions. And first and foremost we made it absolutely clear that is not our policy to have any group in our territory to attack any of our neighbors or to conduct activities in any of our neighboring countries from our territory.

Now, that is a policy statement. The implementation of that policy statement was that what we did, we created a security belt around where the PKK are today in the Kurdistan region, which is in the Kandil mountain range, very rugged mountain terrain area; villages scattered along this area but no real larger towns or cities. We prevented our airports to be used by anyone affiliated or associated with the PKK and we were monitoring goods and traffic that was going up into the villages of the Kandil mountain range to make sure that there were no ammunitions or weapons going into that area.

We are overseeing the main official checkpoints and border crossings between Turkey and the KRG; we can monitor and control. But the reality is the PKK is not just present in the Kurdistan region, but it also has a significant presence inside Turkey as well. And furthermore they are also able to navigate the border with Iran and come into Turkey from Iran if they chose to. So there are certain things that are outside of the control of the KRG but we've done all that we can within our control to try to limit the impact of the PKK on Turkey.

But what's, I think, more important is that there is an understanding on all sides that this issue, this PKK issue that is decades old, cannot be resolved militarily. That there has to be a comprehensive and broad ranging policy that is political in nature, that is economic in nature, that is social in nature that may have some security components to it. But for so many years the only topic on the table has been the military cooperation if any were to exist.

Now, there is an understanding, I think, on the U.S. side, on the KRG side, and even on the Turkish side that this requires a far more sophisticated strategy; that 30 years of armed conflict between the two sides has not resulted in any success on anybody's side. Should I answer Aydin's question as well?

MS. OTTAWAY: Yeah, okay.

MR. TALABANI: The issue of energy, I think has again, can be a major contributor to improved relationships between Turkey and Iraq and in particular between Turkey and the Kurdistan region. Again, I expressed my frustrations at the slow pace of development on developing a national oil law and a national oil structure in Baghdad. But I think there is an understanding that the vast energy resources that we have in Iraq, and in particular in the Kurdistan region can be beneficial to Turkey, can be beneficial to Europe. There is many things that we can discuss with the U.S. with Turkey that is of a much greater strategic relevance and of geopolitical relevance that is, I think, beneficial to all sides.

So continued engagement by Turkey with Bagdad on creating an oil law that is reflective of the constitution of the country, that is decentralized, that is not state controlled, that is not a state

monopoly; one that allows for international partnerships in the development of the natural resources sector of Iraq will be welcomed. Of course, engagement by the U.S. on this fact will be welcomed, but it will be welcomed as long as it's in accordance with what the country's constitution states.

On all of these issues that is outlined in this report and that we highlighted as potential flashpoints, they all revolve around a single issue; and that is, what is the law of Iraq, what is the law of the land. We have a constitution in this country and unless we come to an agreement on this constitution none of these issues: hydrocarbons law, federalism, oil law will be addressed.

So this is something to bear in mind as people are making recommendations, as policies are being formed; they have to be in accordance to the nation's constitution. Otherwise it will be rejected and, you know, we fought long and hard to have a constitution that is viable and we uphold and respect this constitution and as long as that is the case then the Kurds will be full and willing partners in Iraq as we move forward.

MS. OTTAWAY: Thank you, Ian.

MR. LESSER: Well, just on David's question, well, first of all, David, I mean, you're absolutely right, I mean, this is an important issue. Someone ought to be looking at this in detail including the lessons learned from other cases on this amnesty and reconciliation set of issues; German Marshall Fund, to my knowledge has never done that, there may be others who have. Certainly there is a body of analysis from other cases, from Northern Ireland; Algeria came to mind as you were talking about this that might be worth looking at.

I would just say though, my own sense is that I think a lot of Turks, although at some point that political piece of the issue of the strategy is going to become critical. And Turks already talk about this quite actively. I mean, even those who are focused very specifically on the security dimension. The Turkish General Staff talks even about the economic and political dimensions although, you know, still to spin this out in terms of amnesty and so forth, I'm not sure Turkey is quite there yet; eventually you might get there.

It strikes me as the kind of thing that at the end of the day only Turks and Kurds can do for themselves. I think it would be extremely difficult, other than the softest of sort of second-track NGO activity, to get, to envision either an American or a European role in that; however worthwhile it might be at some point in the future.

