

# MOSUL

## AND TURKEY'S REGIONAL INTERESTS IN THE NEW WORLD ORDER

### MOSUL Y LOS INTERESES REGIONALES DE TURQUÍA EN EL NUEVO ORDEN MUNDIAL

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#### ABSTRACT

The Mosul Question represents a significant historical case study in post-Ottoman territorial disputes and resource-sharing agreements, with implications for understanding international relations in the Middle East during the early 20th century. While existing scholarship has primarily focused on the period leading up to the 1926 Frontier Treaty between Turkey and Iraq, there remains a gap in the literature regarding the treaty's long-term implementation and economic consequences. This study examines the complex aftermath of the 1926 Frontier Treaty, particularly focusing on the previously unexplored aspects of oil royalty payments from Iraq to Turkey. It is challenged the conventional narrative that Turkey accepted a fixed settlement of 500,000 pounds, presenting evidence from Turkish state budgets that indicates a different arrangement based on a ten percent royalty system that operated from 1931 to 1952. The research traces the evolution of the Mosul dispute from its origins in the post-World War I period through the Lausanne negotiations and subsequent League of Nations deliberations. Key findings reveal that contrary to traditional interpretations, Turkey received regular royalty payments for over two decades following the treaty. However, post-1952 relations were strained by issues of unpaid royalties and payment inadequacies. This study contributes to our understanding of early Turkish-Iraqi relations by demonstrating how economic agreements shaped bilateral relationships. The findings indicate that Turkey ultimately prioritized diplomatic relations over economic claims, adopting a conciliatory approach toward Iraq. This research provides valuable insights into the complex interplay between territorial settlements, resource agreements, and regional diplomacy in the post-Ottoman Middle East.

**Keywords:** Mosul, Turkey, Iraq, Middle East, Oil.

#### RESUMEN

La cuestión de Mosul constituye un caso de estudio histórico significativo sobre las disputas territoriales y los acuerdos de reparto de recursos posteriores al Imperio Otomano, con implicaciones para la comprensión de las relaciones internacionales en Oriente Medio a principios del siglo XX. Si bien los estudios existentes se han centrado principalmente en el período que condujo al Tratado de Fronteras de 1926 entre Turquía e Irak, sigue habiendo una laguna en la literatura sobre la aplicación a largo plazo del tratado y sus consecuencias económicas. Este estudio examina las complejas consecuencias del Tratado de Fronteras de 1926, centrándose especialmente en los aspectos hasta ahora inexplorados de los pagos de regalías petroleras de Irak a Turquía. Se cuestiona la narrativa convencional de que Turquía aceptó un acuerdo fijo de 500.000 libras, presentando pruebas de los presupuestos estatales turcos que indican un acuerdo diferente basado en un sistema de regalías del diez por ciento que funcionó entre 1931 y 1952. La investigación rastrea la evolución de la disputa de Mosul desde sus orígenes en el período posterior a la Primera Guerra Mundial hasta las negociaciones de Lausana y las posteriores deliberaciones de la Liga de las Naciones. Los hallazgos clave revelan que, contrariamente a las interpretaciones tradicionales, Turquía recibió pagos regulares de regalías durante más de dos décadas después del tratado. Sin embargo, las relaciones posteriores a 1952 se vieron

## INTRODUCTION

The province of Mosul, located in the middle of Mesopotamia, has ever been a strategic enclave due to geographical location and riches (Baillet, 2019). It belonged for centuries to the Ottoman Empire, which was part of a commercial and cultural system running from Anatolia to the Persian Gulf. However, the fall of the empire after the First World War (1914-1918) created a long fight for its sovereignty. The Lausanne Conference (1923) and subsequent Border Treaty (1926) attempted to determine its status, but the battle between Turkey, successor to the Ottoman Empire, and the Kingdom of Iraq, under British suzerainty, laid the ground for the tensions that persist uninterrupted today (Jeutner, 2019). This scenario reflects the manner in which the postcolonial redefinition of the Middle East, constructed by agreements such as Sykes-Picot (1916), prioritized imperial interests over local ethnic and economic forces (Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2025). The 1923 Lausanne Treaty, while recognizing Turkish sovereignty, left the question of Mosul unresolved, entrusting its resolution to the League of Nations (Conlin, 2024). The 1926 decision, awarding the province to British-mandated Iraq, was protested by Turkey, who regarded it as part of its *Misak-ı Milli* (National Pact), its constitution of foundation establishing the national borders of Turkey. But Ankara settled for monetary reparations for waiving claims, though subsequent budget statements reveal payments extended to 1952, a testament to the complexity of the transaction. This episode illustrates Turkey's struggle to reconcile its post-imperial identity with the expectations of global powers, a challenge that continues to define its foreign policy (Oztig & Okur, 2023).

The economic importance of Mosul lies in its enormous energy potential, particularly oil, a commodity that has attracted the attention of regional and international actors (Conlin, 2020). In the 20th century, ownership of oil fields such as Kirkuk was not only implicated with Iraq's riches, but also that of European energy security and that of powers such as the United States and Russia. For Turkey, retaining access to such resources and the containment of Kurdish separatism in northern Iraq have been essential, especially since the advent of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). The reciprocal interdependence of domestic security and regional outreach positions Mosul at a strategic crossroads for Ankara, whose priorities alternate between economic utilitarianism and historic loyalty to Turkmen minorities.

