

CHARACTERISTICS OF SELECTED SECURITY THREATS IN THE KURDISTAN REGION IN IRAQ

Piotr SOSNOWSKI, M.A.

National Defence University, Warsaw, Poland

Abstract

Since the end of World War I, the struggle with Kurdish separatism was a common problem for Iraq, Iran, Turkey and Syria. Due to the constant struggle and a series of favourable events, currently the most independent of the Kurdish regions is the Region of Kurdistan in Iraq. The countries in the region perceive Kurdish independence, and any questioning of the Sykes-Picot agreement, as a mortal threat to the integrity of their territories.

The following article describes and highlights selected security threats in the nascent Kurdish Region in Iraq. These are very complex and have different sources. The work starts with the characterisation of the geographic region of Kurdistan and the region of Kurdistan in Iraq. The next part describes the threat from the PKK, radical Islam and terrorism. An important aspect that generates threats for the Kurdistan Region in Iraq is the relationship with the Central Government in Baghdad. These relations have a negative impact on the economic and social situation in the Kurdistan Region.

Key words: National Security, Kurdish Issue, Iraq, Kurdish Regional Government,

Preface

The aim of this study is to highlight the selected security threats in the Kurdistan Region in Iraq. The article is based on an analysis of scientific sources, media reports, and interviews with decision-makers, Kurdish officials, scientists and field observations. To recognise the security problems of that region is an essential

part of building the awareness of decision makers who are facing problems like the migration crisis, the growing threat of terrorism in Europe and potential changes in the global security paradigm. Events and processes which take place in the Middle East can be linked with today's security threats to European countries.

The complicated situation in the Middle East negatively affects global security. The Arab Spring caused a destabilisation of the governments of many countries. It significantly strengthened the position of the radicals, polarised society and caused a significant return of resentment and nationalism in relations between countries in the Middle East. The result of the destabilisation of civil wars and humanitarian crises in the Middle East has been a migration crisis in Europe. This situation is characterised by the increasing complexity and multidimensionality of conflicts and social and political processes.

The Kurdistan Region in Iraq is barely explored and increasingly significant. Today, the Kurdish region in Iraq has a chance to become a determinant of the development of political processes in the region. Thanks to an effective and generous struggle against the Islamic State, the world's public opinion is also focused on the Kurdish issue. Unfortunately, Polish literature on this subject is still very deficient, but in recent years there has been an increase of interest in the Kurds, the Kurdish culture and Kurdish issue in general. For this article, I will use the Kurdistan Region in Iraq and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) interchangeably.

The overall research problem concerns the security threats for Kurdish Region in Iraq, as follows: *what constitutes the selected threats to the security of the Kurdistan Region in Iraq?* Solving a general problem is possible by solving the following specific problems:

1. What does the geographic area, called Kurdistan, constitute?
2. What is the Kurdistan Region in Iraq?
3. What threats to the security of the Kurdistan Region in Iraq can be distinguished?
4. What problems are caused by relations with the Central Government?
5. What are the main economic and social problems of Kurdistan Region in Iraq?

The most important scientific hypotheses in this research work include:

- supposing that the activities of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) are one of the major threats to the security of KRG,
- supposing that Islamic State is one of the major threats to the security of KRG,
- supposing that the main internal threat to KRG is terrorism generated by radical Islamic parties and organisations,
- supposing that the problems of economic and social relations with the Central Government in Baghdad strengthen the current threats and problems and can potentially generate new threats to KRG.

Threats are the most classic factor of the security environment. The definition of threats from *Biała Księga Bezpieczeństwa Narodowego* is adopted for this article. That definition shows that threats are direct or indirect destructive effects on the subject, which, in this case, is the Kurdish Region in Iraq. There is a distinction between potential and real threats; subjective and objective; external and internal; military and non-military; crisis and war; intentional and accidental (random).

The following work starts with a short description of the area called Kurdistan, which will facilitate the understanding of the position of the Iraqi Kurds, sources of their problems, the Kurdish decision-makers, and some sources of threats. The next part describes the subject of research – the Kurdistan Region in Iraq. Next is an analysis of selected threats to the security of the KRG. The author focuses on three, in his opinion, of the most important, which are the Kurdistan Workers' Party, Islamic State and the internal threat of terrorism and Islamic radicalism. The next section describes the relations between the KRG and Central Government in Baghdad. These relations have generated a threat to Iraqi Kurds for years and, even nowadays, are very challenging for both sides. The last section describes selected economic and social problems. The previously described risks have a huge impact on the intensification of the problems described, which also generate new risks and strengthen the present.

Kurdistan

In the period of Antiquity and the early Middle Ages, the area now called Kurdistan was a place of clashes between the influence of Rome and Constantinople, and the Parthians and Sasanians. The ancestors of the modern Kurds never let their powerful

neighbours dominate them, forcing them to maintain semi-independent vassal status. Landform had a huge impact on the character of the development of this nation. The mountainous land crisscrossed by rivers, on the one hand gave shelter, and on the other was a barrier in contacts within the society. During the Middle Ages, there were about forty independent Kurdish principalities. As a result of that, none of the Kurdish rebellions and uprisings had ever covered the whole of the Kurdish territory¹.