MR. BARKEY: David, your question about previous attempts at U.S. envoys, the most important one is a guy called Joe Ralston, General Ralston, who was sent as a "PKK Envoy" and I was never sure what it meant – (laughter) – but I think he didn't know what it meant either so – and it was a very frustrating experience for him because he was very – his mandate was very restricted, he wanted to do more, he actually felt very much in terms of looking at the issue beyond the PKK and looking at relations with the KRG, et cetera.

But there was no backing, it was really, it was a Bush administration's way of buying some time as the Turks were pressing the United States to do something about the PKK or allow the Turks to do cross-border operations and the Bush administration came up with this envoy. That's not what I have in mind I don't call it an envoy, but a coordinator. But on a more general point of amnesty and how – I mean, I do really believe that when you look at the PKK component of this;

remember the Turkish army, which is the second largest army in NATO has fought for 20 years against the PKK and has yet to get the best of it. And, you know, these kinds of, you know, when you have these kinds of insurgencies and especially an insurgency that can cross borders and go whether it's into Iran or Iraq; they are very hard – they are very obviously very hard to defeat.

Moreover, the one thing that we forget is that this insurgency has popular support in Turkey. And you know when you look when you talk to people and you look at even one of the Kurdish – legal Kurdish fighter, I mean, clearly there's sympathy for the insurgency at some level; and it seems to me, that's one aspect. The other aspect of the coin is that people are also fed up of the insurgency in the southeast in Turkey. They now want, what they want is for the return of the – when you talk to them – of the kids to go – they want the kids to come home; all those people in the mountains to come home.

And somehow one has to construct a process by which these people will be reintegrated, maybe not all of them will be able to come back to Turkey, certainly the leadership may have to learn Norwegian or Swedish or something like that. But, and some of them may be only integrated into northern Iraq and will never be able to come back to Turkey. But at least for the conflict to end, you need to create conditions whereby there is an incentive for people to come down from the mountains.

Whether you call that an amnesty or a partial amnesty or, the Turks had another euphemism for it, something, winning people back to society. Something has to be done, and I think there is where the United States can be influential because for the PKK especially in Iraq to disband it has to be afraid of something, and that is us.

The one thing I also wanted to – I forgot to mention at the beginning of my talk – the other thing that the context, when you look at American decision to withdraw, this applies to everything that I said, every day that goes by our influence in Iraq diminishes. So in that sense there is, if we are going to do something, we have to do it now. We better do it now rather than later when we have less influence so to say. As we pull troops out, as we become less relevant to domestic political, as we should, to issues in Iraq, our influence diminishes and we need to take that – and just to answer Aydin's question on kind of looking at it without borders.

This is not meant to say that, you know, because I take out the borders for a moment and try to conceptualize the issue as a whole that means that the borders should not, are open to be changed. On the contrary, the main point that I make is that the most important issue is that Iraq should remain as a unified whole; that there should not be a separate Kurdish state in Iraq. So nobody is talking about changing the boundaries. But it is also – we would be deluding ourselves if we don't think that events in one area don't affect events in the other, don't think change the perceptions of governments and people et cetera.

And, finally, on the point of the improvement on KRG-Turkish relations, I acknowledge that in the paper. But I do worry about whether or not, whether it is reversible or not. I think it is reversible and I think it depends on, we can talk later – I can give you a couple of scenarios in which it can be reversible.

MS. OTTAWAY: Okay, thank you very much. I guess you. Can we have a moment, we have, here.

Q: Thanks, Gary Mitchell (ph) from The Mitchell Report, although I should probably say to this crowd, perhaps not the Mitchell report you're thinking about. (Laughter.) I have two quick questions that are fairly specific but, so let me say the first one that – the comment that both Professor Barkey and Mr. Talabani made about the sort of silo mentality at the Department of State and bureaus not talking to each other. And my question is could you give us an example of where that has been a problem in the past? Where has that happened and what did that prevent from happening or how did that slow up progress so that we get some sense of specificity there?

And to Mr. Lesser, I think you characterize the current state of the Turkish-KRG relationship as sort of riding on cultural wings, if that's – and that the question is whether it will move upstream to become sort of geostrategic in nature. Could you give us an example of what a geostrategic – what would make it a relationship based on geo-strategy, if you will, an example of – sort of, dimensionalize what it means to say, there is now a geostrategic relationship.