Ethnosectarian politics adds multiple layers of complication to the war. Turkmens, Turkish in origin, and Kurds, autonomy for whom is an ideal, have been major players in the contest over Mosul. Turkey, in its assuming of a

protector role of the Turkmen, tries to legitimize its role, but Baghdad views such measures as an infringement. At the same time, external powers' instrumentalization of sectarian divisions, as the article suggests, escalated tensions, reviving colonial patterns of "divide and rule". This image depicts the manner in which local identities get weaponized within global geopolitics, where the mastery of energy is more precious than social coexistence to the likes of the US and the EU (Dodge, 2024).

Within the context of the new world order, Mosul embodies the paradoxes of an emerging international system. The comparative US withdrawal, the resurgence of Russia and the rise of China as a consumer of energy are reshaping alignments within the region. Turkey, under Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, is attempting to position itself as a standalone regional power, balancing Islamist soft power with a militant military strategy, as seen by its intervention in northern Iraq (Gurbuz, 2023). However, this approach disrupts the interests of both traditional and emerging players, and Mosul is a microcosm of the struggle to redefine the balance of power in the 21st century. Examining this case educates us on how history, resources and ethnicity converge in contemporary geopolitics.

The main purpose of this study is to provide the historical background of the Mosul issue and to shed light on the consequences of the 1926 Border Treaty. To obtain a fuller and more accurate picture of this important issue, we emphasize the events that took place in the period after 1926. First, we examine the historical background of the Mosul issue, beginning with the Lausanne negotiations, when the fate of the province became a key issue in the peace process. Next, we analyze the years 1923–26, during which increasing tensions between Great Britain and Turkey dominated the League of Nations negotiations. Finally, we focus on the period after the 1926 Border Treaty to shed light on the Iraqi government's payment of ten percent of its oil royalties to Turkey.

## DEVELOPMENT

Today, the inclusion of Mosul province in the collection on Iraq seems entirely appropriate. However, less than a century ago, this was hardly a credible assumption. Indeed, as the emerging international community at the beginning of the last century understood it, the "Mosul question" revolved around where Mosul fit into the new nation-state system. This question arose from a set of shifting assumptions about borders and belonging. During the last century of Ottoman rule, Mosul was part of a wider region through which goods, people, ideas, and currencies were exchanged. This region included cities and towns that are now part of Iran, Iraq, Turkey, Syria, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia.

At the end of the First World War, it was not yet certain that Mosul would become part of Iraq. More than any other place discussed in this volume, the Mosul region exemplifies the massive transformation that accompanied the creation of the new nation-state system (Fromkin, 2009, p. 372).

The major issues accompanying this transformation for Mosul are, first, the consequences of its removal from its former imperial context, and second, its place within the new nation-state system. To begin with, I will argue that Mosul benefited greatly from the regional trade facilitated by the vast territory of the Ottoman Empire. When this empire dissolved and was replaced by a new Middle Eastern state system, the province had to adapt its economic base.

In fact, the issue extends far beyond the context of Iraq-Turkey relations and the fight against terrorism. Iraq is situated on the world's energy "ocean," and a new imperialist conflict is unfolding in the region. Unlike in the past, Turkey now intends to act assertively in this conflict not as an ally of one of the parties but as an independent player. In this sense, although the training is purposeful, the establishment of a base with 1,000 armored vehicles and a military airfield by the Turkish army demonstrates that it is pursuing a more sustainable and ambitious strategy. Following Qatar, Turkey is creating a second and highly significant strategic location and military presence in a country that is crucial in terms of energy resources in the Middle East (Bialasiewicz, 2002).

Turkey rightly recognized that creating a safe zone was the only viable option to prevent terrorists from entering the country from Iraq and Syria, and it has been working toward this goal for years. Those who are blind to Turkey's national interests in the Mosul issue oppose Turkey's involvement because they have not abandoned their ideas of reviving the Crusades. They aim to repeat the manipulative tactics they employed in the past. For instance, England, which once incited desert Arabs with the help of Lawrence and betrayed the Turkish soldiers who were protecting Arab lands in the Arabian Peninsula against imperialists, is now seeking to play new games against Turkey by aligning with America and Israel. The current Iraqi Prime Minister, Heydar al-Abadi, has taken on the role of the desert Arabs of the past. He issues statements claiming that "Turkey is undermining Iraq's independence," yet he remains silent about the United States and England, who have occupied Iraq since 2003. Moreover, years ago, Iraq itself requested the presence of Turkish military forces in Northern Iraq (Åkermark, 2009).

The President of Turkey rightly emphasizes that the Mosul issue is a national issue for Turkey and clearly communicates to the global community that Turkey is resolute on this matter. Turkey cannot sacrifice its national interests to accommodate the imperialist sentiments and ambitions of others, as the Mosul issue represents one of Turkey's most sensitive national concerns. The struggle of great powers for influence in Iraq continues unabated. External forces do not hesitate to exploit sectarian differences among Muslims. Specifically, they are attempting to suppress Sunnis and Turkmens while placing other groups in positions where they have traditionally held dominance. This strategy serves two purposes. The first is to undermine the historical claims of the Turks. In other words, if the Turkish identity in Mosul and Kirkuk weakens, the historical basis for their claim to these regions will also erode.