The Kurdish language belongs to the group of Western Iranian languages. North-western Kurdistan mainly uses the Kurmanji dialect. It is used by more than half of the Kurds and the first Kurdish literature was written in this language. Southern Kurds speak the Sorani dialect. There are also Zaza and Gurani dialects, but they are becoming less common. This is caused by a deficiency of literature and lack of education in those languages. A key problem is the language differences between the Kurds. They failed to establish a single literary language. The Kurdish language is official only in Iraq. It is still forbidden to publish in this language in Syria, and it was prohibited by law to use it in Turkey until 2002².

The landform of the area inhabited by the Kurds has allowed them to survive historical turmoil and forge their own individual identity. Science defines Kurdistan as a geographical region of compact Kurd settlements in the Middle East. It is an area of approximately 550 thousand km² situated in the centre of the Middle East between the Taurus, Antitaurus arc, Iranian Highlands and Anatolia, and between the Black Sea and the upper course of the Tigris and Euphrates³. This territory is divided by the borders of four countries: Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria⁴. Taking historical, political, socioeconomic and cultural factors into account, there are five sub-regions, which are briefly highlighted in the table below:

¹ F. Jomma, *Kurdowie i Kurdystan*, Gdańsk, 2001, p. 43-45.

² Amnesty International Report (march 2005): *Kurds in the Syrian Arab Republic one year after the March 2004 events*.

³ There are some differences in the sources related to the surface of Kurdistan. According to the official website of the regional government of Kurdistan given area of 595 thousand km², Amir Grgies estimated it at 520 thousand km² (A. Grgies, *Sprawa kurdyjska w XX wieku*, Warszawa 1997, p. 9). The reason for that discrepancy is the fact that the land is divided between the four countries in which interest is undervaluation of size or even denial of the existence of Kurdistan.

⁴ K. Lalik, *Kurdystan iracki u progu XXI wieku*, Kraków p.19.

Subregion	North	East	South (with the Middle)	Western
Controlling country	Turkey	Iran	Iraq	Syria
The percentage of The area of the country that it controls	26.9%	11.8%	18.8%	8.1%
Capital city ¹	Diyabakir ²	Mahabad	Erbil	Al-Hasakah
Area [km ²]	210 000	195 000	83 000	15 000
Estimated percentage of the area of Great Kurdistan	41.7%	38.7%	16.5%	2.9%
The population of Kurds in the controlling country	18-20 mln.	8-10 mln.	4.5-5.5 mln.	1.5-2.5 mln.
Strategic natural resources	Springs of the most important rivers in the region, oil and natural gas	Springs of the most important rivers in the region, oil ³	Oil and natural gas	Oil ⁴

¹ Sources differ in assigning central cities to the regions. Because of that author proposed capitols, which resulted from the knowledge gained during the research, but not found in the literature.

² M. Izady, *Internal Subvisions*, [in:] "The Encyclopedia of Kurdistan, Geography", [on-line] <http://kurdistanica.com/?q=node/49> (9.05.2016)

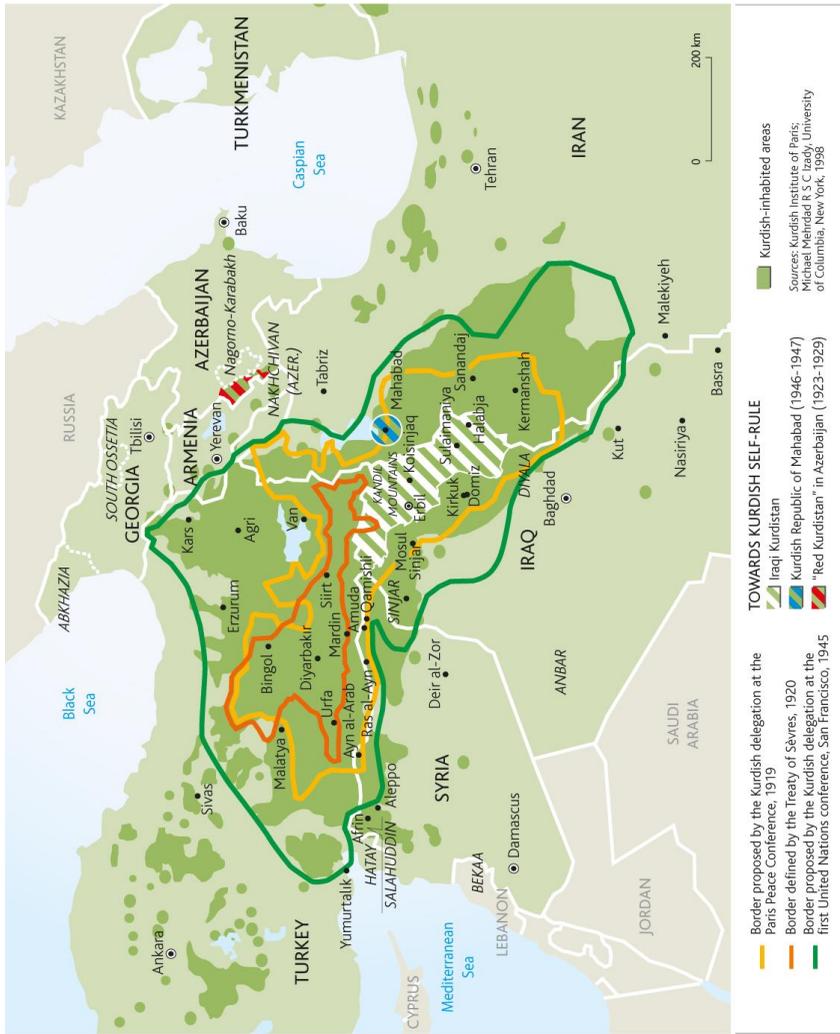
³ <http://www.parstimes.com/loil.html> (9.05.2016).

