



In the Kurdish Issue

Erbakan Tried to Repeat the Ottoman Experience in the Republican Way

The Kurdish issue is considered one of the chronic issues in the history of the Turkish Republic since its establishment (1924) until today, and its roots extend since the era of the Ottoman Empire. Therefore, the writer Oraib Al-Rantawi refers to this matter, saying: "The Kurds and the fundamentalists in modern Turkey are among the most important issues. There are no security solutions, only the democratic political treatment, otherwise Turkey will remain a democratic, imperfect, distorted secular state".

The Kurdish issue in particular began in the time of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and his attempt to make "all in one". This is manifested in the denial of the ethnic identity of the Kurds and the prevalence of the term "Mountain Turks" as a description of the Kurds, a term rejected by all Kurds, because it contradicts their history.

Kemal Ataturk's view of Turkish citizenship was based on two components: the Turkish and the Kurdish. The actual practice led to the Turkification of society under the pretext of its unity, which did not respect cultural and ethnic pluralism, especially with the exclusion of the Kurdish language from the public space. This is in addition to the prohibition of the old traditional Kurdish celebrations, especially Nowruz, the Spring Festival, which is one of the national manifestations of the Kurds.

The Ottomans, before the Republicans, promoted the Islamic Association to deceive the Kurdish people and achieve their goals, which prompted the Kurds to go to war with the Ottoman Empire in the face of the Safavid state in Iran. Therefore, it was not expected that the secular Turkey would deal with the Kurdish issue through the values of citizenship between the Kurdish minority and the Turkish majority. This is what led to confrontations in the Kurdish regions of Turkey, and even more so, armed confrontations between Turkish forces and the Kurdistan Workers Party (Kurdish: partiya karkerên Kurdistan), which Turkey classifies as a terrorist organization responsible for the deaths of hundreds of Turks.

With the rise of political kinetic Islam in Turkey by Necmettin Erbakan, some people thought the possibility of solving the Kurdish issue, by referring to the Islamic association promoted by the Ottomans centuries before that. The Turkish army did not like the revival of the old policy, so it sacrificed Erbakan and imprisoned him. Far from the dramatic end of Erbakan, the latter did not present a real project to address the Kurdish issue. Rather, his political discourse did not differ from all previous Turkish media discourses and from the old Ottoman plans to try to domesticate the Kurds.

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The kinetic Islam in Turkey wanted to solve the Kurdish issue without presenting projects that respect parallel nationalism.
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One of the press articles revealed about Erbakan's speech that at first, he rejected the idea of a Kurdish state in the region, even if this state lies outside Turkey's political borders, especially in Iraq. This is because the establishment of a Kurdish state in the region will provoke the separatist tendencies of a large bloc of Kurds in Turkey, as it will expose the Turkish constitutional concept to controversy. This concept sees that everyone is Turkish and that the Kurds are Mountain Turks. Therefore the "Kurdish state" project will destroy not only Turkish citizenship, but perhaps the entity of the Turkish state itself.

Taking into account the conspiracy theory, Erbakan sees that there is an American conspiracy that began with the Gulf War and with attacking Saddam Hussein, which is to strike the military power of Iraq to allow the establishment of a Kurdish state in Iraqi Kurdistan. Erbakan cites the speech of an American military commander who believes that the fall of Saddam is inevitable, and that it must be followed by the establishment of a Kurdish state to fill the void that will occur in the region. This American commander suggests - according to Erbakan - that it is necessary to expand the territory of the Kurdish state by annexing some of the Kurdish lands located in Turkey. This American commander writes a scenario for the future of this Kurdish state that it will face a strong rejection, and perhaps military intervention by Turkey, Syria and even Iran, given the presence of Kurdish minorities in this country, which poses a threat to its political cohesion. The American commander believes that the Kurdish state will win in the end if it is provided with the necessary and sufficient armaments for its survival and the imposition of its will in the region. Thus, Erbakan's speech does not differ from all previous Turkish speeches in adopting a conspiracy theory, and the inability to make progress and present new solutions to the Kurdish issue.

However, some refer to an attempt by Erbakan (1997), through indirect messages, to make a peace attempt with the PKK, and an attempt to make a breakthrough for this chronic issue in the history of the Turkish Republic. This attempt failed. Some believe that the Turkish nationalist elements, in addition to the generals of the Turkish army, prevented the success of this attempt. This attempt is a failure in the agenda of its promoters, because they are well aware of the reaction of the opposition Turkish nationalist currents, especially the Turkish army. Therefore, this attempt was not able to make progress and present new solutions to the Kurdish problem, especially as we hear again about secret and indirect negotiations that took place in Oslo, the capital of Norway, between Turkish and Kurdish elements that lasted from (2008) to (2011). These attempts, like the previous ones, failed, although the Turkish Islamists were the ones who made them. The Turks attribute the failure of these talks to the outbreak of the Syrian revolution in (2011), the change in the situation in the region, and the movements of the Kurds in Syria.

On the Kurdish side, there have been attempts to find a formula for peace with Turkey, the most famous of which is the initiative of the leader of the Kurdistan Workers' Party, Ebdullah Ocelan, whom Turkey accuses of leading a terrorist organization, and who was arrested by the Turkish authorities and first sentenced to death, then the sentence was commuted to life imprisonment. From his prison, Ebdullah Ocelan presented the initiative to stop the violence between the PKK and the Turkish authorities on the basis of redefining citizenship in the Turkish constitution, and the implementation of the localities system with wide powers in accordance with the regulations of the European Union. Ocelan presented this initiative on the occasion of Nowruz holiday on March 2013, 21, but the developments of the conflict in Syria, the position of Iraqi Kurdistan and the desire of the Turkish army to secure its borders did not lead to tangible results from this initiative.

In his book "Islam, the Kurds, and the Kurdish Nation State", Christopher Houston provides an important analysis of the Kurdish issue and its position in Turkish history and politics. Houston begins his book with a shocking statement: "The Kurdish majority in southeastern Turkey has been in a state of constant revolution since the proclamation of the republic in Turkey".

Houston also refers to another very important matter for Turkish foreign policy, which is the impact of the Kurdish issue on Turkey's relations with neighboring countries, particularly Iraq. He also monitors the repercussions of the Kurdish issue on Turkey's relations with America and the European Union.

Houston notes the impact of the deteriorating security situation in the Kurdish regions on the economic situation among the Kurds and the futility of development projects undertaken by the Turkish government as a result of the instability in these regions. He monitors the emigration of many Kurdish youths from their homeland in search of a better economic future.

In the end, the author clarifies the dilemma of the Kurdish issue between the position of the Turkish government, which seeks to preserve as much homogeneity as possible between the ethnic community segments, and the position of the Turkish army, which views the Kurdish issue as a mere security problem from the standpoint of combating terrorism. This is in addition to the position of Turkish civil society, which sees the Kurdish problem as a major challenge that calls for confronting issues related to the difference in language and culture and how to secure a degree of social homogeneity while maintaining the minimum right to difference.

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Do the Kurds in Turkey constitute a security problem or a multicultural and ethnic societal difference?
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References:

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- 3) Kuwait News Agency, Ocelan Initiative to Stop Violence, 2013/21/3.
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