In particular, the part of the "Misak-i Milli" related to the Middle East lost its significance. It is well known that at the beginning of the last century, the Middle East began to be divided into spheres of influence by France and Great Britain. This process culminated in the 1916 Sykes-Picot Agreement, which formalized these spheres of influence. Thus, the statements made by official Baghdad regarding Turkey actually reflect the policies pursued by certain circles in the West. However, the number of those who oppose the Sykes-Picot Agreement is now increasing (Zurcher, 2004, pp. 143–145).

Secondly, some major powers in the region are attempting to create artificial obstacles to the growth of Turkey's influence. In doing so, they do not hesitate to align themselves with the great powers of the United States and Europe, whom they otherwise consider enemies. Naturally, such actions serve to weaken Muslim states as a whole and pit them against one another. It is deeply regrettable that Muslims have not drawn the right conclusions from the bitter lessons of history. Moreover, this is occurring at a time when Islamophobia is on the rise in the West. Muslims are facing a double blow: they are being oppressed in Western societies while their statehood in their traditional homelands is being undermined. To achieve this, as always, divisions are being sown among Muslim countries (Kuyash, 2016, pp. 64–66).

From this perspective, the "Misak-i Milli" is an extremely important document. It establishes that a Muslim country bears responsibility for the political fate of Muslims in the region. Specifically, according to this document, Turkey is obligated to protect the culture, national identity, and historical territories of Muslims. There is nothing unusual about this. After all, if the United States can travel tens of thousands of kilometers to assert its national interests in Iraq, why should states like Turkey and Iran, which

have existed in this region for thousands of years, or even Russia, remain passive? The Anglo-Saxons and Germans have been active in the Middle East for centuries, making plans and conducting political and military operations, and this is somehow considered normal. Yet, when regional powers seek to protect their interests, it is met with outrage as if it were an abnormal occurrence. The fact that the Baghdad government is complicit in this is particularly disappointing (Kaymaz, 1977, p. 2).

The facts demonstrate that sectarian discrimination exists within the Iraqi army. In the Mosul operation, certain units of this army attempted to advance not under the state flag but under flags bearing sectarian symbols. This is not a coincidence. If it were, the Peshmerga would not have opposed these actions. Therefore, this issue could escalate into a serious problem.

All of this could exacerbate sectarian tensions in the Middle East. The battles for Mosul are already intensifying, and for some reason, America is playing a leading role in this Muslim-majority region. The "Misak-i Milli" is the only official document that opposes the prolonged manipulation of foreign forces in the region. Which other regional states possess a similar document? If they do, why have they not raised their voices against foreign powers playing a dominant military role in the region? Instead, they have hidden behind American, French, German, British, and other military instructors, supporting the idea of liberating Mosul.

Turkey's interests in Iraq can be summarized as follows:

- To monitor and control potential developments in northern Iraq that could threaten Turkey, particularly in areas where the terrorist organization PKK operates and where Kurds are concentrated;
- To preserve the territorial integrity of Iraq and, to this end, prevent the establishment of an independent Kurdish state as a result of Kurdish separatist activities;
- To prevent the oppression of Iraqi Turkmens;
- To ensure uninterrupted access to energy resources from Iraq, given that Turkey meets 90% of its oil needs through imports;
- To address the broader consequences of war in a neighboring country, such as refugee crises, environmental issues, and the risk of being drawn into the conflict. In this sense, Turkey is no exception.

When preparing for military operations against Iraq, the United States planned to deliver one of its decisive blows from the north, using its military base in Turkey, as it did

in 1991. At that time, Turkey, by unequivocally supporting the Pentagon, was forced to relinquish access to Iraqi oil and shut down the Kirkuk-Yumurtalık oil pipeline. As a result, Turkey faced economic losses exceeding \$40 billion (Nasirov, 2008, p. 170).

## CONCLUSIONS

Mosul's important geostrategic position and rich natural resources have turned it into a contested territory, consequently leading to the formation of various interest groups around the city. Along with major regional powers such as Iraq and Turkey, which have ambitions in Mosul, global powers such as the US, Russia, and European countries have joined the struggle for influence in the region. Additionally, groups that constitute the majority in the region, such as the Kurds and Turkmens, have their own interests related to Mosul. The Iraqi state intends to keep Mosul within its geographical borders by all possible means. Meanwhile, Turkey wants to protect the rights of the Turkmen living in Mosul, which it considers a historical Turkish homeland and part of the "National Alliance," as well as benefit from the rich energy resources in the region. Both during and after the Cold War, major powers such as the US and Russia have sought to keep Mosul within their sphere of influence and use it for their policies. The energy potential of Mosul has been the focus of these two powerful states, as is the case with every nation. EU countries, in turn, see Mosul as an opportunity to ensure Europe's energy security.

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