⁴ <http://nationalinterest.org/commentary/syrias-kurds-the-struggle-oil-8090> (9.05.2016).

Source: Own compilation based on *CIA Factbook* and *Central Bureau for studies and Research "Kurdistan"*, 1998, No. 33, p. 35.

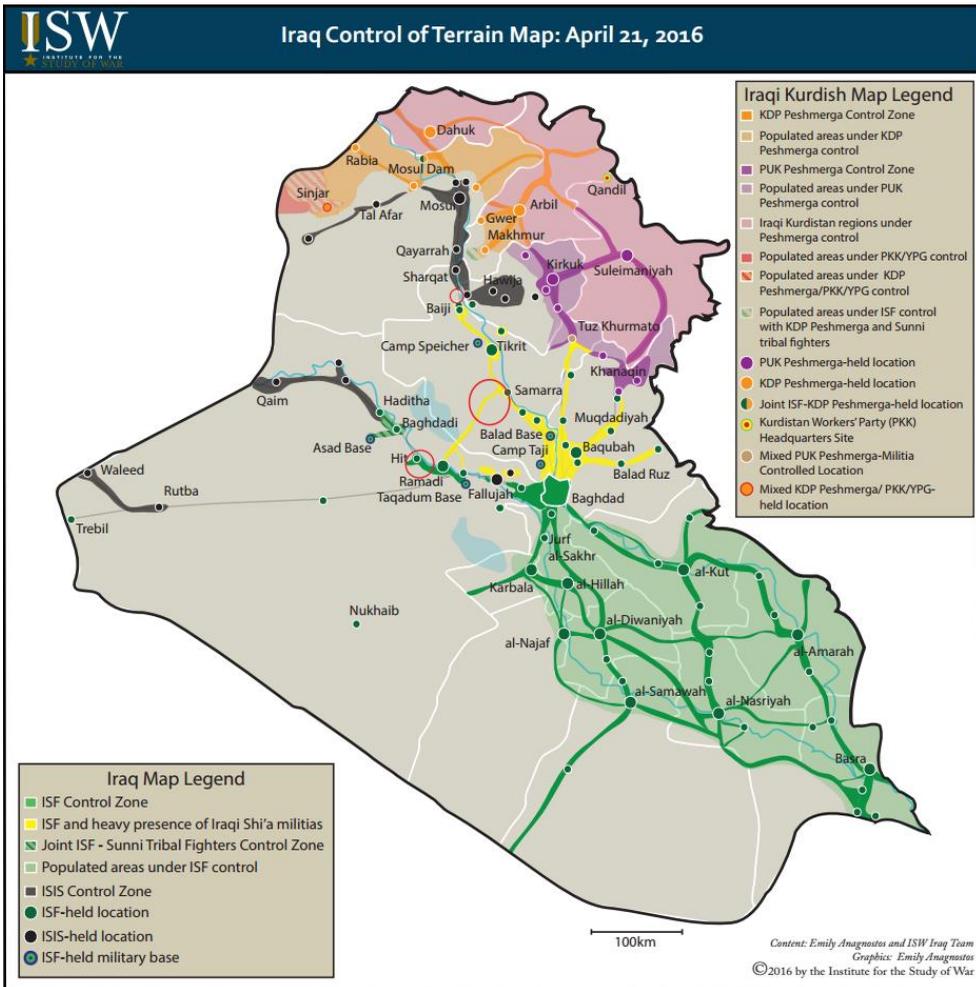
Table 1. Characteristics of the sub-regions of Kurdistan

During research on the Kurdish topic, researchers encounter many obstacles. There is lack of reliable sources of information or sources are distorted because of the emotional approach of an author or the policy towards the Kurdish minority. The most common problems encountered by researchers conducting research related to Kurds and Kurdistan are protests from countries whose territories overlap in any way with the area of Kurdistan. The next problem is distortion of facts about Kurds and Kurdistan, which is motivated ideologically and politically. Therefore, the following figure show only the projects of the demarcation of Kurdistan which were presented by the representatives of this nation at the international forum (Figure 1).



Source: own study based on maps developed by Philippe Rekacewicz: <http://mondediplo.com/maps/kurdistanborders> (05/01/2016).

Figure 1. Concepts of the Great Kurdistan against the Kurdish population distribution and contemporary and historical Kurdish administration



Source: Institute for the Study of War <http://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/iraq-control-terrain-map-april-21-2016> (14.05.2016).

Figure 2. Iraq Control of Terrain Map: April 21, 2016

Kurdish Region in Iraq

The partially autonomous region located in Northern Iraq includes the provinces of Dohuk, Erbil (Hewler) and Sulajmanija. Externally it borders with Syria (to the west), Turkey (to the north) and Iran (to the east). The inner boundary of the Iraqi government formally takes place between the provinces of Nineveh, Kirkuk,

Salahadin (west) and Diyala (to the east). In fact, the internal frontier with Iraq runs further south by the disputed regions⁵.

