

Iraqi Constitution

Article 125:

This Constitution shall guarantee the administrative, political, cultural, and educational rights of the various nationalities, such as Turkomen, Chaldeans, Assyrians, and all other constituents, and this shall be regulated by law.

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Article 140:

First: The executive authority shall undertake the necessary steps to complete the implementation of the requirements of all subparagraphs of Article 58 of the Transitional Administrative Law.

Second: The responsibility placed upon the executive branch of the Iraqi Transitional Government stipulated in Article 58 of the Transitional Administrative Law shall extend and continue to the executive authority elected in accordance with this Constitution, provided that it accomplishes completely (normalization and census and concludes with a referendum in Kirkuk and other disputed territories to determine the will of their citizens), by a date not to exceed the 31st of December 2007.

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Article 58 of the Transitional Administrative Law for Iraq states:

(A) The Iraqi Transitional Government, and especially the Iraqi Property Claims Commission and other relevant bodies, shall act expeditiously to take measures to remedy the injustice caused by the previous regime's practices in altering the demographic character of certain regions, including Kerkuk, by deporting and expelling individuals from their places of residence, forcing migration in and out of the region, settling individuals alien to the region, depriving the inhabitants of work, and correcting nationality. To remedy this injustice, the Iraqi Transitional Government shall take the following steps:

(1) With regard to residents who were deported, expelled, or who emigrated; it shall, in accordance with the statute of the Iraqi Property Claims Commission and other measures within the law, within a reasonable period of time, restore the residents to their homes and property, or, where this is unfeasible, shall provide just compensation.

(2) With regard to the individuals newly introduced to specific regions and territories, it shall act in accordance with Article 10 of the Iraqi Property Claims Commission statute to ensure that such individuals may be resettled, may receive compensation from the state, may receive new land from the state near their residence in the governorate from which they came, or may receive compensation for the cost of moving to such areas.

(3) With regard to persons deprived of employment or other means of support in order to force migration out of their regions and territories, it shall promote new employment opportunities in the regions and territories.

(4) With regard to nationality correction, it shall repeal all relevant decrees and shall permit affected persons the right to determine their own national identity and ethnic affiliation free from coercion and duress.

(B) The previous regime also manipulated and changed administrative

boundaries for political ends. The Presidency Council of the Iraqi Transitional Government shall make recommendations to the National Assembly on remedying these unjust changes in the permanent constitution. In the event the Presidency Council is unable to agree unanimously on a set of recommendations, it shall unanimously appoint a neutral arbitrator to examine the issue and make recommendations. In the event the Presidency Council is unable to agree on an arbitrator, it shall request the Secretary General of the United Nations to appoint a distinguished international person to be the arbitrator.

(C) The permanent resolution of disputed territories, including Kerkuk, shall be deferred until after these measures are completed, a fair and transparent census has been conducted and the permanent constitution has been ratified. This resolution shall be consistent with the principle of justice, taking into account the will of the people of those territories.

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Iraqi National Alliance Turkmen call for the establishment of two new provinces northern Iraq

Turkmen in Iraqi National Alliance called, on Sunday, for the establishment of two new provinces northern Iraq while stressing the necessity to preserve the country's unity.

"It is necessary to establish two new provinces in Tozkhormato and Talaafar districts which both meet required conditions for establishment of regions," National Alliance member Fawzi Akram Tarzi told Alsumarianews.

"Tozkhormato and Talaafar districts suffered from elimination and injustice during both past and current regimes in addition to lack of very simple services in comparison with its density," Tarzi assured.

"Establishing the two provinces should not oppose Iraq's unity, independence and Constitution," Tarzi added.

Talaafar District, which is situated northwestern Nineveh Province, counts 280 000 inhabitants and includes 3 major ethnicities (Arabs, Turkmen and Kurds).

Talaafar has common borders with Turkey and Syria. Four regions are affiliated to Talaafar District namely Rabiha, Al Hamdyat known as Badoush, Zamar as well as Al Iyadiya.

Tozkhormato District, situated in Salahuddin Province, is located 180 Km northeastern Baghdad and includes a mixture of ethnicity and confessions.

