

# **Iraqi Kurdistan Region**

**A Path Forward**

**Sasha Toperich**

**Tea Ivanovic**

**Nahro Zagros**

*Editors*

Center for Transatlantic Relations  
The Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies  
Johns Hopkins University

Sasha Toperich, Tea Ivanovic, and Nahro Zagros, eds., *Iraqi Kurdistan Region:  
A Path Forward*

Washington, DC: Center for Transatlantic Relations, 2017.  
© Center for Transatlantic Relations, 2017

**Center for Transatlantic Relations**

The Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies

The Johns Hopkins University

1717 Massachusetts Ave., NW, 8th Floor

Washington, DC 20036

Tel: (202) 663-5880

Fax: (202) 663-5879

Email: [transatlantic@jhu.edu](mailto:transatlantic@jhu.edu)

<http://transatlantic.sais-jhu.edu>

ISBN: 978-0-9907721-3-2

# Contents

<b>Preface</b> .....	vi
<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....	vii
<b>List of Abbreviations</b> .....	viii
<b>Introduction</b> .....	xi
<i>Sasha Toperich, Tea Ivanovic, and Nabro Zagros</i>	
<b>Part I: Contemporary Kurdistan</b>	
Chapter 1 .....	3
<b>From a Revolutionary Movement to an Institutionalized Administration</b>	
<i>Falah Mustafa</i>	
Chapter 2 .....	11
<b>Keeping the Kurdistan Flame Alive Abroad</b>	
<i>Bayan Sami Abdul Rahman</i>	
Chapter 3 .....	23
<b>Protecting Kurdistan: Peshmerga Before, During, and After ISIS</b>	
<i>Sirwan Barzani</i>	
Chapter 4 .....	33
<b>Kurdistan's Political Landscape and the Path Towards Independence</b>	
<i>Ranj Alaaldin</i>	
Chapter 5 .....	45
<b>Why It Is Time for an Independent Kurdistan Region of Iraq</b>	
<i>Gazang Bradosti</i>	
Chapter 6 .....	51
<b>Questions Arising Before and After Independence</b>	
<i>Michael M Gunter</i>	
<b>Part II: Humanitarian Crises</b>	
Chapter 7 .....	63
<b>Displacement and Forced Camps as A Civilizing Offensive</b>	
<i>Ibrahim Malazada</i>	

**Part III: Multiculturalism**

Chapter 8 ..... 81  
**Kurdistan Region of Iraq’s Ethnic and Religious Communities:  
The Need for Power-Sharing and Genuine Partnership**  
*Dlawer Alaldeen*

Chapter 9 ..... 105  
**The Emergence of a Nation State and the  
Question of Ethno-Religious Minorities**  
*Muslib Mustafa and Kamal Y. Kolo*

Chapter 10 ..... 123  
**The Role of Civil Society Organizations in Youth Development**  
*Abdulsalam Medeni*

Chapter 11 ..... 133  
**A Talking Story**  
*Stafford Clarry*

**Part IV: Economic Prosperity in Kurdistan**

Chapter 12 ..... 155  
**Economic Diversification and Reconstruction**  
*Ali Sindi*

Chapter 13 ..... 163  
**Oil and the Creation of Nation State:  
The Kurdistan Region at a Crossroads**  
*Kamal Y. Kolo*

Chapter 14 ..... 183  
**From a Curse to Blessing: Kurdistan’s Oil and Natural Resources**  
*Ashti Hawrami*

Chapter 15 ..... 193  
**Agriculture and Water Resources in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq**  
*Abdulsattar Majeed Qader*

**Part V: Case Studies**

Chapter 16 ..... 209  
**Christians And Religious Freedom**  
*Basbar Matti Warda*

Chapter 17 ..... 213  
**Yezidis And Justice**  
*Pari Ibrahim*

Chapter 18 .....	217
<b>The Culture of Yazidis</b>	
<i>Luqman Sulaiman Mahmood</i>	
Chapter 19 .....	221
<b>Humanitarian work in the Kurdistan Region: Historical Development     and New Challenges</b>	
<i>Dilsbad H Khidbir, Mariette Hägglund, and Awat Mustafa</i>	
<b>About the Authors</b> .....	237

## Preface

On September 25, 2017, the people of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq will head to the polls to cast their vote in a referendum on independence. This historic event will without question be an important topic for time to come. While many have set forth important reasons to hold the referendum, neighboring countries did not welcome its announcement, and many others have questioned its timing.

The purpose of this publication is to widen public understanding of the Kurdistan Region, its multifaceted history, its rich diverse culture, its struggles, and prospects for the future.

Our authors—international and local experts, scholars, and government officials—express a range of views that illuminate the complexities of the Kurdistan Region, Iraq, and the wider neighborhood. We seek to offer context and background rather than prescription.