The Region was established due to the agreements adopted in March 1970 by the Kurdish opposition and the Iraqi government after years of heavy fighting. The current status stems from the Iraqi Constitution adopted after the overthrow of Saddam. The population of the Region is estimated at about 5 million people. Approximately half of them are under the age of 20, so this is a very young society⁶. The economy is dominated by the government, the oil industry, construction and services.

The Kurdish Regional Government took care of security and stability in its region, which allowed it to build the infrastructure and develop the services sector for the residents. The main goal of RKI policy will be development of the economy, which will not be dependent on the sale of crude oil.

The high security level of the Region and a growth of foreign investments allowed it to develop economic activity, primarily in the energy sector, construction sector and retail trade. Another factor that has a huge impact on the economic growth of Iraqi Kurdistan is long-term fiscal policy, which still mainly depends on the Central Government and its political reforms.

Iraq's economy is dominated by the oil sector, which represents more than 90% of public revenue and 80% of foreign exchange earnings. In 2012, Iraq increased oil exports to 2.6 million barrels per day, which is significant compared to the exports of 2.2 million barrels in 2011⁷. Iraqi contracts with major oil companies have the potential for further development of oil exports and increased revenues. Before that, Iraq should significantly modernise the processing of crude oil pipelines and export infrastructure. This is not possible now because of the current crisis and the fight against the Islamic State. In 2007, the Kurdistan Regional Government enacted its own law on oil and immediately signed more than 50 contracts for

5 In point no. 140 of the Iraqi Constitution from 2005, disputed regions are the entire territory of the province of Kirkuk and some areas in the provinces of Nineveh, Arbil, Diyala, Wasit, Salah al-Din.

6 http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/MG1100/MG1185z1-2/RAND_MG1185z1-2.pdf s.1 (19.05.2015).

7 Anthony H. Cordesman, Sam Khazai, *Iraq in Crisis*, Report of the CSIS Burke Chair in Strategy, 2014, p. 136.

exploration and extraction of oil and gas on its territories. The federal government challenged the KRG's legal authority in most of these agreements. Some of these contracts are related to disputed areas (e.g. Kirkuk). The other regions of Iraq, managed by Baghdad, have not made any sufficient progress in the implementation of economic policy and the fight against internal problems. These are: unstable political system, social conflicts, terrorism, high crime, corruption, outdated infrastructure, inadequate basic services, a shortage of skilled labour and outdated trade rules. For this reason, the Kurdish region is a much more attractive partner for foreign investors. Investments in Kurdistan are conducted on the basis of the regional law, which provides tax reliefs for investors.

The geopolitical situation of the Kurdistan Region has significantly negative effects on its safety and security. To the west, KRG borders on civil war engulfed Syria, and to the south with the area controlled by the Islamic State. To the north is Turkey, whose relations with the Kurdish regional government are difficult. On the one hand, they have lucrative contracts and run a huge trade, and on the other, they perceive themselves as a mutual threat. Iraqi Kurdistan has an eastern border with Iran, which, like the northern neighbour, sees unrecognised Kurdish statehood as a great danger. In their history, Iraqi Kurds were repeatedly exploited by other countries as an instrument of pressure and a tool of destabilisation.

Another negative feature of the KRG geopolitical environment is the state, most of which belongs to different political structures and political-military and culturally and economically diverse. Only Turkey has a relatively stable democracy, which the Iraqi Kurds can find common in economic interests (e.g. sale oil and gas). In contrast, the dominant ethnic group in Iran are Persians who have common cultural roots with Kurds. According to the Iranian scholars, Kurdish issues should facilitate cooperation, even despite the Sunni-Shiite conflict. However, common roots do not interfere with the Iranian authorities carrying out the death penalty on Kurdish oppositionists.

Huge energy resources can also be considered as a negative trait of KRG's geographic position. There is a general opinion that it was the reason for blocking the Kurdish independence project and the liquidation of the Kingdom of Kurdistan in 1924 by the former colonial states. A contemporary problem is the fact that the

common interests of the Islamic State and the Sunni Arab tribes are to obtain access to the deposits of strategic oil plains. One of the main directions of their activities to achieve this goal is Kirkuk, which is now controlled by Kurds.

An Analysis of selected threats

The main external threat is the armed aggression of one of the neighbouring countries or Iraq's Army. However, such a scenario is unlikely to happen if only a conventional war is considered. An unconventional aggression is much more likely to happen. It can occur even though the Turkish relationship with the government in Erbil is proper and that both entities work together on the economic as well as military (fight against PKK). Any Kurdish subjectivity still raises huge concerns among Turks. In the near future, it can be expected that Ankara will try to use the Arab-Sunni tribes, Turkmen minorities and Sunni religious political organisations to increase their influence in Iraq and to exert political pressure or even destabilise the KRG. Today, it seems that Turkey receives more benefits from good relations with the KRG, which may also play the role of a mediator in the conflict between Turkey and the PKK.

Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK)

Iraqi Kurds relations with the PKK are very complicated. Both sides have accused each other of being under the influence of a foreign power and dispute the right to lead the Kurdish Issue. Turkey and Syria especially willingly stoke that conflict, which in the past led to heavy fighting between Kurds. Currently, the PKK has a huge influence in northern Syria, where it formed a quasi-state called Rojava. The PKK is also trying to gain influence in Iraqi Kurdistan, e.g. in Sinjar among the Kurdish Yazidis. The PKK is an organisation founded in November 27 1978 by Abdullah Öcalan. Its main objective was to establish a state based on the ideology of socialist countries in the areas inhabited by the Kurds. Now, we can observe the evolution of PKK ideology towards libertarian anarchism. The organisation is located on US and European lists of terrorist organisations, but because of its

current effectiveness in the fight against the Islamic State there are some voices considering removing the PKK from that list⁸.

During the civil war between the Democratic Party of Kurdistan (PDK) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) in 1994-1997, the PKK intensified the conflict, which was beneficial for Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria. In that conflict, Iran was supporting the PUK and PKK. Those PKK activities prevented the United States from gaining influence in Northern Iraq and blocked the peace process between the PDK and PUK, which could lead to the creation of an independent Kurdish state in that region. PKK bases located in the mountains on the Iraq-Turkey border became the target of four major military operations conducted jointly by the Turkish army and the PDK (1992, 1995 and two in 1997).

Currently, it is believed that the PKK carries out the interests of the United States in Syria and partly also Russian interests and, in Iraq, the interests of Baghdad. It is hard to avoid such conclusions after trying to establish a PKK canton in Sinjar⁹. That plan was combined with a psychological operation, the goal of which was to inspire Yazidi Kurds to abandon their Kurdish identity¹⁰.

Islamic radicalism, terrorism and the Islamic State

According to the *Global Terrorism Index*, reported by international think tank the Institute for Economics and Peace, the country most affected by terrorism in the world is Iraq¹¹. In 2013, 35.4% of all deaths due to terrorist acts took place in this country. Also, in this country, the highest intensification of terrorist acts was recorded – from 2012 until 2013, the number of those killed in terrorist attacks had increased by 164%. The only provinces free from this phenomenon – Erbil, Dahuk and Sulaymaniyah, are under Kurdish control.

⁸ <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2014/08/16/pkk-kurdish-terrorists-are-fighting-isis-terrorists-with-u-s-help.html> (04.05.2016).

⁹ <http://ekurd.net/iraqi-kurdistan-warns-pkk-it-will-not-brook-external-interference-in-sinjar-2015-01-17> (04.05.2016).

¹⁰ <http://www.kurdpress.com/En/NSite/FullStory/News/?Id=8173> (04.05.2016).

¹¹ http://www.visionofhumanity.org/sites/default/files/Global%20Terrorism%20Index%20Report%202014_0.pdf (19.04.2016).

Especially disputed areas, but also others controlled by the Central Government, are affected by terrorism whose usual target is the Kurds. In 2014, these events took place in the cities of Jalula¹², Tuz Khormato¹³ and Baghdad¹⁴. Furthermore, in these areas there are also a lot of kidnappings and killings of all citizens of Iraq. In 2014, in the area of Kurdistan Region only one terrorist attack was recorded¹⁵. From January to late May 2015, there was also only one attempt. Both took place in the capital of Iraqi Kurdistan – Erbil¹⁶. It should also be noted that an important area of terrorist activity is Kirkuk, in which Kurdish control is not officially approved by the Central Government¹⁷.

Terrorist organisations that pose a threat to the Kurdistan Region in Iraq:

- Ansar al-Islam (AAI) and Al Qaeda¹⁸,
- Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK),
- Islamic State,
- Hash al-Shaabi.

Ansar al-Islam was incorporated by the Islamic State, which is now the biggest military threat to the Kurds. Internal threats to KRG are determined by the external environment. The factor which has a huge impact on the internal security and stability of the KRG is the rivalry for influence in Iraq between Turkey and Iran. It can be said that both countries have, in some way, inherited hostility towards each other after their predecessors – Ottomans and Safavids. This historical hostility is used by both countries, which, in order to pursue their own interests, heats up sectarian conflict between Shiites and Sunnis. This situation poses a threat to the Kurds because it strengthens the religious identification of KRG citizens at the expense of the national one. It is difficult to build statehood if citizens

12 <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/06/iraqi-kurds-targeted-twin-carb-bomb-blasts-201469141237775108.html> (19.04.2016).

13 <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/06/multiple-bombings-target-kurds-iraq-2014689857332677.html> (19.04.2016).

14 <http://www.foxnews.com/world/2014/06/08/iraqi-officials-double-bombing-at-kurdish-party-office-kills-13-northeast> (19.04.2016).

15 <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/11/deadly-car-bomb-hits-iraq-erbil-2014111992353562885.html> (19.04.2016).

16 <http://news.yahoo.com/car-bomb-blast-targeted-u-consulate-erbil-reuters-154753982.html> (19.04.2016).

17 <http://ekurd.net/mismas/articles/misc2014/12/state8761.htm> (19.04.2016).

18 <http://www.aina.org/news/20120105102642.htm> (19.04.2016).

are beginning to strengthen religion identity more than their own nationality. A striking example of this is the behaviour of Ali Bapir, the leader of the party called Komelî Islami Kurdistan (Kurdistan Islamic Group, NCI). Ali Bapir did not rise during the playing of the Kurdish national anthem at the official government ceremony. He explained his behaviour later as a protest against the words of the anthem: „our country is our religion”.