<http://www.alsumaria.tv/en/Iraq-News/1-70652-.html>

Tuesday, November 15, 2011 16:02 GMT

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(Ahlul Bayt News Agency) - Tens of Shiite Turkmen demonstrated before Kirkuk province premises to demand regaining their original lands in their villages.

A demonstrator told that the Iraqi government approved the return of the lands from Arab beneficiaries during the ex-Saddam Hussein regime, "but there are officials at the central government hinder the implementation of these decisions, so we demand the President and Kirkuk governor to solve these problems".

Kirkuk, center of the province, lies 255 km north east the capital, Baghdad, which is one of the disputed areas between the federal and Kurdistan governments.

<http://abna.ir/data.asp?lang=3&id=275307>
30 October 2011

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An uneasy truce in Kirkuk

niqash | Azad Ghareeb | Kirkuk | 23.03.2011

Kirkuk seems to be entering a period of political agreement, after all the tension and crisis in the city recently.

This has lessened the anger of the Turkmen population, but the Arabs are still unhappy about the way Kurds are 'engineering' the distribution of political posts.

In a ceremony on 7 March in Sulaymaniyah city to mark the anniversary of the 1991 Kurdish uprising against Saddam Hussein, President Jalal Talabani described the oil-rich province of Kirkuk as the "Jerusalem of Kurdistan" and said that it should be annexed into the Kurdish regions.

Azad Jandiyani, a spokesman for the Kurdistan Patriotic Union (KDP), said that Talabani was speaking in his capacity as Secretary General of the KDP and not in his capacity as President of the Republic.

But this explanation was not enough to appease the wrath of the Arab and Turkmen political forces in Kirkuk or Baghdad.

Politicians from both the Arab and Kurdish sides said that these statements had two implications. First they would reinforce Kurdish demands in Kirkuk; second, they would dilute Kurdish anger by rousing nationalistic feelings among the Kurdish people, especially in Sulaymaniyah province, which, since 17 February, has been witnessing continued protests calling for general reforms.

A statement issued by the Turkmen Front in Kirkuk accused Talabani of stirring the emotions of the people living in the Kurdish region.

Muhammad Khalil, the Arab member in the Kirkuk Provincial Council said that Talabani's statements were contradictory to his position as a President of Iraq.

A week after Talabani's statements, in a move that surprised people in Kirkuk, Kirkuk's Governor, Abdul Rahman Mustafa, and the Head of the Provincial Council, Rizgar Ali, who are both members of the Kurdistan Alliance, submitted their resignation.

They did so, they said, because of the current situation in Kirkuk province and because it was extremely difficult to satisfy all parties.

However, sources within the Provincial Council said that the resignations came after a deal was reached between the Kurdistan Alliance, which has 26 of the 41 Provincial Council seats, and the Turkmen Front, which has 9 seats.

A leading member of the Turkmen Front, speaking on condition of anonymity, told Niqash that the agreement was aimed at reconciling both parties. It would allow the Turkmen Front to hold the Presidency of the Provincial Council, while giving the Kurd's the post of Governor, he said.

The Kurds then announced that they had nominated Najm ad-Din Kareem, from the Kurdistan Alliance and a member of the Iraqi parliament, for the Governor post.

Meanwhile, the Arab parties say that the agreement was reached at their expense. They are demanding that the Kurds, Arabs and Turkmen should each get 34% of the posts in the province, with the Christians getting 4%.

The Arab bloc has issued the following statement: "The mechanism by which the President of Kirkuk's Council, Rizgar Ali, and its Governor, Abdul Rahman Mustafa, were replaced was political and is a violation of the rules."

"The Arab bloc stands against such agreements which are decisive in determining the Province's fate."

But this so-called deal reached between the Turkmen and Kurds is not the only reason why the Arab political parties are angry. Another reason is that thousands of Kurdish Peshmerga forces have been deployed in the southern and western areas of Kirkuk city, which have an Arab majority.

