This Part of The Globe is not Flat: The Paradox of the Turkish Relationship with Northern Iraq and the Dilemma of Kurdish Politics Across Borders

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Abstract
The chapter discusses the impact US presence in (re)construction of Kurdishness from ethnicity to nationhood in the Middle East. It compares and contrasts various Kurdish nationalisms as they emerge from different historical trajectories and geographical boundaries in Turkey and in Iraq. As a survey of public articulation of claims to ethnicity and nationalism by political actors, it shows the impact of the “nation state era” on the construction of competing discourses of nationhood. Such competing claims have been revised and re-interpreted with the US military presence in Iraq.

Keywords
Kurdistan, Kurdish Workers Party, Kurdish Regional Government, ethnicity, nationalism

Introduction
In March 2008 during a passing visit to Turkey, Vice President Dick Cheney confirmed\(^1\) the statements made in November 2007 by the Deputy Prime Minister of the Kurdistan Regional Government that Turkish corporations have invested more than five billion dollars towards the reconstruction of the infrastructure in Northern Iraq.\(^2\) Other visitors have often mentioned the ubiquity of Turkish construction companies and restaurants in the same region and some claim that 80 percent of the commerce in Kurdistan is now handled by Turkish companies.\(^3\) Newspapers reported that out of $15 billion worth of

\(^1\) As reported in Milliyet March 25th 2008.


new construction contracts, $12 billion has been undertaken by contractors from Turkey or consortiums that have Turkish partners. Meanwhile, the Turkish military has performed more than two dozen cross-border operations in the area against the Kurdistan Worker’s Party (PKK), an armed group that has been waging violent warfare against the Turkish government since the mid-1980s. It appears that after decades of brutal suppression and criminalization of political expressions of Kurdish identity within the borders of Turkey and violent clashes with the PKK, the Turkish capital has seized the regional economic opportunities created by the US invasion of Iraq in the Kurdish territories beyond its borders.

A dynamic paradox has emerged for Turkey around its borders with Iraq with the de facto (and eventually de jure) carving out of the Kurdistan Autonomous Regional Government. Since January 2005, there has been an autonomous Kurdistan on the territory that was established during the Saddam regime in 1970s and internationally sanctioned through a “no-fly” zone north of the 36th parallel in 1991, in the aftermath of the First Gulf War. The Turkish government claims that its territorial integrity is in danger when a self-governing Kurdish political entity gains international recognition because such recognition may increase and justify separatist hopes among a much larger Kurdish population residing within the borders of Turkey. On the other hand, while there is a violent history of brutal suppression of political (and often times cultural) expressions of Kurdish ethnic identity in Turkey, Turkish capitalists are now eagerly investing in the territory secured by a Kurdish Regional Government, finding a lucrative opportunity in the reconstruction of this conflict ridden zone. Presently, the regional government with its own national anthem and flag has announced its territory as a “gateway to [global] investments” and a “growing economy” that “build[s] ties between business communities here and abroad.”

The Kurdish cities of Northern Iraq have been hosting several trade shows in 2008 with hundreds of Turkish contractors.

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5 The Kurdish population in Iraq is approximately 5 million, whereas there is an estimated 20 million Kurds living in Turkey.