Another example of an organisation which is a high security risk for the KRG is the Ansar al-Islam. This radical group of Sunni Kurds was founded in 2001 by Najmaddin Faraj Ahmad¹⁹. Its aim is to fight the influence of the United States in Iraqi Kurdistan. The main area of activity is Halabja and Kirkuk²⁰. In 2014, part of the organisation was absorbed by the Islamic State. Other groups of AAI cooperated with Al-Qaeda and Al-Nusra Front²¹. The organisation is affiliated with the legally acting party - the Islamic Group of Kurdistan. Members of the PUK were the main targets of attacks²². The group was also referred to as Kurdish Battalions of Al-Qaeda, which was suspected of carrying out the attack on the headquarters of Kurdish Special Forces, Asayish, in Erbil in 2013²³. This group has also been incorporated by the Islamic State²⁴.

The Islamic State intensified fighting in northern Iraq in December 2013. In January 2014, it took Fallujah and Ramadi and, on 5 June 2014, launched an offensive against Iraqi forces and started occupying Samara, Mosul and Tikrit within a week. As a result, Iraqi troops, despite considerable manpower and weaponry, withdrew to the south. The source of Baghdad's failures was probably the very low morale of the Iraqi Army and corruption. An example of Central Government failure was its loss of Mosul. It is the second largest city in Iraq, inhabited by two and a half million people. The Islamic State did this with a huge disproportion of power – about 30 000 members of the Iraqi army literally fled

19 Known as Mullah Krekar, he is linked to Al-Qaeda. Nowadays he is in custody in Norway and convicted to death in Iraqi Kurdistan.

20 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/proscribed-terror-groups-or-organisations--2> (19.04.2016).

21 <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/security/2014/09/is-takfiri-caliphate.html#> (19.04.2016).

22 http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/not_in_website/syndication/monitoring/media_reports/2588623.stm (19.04.2016).

23 <http://rudaw.net/english/kurdistan/02102013> (19.04.2016).

24 Ibidem.

from 800 fighters of the Islamic State²⁵. The Iraqi army and security forces left behind modern military equipment and weapons, such as 2300 Humvee²⁶. More than half a million residents of the city found a safe haven in Iraqi Kurdistan²⁷.

Relations with the Central Government

As a result of the terrorist offensive on June 13 2014, Kurdish forces seized territories abandoned by the Iraqi Army, which, according to the Iraqi Constitution of 2005, are considered as disputed. This action saved religious and ethnic minorities from persecution by the Islamic State. That operation also allowed Kurds to achieve one of their important goals, which was taking control of the historical Kurdish lands. Another would be to obtain the approval of Baghdad and the support of the international community to officially accept joining the disputed lands to the KRG administration.

The liberation of Mosul is in the interest of Bagdad, but to achieve this it needs the help of Kurdish troops which control the area around the city. Iraqi Kurds are opposed to taking the main burden of that operation. In their opinion, the people of this city and Baghdad should deal with this alone. There is a belief that the fact that the inhabitants of Mosul are not fighting with Islamic State stems from the fact that the new power is convenient for them. A significant part of the population of Mosul perceives the Islamic State negatively. The reason for this is the chaos that prevailed in the city after the American operation in 2003 and Maliki policies toward Sunni Arabs.

It can be assumed that the liberation of Mosul will be related to the presidential election in the US. Some sources indicate that the current government of Democrats needs a propaganda success, which will help to increase the support for their candidate in the race for the highest office in the United States. Liberation

25 <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jun/11/mosul-isis-gunmen-middle-east-states> (19.04.2016).

26 https://news.vice.com/article/iraq-might-have-lost-2300-armored-us-humvees-to-the-islamic-state-in-mosul?utm_source=vicenewsfb (19.04.2016).

27 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-27789229> (19.04.2016).

of Mosul needs a common position and cooperation between the Central Government and the KRG. The Kurds will not proceed with this operation without finding solutions to the following issues:

- Baghdad's official agreement for the inclusion of disputed regions including Kirkuk into the Kurdish administration,
- acceptance for rearmament of Peshemrga,
- Baghdad's fulfilment of the financial obligations to the KRG,
- participation of ethnic and religious minorities in the administration of Mosul.

The above are only the most important of the many problems between Erbil and Bagdad.

The total destruction of the Islamic State is also in the interest of the KRG. The existence of the Islamic State is a huge threat to Iraqi Kurds because, even if there is no armed aggression, the propaganda activities, information and psychological operations of Jihadists can lead to the radicalisation of some of the Sunni Kurds. The Islamic State strengthens the Shia–Sunni conflict, which destabilises not only Iraq, but also the whole Middle East. The intensification of the conflict between Shiites and Sunnis can be beneficial for both Turkey and Iran, who are fighting for influence in Iraq and Syria.