They were brought in on 24 February, the eve of the Day of Rage demonstrations around Iraq, "in order to protect the city from the chauvinist Baathists, who want to destabilize security in the disputed areas, especially in Kirkuk," according to a statement by Sheik Jaafar Mustafa, Kurdistan's Minister for Peshmerga Affairs.

Arabs say that the Region's government has taken advantage of the demonstrations in Kirkuk to strengthen the Kurdish military presence in Arab areas.

On 19 March, the Arab Political Council in the province issued a statement demanding the equal distribution of power among the three main constituents of Kirkuk, as well as the full withdrawal of the Kurdish forces.

It wants the Iraqi Army 12th Division to be deployed in Kirkuk and the security brief given to the Kirkuk Police Directorate, "which should handle security and bring stability to the Province."

Another demand is the release of detainees held by the Kurdish security forces since 2003.

The Kurds, who have not yet commented on the resignations, say that the presence of the Peshmerga forces in Kirkuk is legitimate.

Sheikh Jaafar Mustafa, the Region's Minister for Peshmerga Affairs, told Niqash that the Peshmerga entered Kirkuk Province with the consent of the Iraqi government and the US forces.

"Our duty is to protect all citizens without any discrimination whatsoever," he said.

None of the parties wanted to comment on the undeclared agreement reached between the Kurds and Turkmen, nor on the fate of the Peshmerga forces deployed in Kirkuk.

They all stressed that the resignation of the Governor and the President of the Council was aimed at bringing the different sides of the conflict closer to each other and promote stability in the city.

While some of the people of Kirkuk are busy predicting the shape of future relations between the different political forces in the province, there are others, like Usama al-Nujaifi, the Speaker of the Iraqi Parliament, who are demanding the creation of an autonomous Kirkuk region, independent of the governments of Kurdistan and Baghdad.

But the Kurds insist on the implementation of Article 140 of the Constitution, as the best solution to Kirkuk's crisis, as well as to the other disputed areas.

Article 140 stipulates the "normalization" of the demographic conditions in the Province to counter the effects of the policies of Saddam Hussein's regime, which led to the deportation of Kurds and their replacement by Arabs.

It also stipulates that a referendum should be held to allow the people of Kirkuk the right to self-determination and to decide whether they want to be part of the central government in Baghdad or join the Kurdistan region.

According to national and international observers, the problem of Kirkuk is among the most difficult issues yet to be resolved after the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003.

According to the analyst and writer, Yahya Barzanji, the city is like "a gunpowder barrel that could explode at any minute and lead to a civil war in many areas of Iraq."

"Any agreement that does not involve all the constituents of Kirkuk, including the small minority of Christians, will bring the whole country back to square one," he said.

"With this in mind, it is not hard to predict the results of ignoring Arabs and excluding them!"

<http://www.niqash.org/articles/?id=2806>

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Iraq's Interior Ministry approves formation of Kirkuk's Emergency Battalion

11/15/2011 11:52 AM

KIRKUK / Aswat al-Iraq: Iraq's Interior Ministry has approved Monday the formation of another battalion, to be added to the 3 emergency battalions of northern Iraq's oil-rich city of Kirkuk, the Commander of Kirkuk Police stated on Tuesday.

"The Interior Ministry has agreed for the formation of another battalion, to be added to the three emergency battalions of Kirkuk and the Ministry shall appoint necessary staff to fill in the forms of appointment, existing on the Ministry's electronic position," Major-General Jamal Taher told a news conference today (Tuesday), adding that the appointments shall be chosen from among graduates of primary schools and above.

He pointed out that "another company had been added to the so-called Golden Lion Forces, formed by the Iraqi Army, Kurdish Peshmerga and Kirkuk Police, who had started its training to protect leading positions."

"Kirkuk Police has had a joint coordination with the Iraqi Army and other security bodies, who have plans to fight terrorism before the withdrawal of the US forces, scheduled to take place at the end December next," Major-General Taher said, adding that "all security bodies in Kirkuk Province would be under the administration of Kirkuk Police Directorate, according to an order by the Iraqi Interior Ministry."