MS. OTTAWAY: I take advantage of the prerogative of the chair and put in a question myself before we come to you. You have all mentioned the issue of Kirkuk and, you know, the difficulty, the fact that the constitution prescribes a referendum. The problem of sort of, not only figuring out what the sort of de-gerrymandering, as Henri put it, that – (inaudible). But my question is to what extent is the issue of Kirkuk now going to be getting tangled with the issue of the IDPs in the country more generally, because you have sort of the rules for Kirkuk – the constitution was written before this massive population displacement that you have in the country. And is it still possible to insulate the issue of Kirkuk from date of the return of other IDPs inside the country; because there are two more million people, from the estimates, that are now displaced. Thank you, and then we have one, there in the center.

Q: My name is Kani Xulam. I'm at the American Kurdish Information Network. I happen to be a Kurd from Turkey, Turkish Kurdistan. I was wondering if one of you would care to elaborate on the spectacle that took place in Davos, Switzerland. More specifically, I want to ask about the role of religion in politics, especially in Turkey, in Israel and in Iran. If Erdogan and his ilk choose to become the champions of the Palestinians, can you see Israeli politicians siding with the Kurds? If Iran acquires nuclear weapons and Israel decides to attack Tehran, is it possible to see the emergence of Kurdistan regional government in Iran? If peace, which happens to be the mission of this institution, cannot deliver Kurds their freedom, should Kurds then fan the flames of war; if they do, can you blame them?

MR. BARKEY: On the Mitchell Report – this is going to go in the Mitchell Report? First of all, the silo mentality is not just specific to State Department and I would not want to be – it's also in the military. I mean, to give you two examples. On CENTCOM runs the war in Iraq – but Turkey belongs to EUCOM. And when you look at the relationship between CENTCOM and Turkey, it's very, very bad. I mean, CENTCOM was very upset at the Turkish decision not to allow troops to cross from the north. And I'm sure there are people who blame some of the initial problems in Baghdad because there were not enough troops for the Turks. CENTCOM also dealt very badly with the Turkish special forces they arrested on July 4th, 2003. Now, admittedly, those special forces were up to some no good thing, but then they got the al Qaeda treatment. And this has really rankled and has really had a huge impact on Turkish-American relations – I mean, this is one thing the Turks – now EUCOM would not have done that.

So there is a way – there's not enough information, there's not – and then similarly, when you look at the way State works, I think there were many messages that were coming, actually, from Turkey and from the Iraqi Kurds at one point, well before this rapprochement started, that were completely missed because I don't think the two sides were talking to each other – the people who produce – who create policy for Turkey versus the people who produce policy on Iraq. The Turkish chief of intelligence – (inaudible) – you know, probably with the prime minister's consent but not with the consent, at that time, of the military or the presidency, went and started negotiating and talking to the Iraqi Kurds.

The Iraqi Kurds were telling us, also, that they wanted us – they were looking to us to build on this and we did absolutely nothing. On Kirkuk, I actually think that the IDP issue and Kirkuk are actually quite separate because the Kirkuk issue has been on the back burner for such a long time and people are – the issue has been, in fact, very crystallized between, let's say, the Turkmen and the Kurds and the Arabs and each one knows where they want to go back to or if they want to leave, et cetera. I think those two are not going to be conflated. On Davos, I mean, it remains to be seen whether Davos is just a flash in a pan or if it's going to be part of a longer policy process. I'm not sure at the moment.

MR. TALABANI: Think I'll just very – I think Henri covered pretty well the Mitchell Report's concern. I think I'd second that. On – I, too would say that the issue of IDPs as a whole in Iraq should be separate from the issue of Kirkuk, because what happened in Kirkuk and Qanaqin and Sinjar, these were – this was a forced displacement of communities; this was a policy carried out by the former regime; this was genocide in the form of ethnic cleansing.

That has to be reversed in a legal way. Now, we have the legal framework in place; it's the constitution. There's an article of the constitution that lays out the mechanisms to carry out that resettlement process and re-gerrymandering of the borders and, ultimately, coming up with a mechanism for people to have a say on the future administrative status of places like Kirkuk and Qanaqin. So that has to be treated in a unique way.

And it is incredibly complicated; it is a very complex situation, which raises the emotions of everybody involved. But the UN assistance mission in Iraq, Staffan de Mistura, has done a pretty good job to date of gathering the facts, of making certain policy recommendations. But I think the time is now to get some heavyweight support for de Mistura's effort in Washington to give it a policy context and not just a technical context. So we should certainly treat them separately from the larger and regrettable IDP issue as a whole in Iraq.