Another important issue of KRG and Baghdad relations is Kirkuk. Arabs, Kurds and Turkmen are the three largest groups living in the, so-called, “Kurdish Jerusalem”. All of them claim their rights to the city. Arabs consider this city as an integral part of Iraq, but it is more related to economics and sentiment than to history. Oil fields of Kirkuk export about 400 000 barrels of crude oil per day. In April 2014, Iraq produced 3.3 million barrels of oil per day and planned to increase production to 5 million barrels per day in 2015. Oil extracted in Kirkuk and infrastructure running through the province is strategically important for Iraq. Also, Turkmen believe that Kirkuk is their city. They came to this city with their administration and army in the days of the Ottoman Empire. The Arabs were largely resettled there by the Arabisation policy pursued by the government of Saddam Hussein. That changed not only the ethnic composition of Kirkuk, but also other regions to the disadvantage of Kurds, Assyrians and Turkmen. Arabisation of regions inhabited by the Kurds and the forced relocation were an integral part of the policy of Saddam Hussein against the Kurds which continued

until the US invasion in 2003²⁸. According to the UN's data, over the entire period of the rule of Hussein, in the Kurdish provinces of Dohuk, Erbil and Sulaymaniya, he displaced and sent into flight more than 805 thousand Kurds. 42% of them were displaced from areas rich in oil (mainly Kirkuk). Some sources say that 400 thousand Kurds were forcibly displaced from the region of Kirkuk in the 1980s. Kirkuk has been an area of inflamed conflicts between all ethnic and religious groups living in Iraq and also between the Kurds and the Turkish Republic which, under the pretext of defending the rights of the Turkmen living in the region, is trying to implement its policy there. Today, Kirkuk is under the control of the Kurdish forces and the city itself is fairly safe, but in the province there is still some fighting with the Islamic State.

Economic and social problems

The war against terrorism, Islamic radicalism and looking after nearly two million refugees is a very expensive undertaking. The rapid development of the KRG in recent years was possible due to high oil prices, which at their peak cost over \$146 per barrel (3 July 2008). Today, the KRG is facing crisis because of a radical drop in oil prices. In January 2016, oil prices dropped to just over \$ 27 per barrel. Unfortunately, KRG's economy is totally dependent on oil.

Along with the duration of the crisis, the likelihood of occurrence of zones of hunger and poverty is increasing. They may occur when neighbouring countries decide to isolate Iraqi Kurdistan (e.g. due to a declaration of independence) and the continuing migration crisis in the region. There are nearly two million refugees and Internal Displaced Persons in an area controlled by the Kurdish government. One of the major economic problems is the current excessive imports (especially from Turkey and Iran), which leads to the unprofitability of the KRG's own production. Another one is corruption, which also causing important social and economic problems.

²⁸ *Tereny sporne i kwestia Kirkuku* w: K. Lalik, *Kurdystan Iracki u progu XXI wieku*, op. cit., p. 237.

Before and after 2003, the prevailing conditions in the Kurdish region were very unfavourable for investors. There was no effective banking or insurance system. There was no power, highways, water purification plants, heavy industry and modern agriculture, airports, etc. The Kurds had to build almost everything from scratch. That situation was the result of Baath party policy that limited Iraqi investments in this area almost to the tourism sector. Nowadays, because of a high level of security, the Iraqi Kurds have achieved political stability and unification of the administrative authorities of the Kurdistan Region. They can concentrate on creating laws favourable for economic development adapted to the requirements of internal and global interest and for foreign investors.

Conclusion

Risks and problems highlighted above are only a small part of the complex security environment of the Kurdish Region in Iraq. There are some important issues that have not been addressed at all or have only been mentioned in the following publications. Understanding the current security situation requires an immediate analysis of the relationship between the parties of the PUK, PDK and Goran, estimating the risk of an outbreak of fratricidal civil war and its effects on the overall situation in the region. Another important issue is also the possible announcement of independence by the KRG. The effects of that decision are extremely difficult to predict without a thorough analysis of the interests and objectives of the most important players in the region who push Kurdish decision-makers to take an ill-considered decision.

Problems and threats to the KRG's security are characterised by multidimensionality. There is a strong correlation between both - the internal and external threats. PKK, radical Muslim organisations and terrorist organisations like the Islamic State often follow the interests of other entities in exchange for financial support or weapons. The central government in Baghdad is highly unstable and has significant problems with regaining control over a large area of Iraq. The weakening of Iraq and Syria dramatically changed the political situation of Iraqi Kurds. Entities which want to weaken the KRG will use non-state entities, such as the PKK, radical Muslim organisations and terrorist organisations to destabilise

the KRG. There is a high probability that they will be used by other countries in order to gain control over the region for achieving their own interests. There are also visible efforts aimed at polarising the main political parties governing the KRG. Enemies of Kurdish independence can also sthe government in Baghdad and push the KRG and the Central Government to conflicts which can legally prevent and accept the secession of the Kurds in Iraq. Secession without the official acceptance of Baghdad can provoke the military intervention of Turkey, Iran and Iraq. The summary question is how far will some countries go forward in order to realize their interests? The consequences of heating up conflicts in the Middle East can also have a negative impact on the security of European countries, as evidenced by the migration crisis. The aim of this study was to highlight selected security threats for the RKI. However, it was not fully achieved. The described problems require further research.