As regards to Kirkuk's Turkoman fears after the US withdrawal from Iraq, he pointed out that "all components of Kirkuk and not only Turkomen have been targets (by terrorists), before and after the scheduled US withdrawal," adding that "there is coordination between terrorist groups in the Province, including al-Qaeda, Ansar al-Sunna, Ansar al-Islam and the Naqshabandiya group."

Answering a question by Aswat al-Iraq news agency, regarding the handing over of al-Hurriya Base after the US troops departure from Kirkuk, Major-General Taher said: "Al-Hurriya base is situated within the Kirkuk Municipality, and the security dossier is the responsibility of the Police forces; so, it's better that it would be handed over to the Police, thing that we have already demanded."

A Kirkuk Police source, who asked not to be named, told Aswat al-Iraq that "there is a dialogue between the Emergency Police and the Iraqi Air Force about the said base."

Kirkuk is 280 km to the northeast of Baghdad.

http://en.aswataliraq.info/Default.aspx?page=article_page&c=slideshow&id=145611

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post-us, a military unit staffed by former enemies raises hopes for kirkuk

As US forces slowly begin to withdraw from Iraq, there are fears that ethnic and sectarian conflicts will arise again. In Kirkuk, a long conflicted state, they're pinning hopes on a unit called the Golden Lions.

The Golden Lions unit is composed of almost 400 members from three different security forces operating in Kirkuk: the Iraqi army, the local police forces and the Iraqi Kurdish military force known as the Peshmerga. The tripartite force, which eventually hopes to increase its number to 1,000, was the idea of Ray Odierno, former commander of US forces in Iraq, who hoped a joint force like this one might help put an end to ethnic clashes in the area.

Kirkuk has been the scene for many of these types of clashes as the oil-rich state, producing up to one million barrels of oil per day, is disputed territory. Its ownership is contested by the Iraqi government in Baghdad and the Iraqi Kurdish administration in the semi-autonomous state of Iraqi Kurdistan.

Iraqi Kurds see the area as their own and in fact, many Kurds used to live there – a census from 1957 records the population as at least a third Kurdish. However former Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein's regime practiced a concerted policy of what has been described as Arabisation of oil rich areas in the north. This saw hundreds of thousands of Kurdish families deported and ethnic Arab families brought in to take their place. The tug of war over Kirkuk's geography has continued even after the 2003 US-led invasion that saw Hussein's regime toppled – and analysts believe that if a civil war was to start in Iraq, then this northern state might well be one of the flashpoints.

Now that the US soldiers, who once formed a sort of buffer between the Arabs and the Kurds, are leaving, the idea is that the Golden Lions, most of whom completed their training with US troops at the end of June this year, help ameliorate their withdrawal.

The lion is an Iraqi symbol of fighting strength and although the three different forces will continue to wear their own uniforms – the Peshmerga wear khaki, the police wear blue and the Iraqi military wear tan - they will all have an armband that shows their membership of the Golden Lions.

In early 2010, the unit undertook raids targeting insurgents' hideouts and was also deployed at several checkpoints in Kirkuk under supervision of US forces. As of August 2011, the US forces have taken a back seat and withdrawn from the security checkpoints. Before they did so though, they requested that Kirkuk's checkpoints be handed over to the Golden Lions in order to ensure ongoing cooperation between the three different security forces.

"It shows that a joint action is possible," Colonel Michael Pappal, the US military commander in Kirkuk, said. Lieutenant James Maceo, who trained the Golden Lions, boasts that the troops sleep in the same tents together and live and eat together as well. Maceo said he had not noticed any hostilities between the different groups.

The Kurdish commander of the Golden Lions, Colonel Salahuddin Sabir, told NIQASH that there were still many issues to be overcome. "Among these is the lack of adequate experience, the limited number of troops and the absence of logistical support and necessary supplies such as cars and fuel," said Sabir, who was currently negotiating with local authorities to ensure funding. "The number of the troops is too low to undertake responsibility for [Kirkuk's] checkpoints as well as for the military patrols that are needed to maintain order."