MR. LESSER: Well, just on this question of what would – how do you get to something that looks more like a strategic relationship between Turkey and the KRG, I mean, I would actually say that the center of gravity at the moment is not, in fact, cultural. If you leave aside the Kurdish community and the issue of affinity, that's different. But if you're talking about, you know, Ankara-KRG, I mean, really the core of this is economic at the moment. So I would imagine, looking ahead, a couple of things have to happen to actually get a strategic relationship.

One is you have to have confidence that borders won't be changed. I mean, this is perhaps the Turko-centric view of what's necessary, but I think it's true for all of that. You have to have confidence. Secondly, I think there's probably a lot more that can be done on the economic side, including on infrastructure and investment and all the rest of it. The energy piece might be very big

in that part of it. And then finally, I suppose the two sides have to come to see each other as security partners rather than liabilities – rather than risks – rather than a source of risk.

There are inklings of that already, but you're certainly not there yet, and you probably won't ever be there until the PKK issue is dealt with in some fairly definitive way. On the question of Prime Minister Erdogan and Davos and so on, well, I mean, I wouldn't go to far with all of this. I think I share Henri's view. To me, this incident tells us a couple of things: First of all, it tells us that personality matters in international relations, you know. It really does. And I think that we can spin out the implications of that and so on, but nonetheless, you know, he's prime minister, he has a style of his own.

We have other examples in the world of leaders with their own style, for good or for bad, and so on. I don't think that's necessarily such a durable issue; it's not so much about Davos. If you're asking about the Turkish public's reaction to the Gaza crisis, well, this also tells us things. I mean, public opinion counts in Turkey today. The Palestinian issue engages public opinion in a serious way in Turkey. This is a structural reality.

It's also a reality to say that over the last years under AKP the Middle East as a whole has become a more prominent piece of Turkish policy – that the AKP government is more comfortable in dealing with, really, all of its Middle Eastern partners than its predecessors might have been – would have been. That has implications for what we're talking about. But I – to me, the driver here is not Islamism – it's not that; it's perceptions of national interests and, yes, a mood of rising nationalism in the whole region.

MS. OTTAWAY: I don't think we have time for another round of questions, but I'd like just to give a chance to the speakers for if they want to make any final, concluding remarks. Ian?

MR. LESSER: It's a great report and thank you for it. (Chuckles.)

MR. TALABANI: No, I'll just reiterate the fact that there are certain – we don't need to recreate the wheel on certain issues. We have a constitution in the country; we need to find a way of adhering and respecting this constitution, and we mustn't, kind of, ignore these critical issues in the country such as the resolution of Article 140, such as the implementation of federalism in the country and also, implementing the oil revenue-sharing law and the oil framework law in the country.

And that – you know, unfortunately, it looks like we still need a push from – be it the United States, be it others – we do need the push to push us in this right direction. The U.S. cannot leave and disengage from Iraq unless these issues are resolved.

MR. BARKEY: One thing I would like to add is, Qubad brought up the issue of de Mistura, the UN's special envoy. The U.N.'s special envoy – and you'll see in the article; it details it – has this, essentially, three-stage process of trying to resolve the disputed territories and Kirkuk, ultimately. And I think here, certainly, the Bush administration did not really back Mistura. I mean, it was very receptive; I mean, wanted him to succeed, but for Mistura to succeed, even though it's U.N., he needs much more support. I mean, he has a staff of, I think, 20 people.

You're not going to be able to deal with all these very, very complex issues with essentially what is, in Iraq at least, a weak international institution – the U.N. So one of the things the United States has to do, and I argue it, is that the de Mistura process has to be strengthened, because this provides a long-term way out and it's a stage-by-stage process, which means that it also envisages confidence-building measures and reconciliation between the communities. And that will be critical.

Ultimately, maybe, Kirkuk will be – we'll see two Kirkuks; we'll see the province of Kirkuk and we'll see the city of Kirkuk, each being dealt with differently. There are many different ways of resolving these issues but again, you know, my emphasis here was about getting the Americans involved, in large part, because the details, as you'll see, are quite numerous and there is nobody else out there that can actually engage in this. Thank you.

(Applause.)

MS. OTTAWAY: And thank you all for coming.

(END)