Bibliography

Monographs and scientific articles:

- Barkey H.J. *Preventing Conflict Over Kurdistan, Carnegi Endowment For International Peace*, Washington 2009.
- Beehner L., *The Challenge in Iraq's Other Cities: Kirkuk*, "Council on Foreign Relations", 19 I 2006.
- Biała Księga Bezpieczeństwa RP*
- Bogusławska J., *Interwencja w Iraku - stanowisko Turcji*, „Biuletyn” PISM 2003, 7 III.
- Certrez, Donabed, and Makko. *The Assyrian Heritage: Threads of Continuity and Influence*. Uppsala University 2012.
- Chapman D., *Security Forces of the Kurdistan Regional Government*, U.S. Army War College, 2009.
- Cockburn P. *Państwo Islamskie*, PWN, Warszawa 2015.
- Dawoody A., *The Kurdish Quest for Autonomy and Iraq's Statehood*, "Jurnal of Asian and African Studies" 2006, Vol. 41, No. 5-6.
- Dzięgiel L., *Węzeł Kurdyjski* .
- Giedz M., *Kurdystan. Bez miejsca na mapie*. Bernardinum, Pelpin 2010.
- Grgies A., *Sprawa kurdyjska w XX wieku*, Warszawa 1997.
- Gunter M.M., *The KDP-PUK Conflict in Northern Iraq*, "Middle East Jurnal" 1996, nr 2.

- Jafar M., *Democracy and Federalism. Some economic Issues*, [w:] „Nowy Irak w perspektywie budowania demokratycznego państwa federacyjnego”, Materiały Międzynarodowej Konferencji Naukowej, Poznań 11-12 kwietnia 2005, red. Abbas A, Poznań 2006.
- Jomma F., *Kurdowie i Kurdystan*.
- Kurpiewska-Korbut R., *Spółeczność międzynarodowa wobec Kurdów irackich*, Kraków 2014.
- Lalik K. *Kurdystan iracki u progu XXI wieku*, Kraków 2010.
- McDowall D., *A Modern History Of The Kurds*, I. B. Tauris, New York 1997.
- Olson R., *The Goat And The Butcher. Nationalism And State Formation In Kurdistan-Iraq Since The Iraqi War*, Mazda Publishers, Costa Mesa 2005, “Kurdish Studies Series”, No. 6.
- Ries J., *Islam*, Kraków-Poznań 2001.
- Sosnowski P., *Paradygmat bezpieczeństwa Regionu Kurdystanu w Iraku*. Praca magisterska, Akademia Obrony Narodowej, 2015.
- Sosnowski P., *Relacje pomiędzy wybranymi organizacjami zbrojnymi biorącymi udział w przenikającym się konflikcie w Iraku i Syrii*. W: „Wojny i konflikty zbrojne w XXI wieku, AON, Warszawa 2015.
- Wahlbeck Ö., *Kurdish Diasporas. A Comparative Study of Kurdish Refugee Communities*, New York 1999.
- Zebari D., *The Kurdish Safe Haven in Iraq. The Problem of Non-State Status*. Erbil, 2005.

Websites:

- <http://kurdistanica.com/?q=node/49>
- <http://www.parstimes.com/Ioil.html>
- <http://nationalinterest.org/commentary/syrias-kurds-the-struggle-oil-8090>
- http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/MG1100/MG1185z1-2/RAND_MG1185z1-2.pdf s.1
- <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2014/08/16/pkk-kurdish-terrorists-are-fighting-isis-terrorists-with-u-s-help.html>
- <http://www.ekurd.net/mismas/articles/misc2008/2/independentstate2042.htm>
- <http://rudaw.net/english/middleeast/iraq/040520151>
- <http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2014/10/21/383033/new-report-shows-turkeyisil-links/>
<http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/qatar-and-isis-funding-the-u.s.-approach>
- http://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/23/opinion/isis-atrocities-started-with-saudi-support-for-salafi-hate.html?_r=0
- <http://www.newsweek.com/how-syrias-assad-helped-forge-isis-255631>
- <http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2014/06/22/368155/rand-paul-us-arming-isis-terrorists/>
- http://www.huffingtonpost.com/david-l-phillips/research-paper-isis-turke_b_6128950.html

<http://www.danielpipes.org/blog/2014/06/more-on-turkish-support-for-isis>
<http://www.newsweek.com/isis-and-turkey-cooperate-destroy-kurds-former-isis-member-reveals-turkish-282920>
<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jun/11/mosul-isis-gunmen-middle-east-states>
https://news.vice.com/article/iraq-might-have-lost-2300-armored-us-humvees-to-the-islamic-state-in-mosul?utm_source=vicenewsfb
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-27789229>
http://www.visionofhumanity.org/sites/default/files/Global%20Terrorism%20Index%20Report%202014_0.pdf
<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/06/iraqi-kurds-targeted-twin-carb-bomb-blasts-201469141237775108.html>
<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/06/multiple-bombings-target-kurds-iraq-2014689857332677.html>
<http://www.foxnews.com/world/2014/06/08/iraqi-officials-double-bombing-at-kurdish-party-office-kills-13-northeast>
<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/11/deadly-car-bomb-hits-iraq-erbil-2014111992353562885.html>
<http://news.yahoo.com/car-bomb-blast-targeted-u-consulate-erbil-reuters-154753982.html>
<http://ekurd.net/mismas/articles/misc2014/12/state8761.htm>
<http://www.aina.org/news/20120105102642.htm>
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/proscribed-terror-groups-or-organisations--2>
<http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/security/2014/09/is-takfiri-caliphate.html#>
http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/not_in_website/syndication/monitoring/media_reports/2588623.stm
<http://rudaw.net/english/kurdistan/02102013>
<http://www.iraqinews.com/iraq-war/20-turkish-officers-train-iraqi-volunteer-forces-mosul-battle/>
<http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/security/2014/08/kirkuk-kurdistan-region-oil-economy-iraq-government.html>