Captain Mohammed Ahmad, a Golden Lion member, a Kurd and former member of the Peshmerga, said that despite the troubled history in the area, there were no ethnic conflicts within the unit. "We treat Iraqi soldiers the same way we treat our Peshmerga men," said Ahmad, who had lost seven of his family in Iraqi campaigns against the Kurds in the 1980s.

"But," he admitted, "it is difficult to forget historical animosities in Iraq." And he added that he wasn't so sure about the ability of the Golden Lions to survive after the US withdrawal.

The chairman of the Kirkuk council, Hasim Touran, has expressed similar fears: "The absence of a common political vision for the management of Kirkuk's security raises fear among all concerned parties."

In an attempt to at least partially dispel those fears, a new counter terrorism centre was inaugurated in Kirkuk in early August. The centre would be staffed by Iraqi police and army as well as Kurdish forces: in this case, it would be Iraqi Kurdistan's Asayish force, who are a sort of intelligence agency where the Kurdish Peshmerga, who take part in the Golden Lions, are more like a general military force. Again, it would be another attempt to manage Kirkuk's security situation after the US withdrawal.

Meanwhile politician Hussein Saleh al-Jibouri, believes that the counter-terrorism centre and the Golden Lions style of military unit can only be temporary solutions. Al-Jibouri, a strong opponent of the extension of US troops' stay in Iraq, believes the best thing to do would be to form a balanced security force made up of Kirkuk's people, and supervised by the Iraqi federal government. Whether his Iraqi Kurdish compatriots agree with him, is another question altogether.

<http://www.niqash.org/articles/?id=2884>

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Aswat Al Iraq / Kirkuk, Security

Iraq's Turkomen Front says Turkomen did not celebrate Eid al-Adha holidays due to fear from aggressive attacks

11/10/2011 11:53 AM

KIRKUK / Aswat al-Iraq: The Chairman of the Iraqi Turkomen Front and Member of al-Iraqiya Coalition, Arshad al-Salehy, has said on Thursday that Iraq's Turkomen, especially in northern Iraq's oil-rich city of Kirkuk, have not celebrated Eid al-Adha Holidays, due to the deteriorated security situation and the continuation of aggressive attacks against them.

"We are cornered by silence by both government and Parliament sides, and would like to ask for the reason why Iraqi Turkomen are being targets for killings and abduction," Salehy told Aswat al-Iraq news agency, adding that the "Iraqi Society has began to be divided between Sunnis, Shiites and Kurds, whilst the Turkomen are still linked to their 'Iraqism', territory and homeland."

Salehy charged the Iraqi government and Parliament with "being silent towards the abduction and killing of Turkomen, as well as their scientific and medical symbols and businessmen."

"We have also demanded a tribual support for our positions during our recent visit for a number of tribes, especially in southern Iraq's Hilla Province," he said.

The Turkoman leader has also expressed fear "from the close US Army withdrawal from Iraq, especially areas of Turkomen, who suffer from huge problems," warning against "a possible agreement with certain political and party forces in Kirkuk," which he did not name.

The Strategic Agreement, signed between Iraq and the United States in 2008, the American troops were scheduled to leave Iraq entirely by the end of December next.

Kirkuk Province is 250 kms to the north of Baghdad, and is one of the areas-in-conflict between the Central Government in Baghdad and northern Iraqi Kurdistan Region's government.

http://en.aswataliraq.info/Default.aspx?page=article_page&c=slideshow&id=145548

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President Barzani visits Kirkuk

Kurdistan Region President Massoud Barzani visited Kirkuk on Oct. 26, "carrying a message of brotherhood." He promised Kurdish forces would help in filling security gaps after the U.S. forces withdraw. Kirkuk's Arab bloc declined to attend the meeting.

"My visit is to deliver a message of brotherhood and peace," said Barzani at the beginning of his speech to local officials. He said Kurdistan Region respected all components of Kirkuk - Kurds, Arabs, Turkmen, Assyrians, Kaldians and others living in the province.

"We, together, have made Kirkuk an example of coexistence to prove to everyone that different components of Kirkuk can live together whether there are U.S. forces or not," said President Barzani, noting that after the withdrawal of the forces, Kurdistan Region is to cooperate with the federal government to maintain Kirkuk's security. "We won't allow terrorists to make Kirkuk an open field" for their activities, he said.

On the presence of Kurdish forces in Kirkuk, Barzani said the headquarters of the Kurdish forces will remain until security situations stabilize and "they must stay as long as there is threat; this issue is left to the administration and council in the province."

Barzani's speech came in a meeting with the Kirkuk governor, his deputy, the president and members of the Kirkuk provincial council. Members of the Arab group in the council boycotted the meeting.

"Some members of the council have boycotted and I respect their point of view. If one boycotts and does not want to hear the views, how can the problems be solved?" asked President Barzani, commenting on the Arab group's stance. "I have come from Erbil to hear and came to offer a brotherly hand. Anyone who refuses this must take responsibility."

Barzani, who was accompanied by a number of KRG ministers, also expressed the Region's readiness to offer services to Kirkuk province. "It's a part of our duty to help you? the KRG, within its ability and authority is ready to serve Kirkuk the same as Erbil, Suleimaniya and Duhok," stated Barzani, noting KRG's pride in providing Kirkuk with electricity. KRG provides 200 megawatts of electricity to Kirkuk, produced in power plants in Kurdistan Region.

On political problems of the Kirkuk issue and the implementation of Article 140 of the Constitution, Barzani assured that Kurds, through their demands for implementing this article, do not "want to suppress anyone." He said that the future of Kirkuk can only be decided by the people of Kirkuk.

"You have to decide whether you want a region of your own or to be linked to Kurdistan Region; we will never impose anything on you, but we defend you so no one can take this right from you," said Barzani explaining that Kirkuk within Kurdistan Region does not mean it has to break away from Iraq. "Even the Kurdistan Region itself has decided to be part of the federal democratic Iraq."

Kirkuk's Deputy Governor Rakan Saeed, an Arab, who attended the meeting, explained the Arab group's boycott, saying it has become hopeless in dealing with its partners in Kirkuk. Saeed added that he offered to present the Arab group's demands in Kirkuk to Barzani.

The Arab Political Council in Kirkuk, which holds six of the 41 provincial council seats, published an announcement explaining reasons for the boycott. "The Arab component, since 2003, feels its power has declined. The exclusion and arrests of some competent figures makes them unable to hold official positions in Kirkuk, even though this component is taking part in the political process and has opened up to all the parties," says the statement. It also complained that Arabs have made several agreements in meetings with political decision-makers, but nothing changed for them.

The visit went in another direction for the Turkmen delegation and they separately discussed their problems with Kurdistan Region president. "The talks were transparent and frank," said Hassan Turan, a Turkmen and head of the Kirkuk provincial council.

The Turkmen members reportedly submitted a list of requests to President Barzani and he promised to study them.

<http://www.kurdishglobe.net/display-article.html?id=236B0EBCE70145CD26F8F43D764719E3>

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Iraq's Kirkuk faces uncertainty without U.S. troops

Wed, Nov 16 2011

By Mustafa Mahmoud

KIRKUK, Iraq (Reuters) - In Iraq's northern oil city Kirkuk, home to a volatile mix of Kurds, Arabs and Turkmen, politicians and residents fear a possible explosion of ethnic conflict when American troops leave.

With prospects that U.S. forces will leave Iraq by Dec. 31, the city turns uncertainly to Iraqi and Kurdish security forces to keep the peace in an area contested by Iraq's central government and semi-autonomous northern Kurdistan.

"We do not trust the Iraqi forces' ability to preserve security and order after the withdrawal of American forces," said government worker Ibrahim Mohammed, a Kurd. "Security will deteriorate at the same speed as the withdrawal."

"I really hope this will not happen and American forces will remain in Kirkuk. It is my wish for the new year."

Kirkukis were among those Iraqis who argued most vociferously for U.S. forces to stay past the year-end deadline for their departure prescribed by a 2008 bilateral security agreement. Officials had lobbied publicly for an extension.

Even those who are fully behind the American withdrawal fear potential problems in Kirkuk, which sits atop some of the world's biggest oil reserves.

Nearly a quarter of Iraq's oil exports come from the fields around Kirkuk. Last month the region shipped an average of 460,000 barrels per day, 22 percent of Iraq's total exports.

U.S. military officials long ago marked the city as a likely flashpoint for future conflict.

"What do we gain from America's democracy? Violence, sectarian divisions...," said Munaf Abdulla, a restaurant owner and an Arab, but added: "Kirkuk is a volatile area, vulnerable to explosion because of the problems ... over control of its fortune."

With Iraq's central government in Baghdad and the Kurdistan Regional Government in Arbil both claiming Kirkuk, a census to determine whether the city has a Kurdish or Arab majority that might have backed up one or the other's claims has been repeatedly shelved.

Arabs and Turkmen accuse Kurds of flooding the city with their kin. Kurds say dictator Saddam Hussein "Arabised" Kirkuk by encouraging Arabs to move there in the 1980s and 1990s.

While Kurdistan says it has historic rights to the city, Kirkuk is officially outside the three northern provinces that comprise the region. Iraqi security forces, and not the Kurdish peshmerga army, have the responsibility to protect it.

Kurdish president Masoud Barzani, in a visit to Kirkuk in late October, promised local politicians and residents that the city would be properly protected when U.S. troops leave.

"We will not allow for terrorists to believe that Kirkuk has become an open field," he said.

Whether Kirkuk will prove to be a time bomb depends on who you ask.

"I don't think security will be set back with the departure of the Americans from the city," said Brigadier General Samir Abdul Kareem, an Iraqi army commander. "We have been handling the city for the past four months without any problems."

Other security officials were less optimistic, however.

"I can't say we can completely control security in Kirkuk after the pullout," said Brigadier Halou Najat, a Kurdish peshmerga commander. "The success of keeping Kirkuk stable will depend on the cooperation between security forces in the city."

An experimental force of Kurdish peshmerga, Iraqi army and Iraqi police, part of an effort spearheaded by the United States to get the two sides to cooperate, now helps patrol Kirkuk.

Yaseen al-Bakri, a political science professor at al-Nahrain University, said the coming withdrawal could lead to rival factions taking advantage of the confusion to achieve their own ends.

In addition to the dispute between Arbil and Baghdad over the city and its oil wealth, Kirkuk is rife with competing property claims stretching back over generations.

"It is certain that the Arab-Kurdish conflict will worsen, because after the U.S. withdraws, everyone will think it is a time to collect their spoils ... in the absence of a policeman who was able to prevent some of the parties from exceeding their bounds," Bakri said.

As in the rest of Iraq, violence in Kirkuk has dropped sharply since the sectarian slaughter that killed tens of thousands across the country in 2006-07. But the city continues to be plagued by insurgent attacks and kidnapping-for-ransom by militants looking for money to fund operations.

"I say with total fear for the future, we don't want the U.S forces to walk out of Iraq, at least at this time. We don't want to see our country slip once again towards sectarian war," said government worker Ibrahim Kareem, 45, an Arab.

"I see we are moving toward a catastrophic situation. This is an explicit fact: Iraqi forces have failed to end the violence, killing and kidnapping."

"Speaking reasonably," said Ahmed al-Askari, a Kurdish member of the Kirkuk provincial council, "American forces must stay longer to train Iraqi forces ... With the current performance of the forces in Kirkuk, I can see trouble in the future in handling security."

Other residents argue the long U.S. presence in the area has made little difference, and believe Kirkuk's tensions lie less with residents or security forces than in political turf battles over control of the disputed city and its untapped riches.

"Every day we witness explosions, assassinations and kidnappings... all these events occur with the presence of U.S forces and Iraqi ones," said Ahmed Hassan, the Turkmen owner of a car parts shop.

"We want Iraqi government to take real measures to maintain (security). This issue has nothing to do with the presence or withdrawal of American forces. I believe Iraqi stability depends on cooperation among political parties."

(Additional reporting by Muhanad Mohammed; Writing by Ahmed Rasheed; Editing by Jim Loney)

<http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/11/16/us-iraq-kirkuk-idUSTRE7AF1DB20111116>

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