The future of this region and the Broader Middle East is central not only to its inhabitants, but to interests and values of Americans, Europeans and people from other parts of the world as well. Our Center will remain engaged with these developments. We look forward to our continuing partnership with Soran University and others across the region.

*Daniel S. Hamilton*

Austrian Marshall Plan Foundation Professor  
Executive Director, Center for Transatlantic Relations  
School of Advanced International Studies  
Johns Hopkins University

## Acknowledgements

We wish to express special thanks to Soran University and the World Youth Leadership Network (WYLN) for sponsoring this publication.

We are thankful to the Ministry of Higher Education in the KRG for their support towards this initiative.

Our gratitude goes to Awat Mustafa of the Barzani Charity Foundation (BCF) and Mariette Hägglund, CTR-SAIS and WYLN Fellow who, in addition to contributing a chapter on the BCF humanitarian work have also helped coordinate preparations for this publication, working with various authors in Iraqi Kurdistan to make this project possible. Thanks also to Andy Mullins and Heidi Obermeyer, CTR-SAIS fellows, for their editing and research contribution to the publication.

This project would not have been possible without the valuable working partnership with the entire team at the KRG-USA office, and especially Bayan Sami Abdul Rahman, the KRG representative to the United States.

As always, we are very grateful to Peggy Irvine and Peter Lindeman for working on the many details of this, and many other CTR publications.

The opinions expressed in the following chapters are the authors' alone, and do not necessarily represent the views of any government or institution, or those of their fellow contributors.

*Sasha Toperich*

Senior Fellow, Center for Transatlantic Relations SAIS

*Tea Ivanovic*

Fellow, Center for Transatlantic Relations SAIS

*Nabro Zagros*

Vice President, Soran University

## Abbreviations

3RP	Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan
ABSP	Arab Ba’ath Socialist Party
B/D	Barrels per Day
BCM	Billion cubic meters of natural gas
BP	Baath Party
CCCM	Camp Coordination and Camp Management
CVDL	Central Veterinary Diagnostic Lab
DFI	Development Fund for Iraq
DFR	Department of Foreign Relations
EJCCC	Erbil Joint Crisis Coordination Center
ERC	Ethno-Religious Community
EU	European Union
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
FFER	Funding Facility for Economic Roadmap
GoI	Government of Iraq
HRP	Humanitarian Response Plan
IED	Improvised Explosive Devices
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IK	Iraqi Kurdistan
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organization
IOC	International Oil Companies
ISIL	Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant
IRP	Immediate Response Plan
JCCC	Joint Crisis Coordination Center
KCA	Kurdish-Controlled Areas
KDP	Kurdistan Democratic Party
KRG	Kurdistan Regional Government
KRI	Kurdistan Region of Iraq
KRP	Kurdistan Region Presidency
KRSO	Kurdistan Region Statistics Office
KSSE	Kurdish Students Society in Europe
MERI	Middle East Research Institute
MoAWR	Ministry of Agriculture and Water
MoP	Ministry of Peshmerga

MP	Member of Parliament
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OFFO	Oil for Food Program
PDK	Democratic Party of Kurdistan
PKK	The Kurdistan Workers' Party
PMF	People's Mobilization Forces
PPP	Public-Private Partnership
PUK	Patriotic Union of Kurdistan
SBA	Stand-By Arrangement
SOE	State-Owned Enterprises
SOMO	Iraq's State Oil Marketing Organization
SPSF	Social Protection Strategic Framework
SRP	Strategic Response Plan
SS	Schutzstaffel
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UN	United Nations
UNHR	The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UPR	Universal Periodic Reviews
US	United States
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
WFP	World Food Program
WWI	First World War
WWII	Second World War
YBS	Sinjar Resistance Unit
YBS	Yezidi Women's Unit
YPG	People's Protection Units



# Introduction

*Sasha Tôperich, Nahro Zagros, and Tea Ivanovic*

With the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) scheduling a referendum on independence for September 25, 2017, it is difficult to imagine a better timing for this volume. This book aims to introduce the Kurdistan Region of Iraq as it is today. The citizens of the KRI will finally get to cast a vote on their own fate: deciding whether they want to stay in a united Iraq, or whether they will opt for a sovereign state. As is always the case, there is no good time to hold a referendum of independence, yet, the KRI leadership believes that they are closer than ever to achieving their historic dream of establishing an independent country.

As reiterated by Kurdish leaders many times, the referendum on September 25 will not lead to immediate independence. This is a strategy that may well play for Erbil. Messages from the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) indicate that Erbil will be a partner and friend to Baghdad, and that its other neighbors are equally as important for stability and prosperity.

The uprising in March 1991 against the Ba'athist regime after the end of Iraq-Kuwait war (the Persian Gulf War) was the beginning of the birth of Kurdish authority over a large portion of present-day Iraqi Kurdistan. After a bloody war between the Kurdish Peshmerga forces and the Iraqi Army, over one and half million Kurds took refuge in the mountains on the Iranian and Turkish borders. This humanitarian crisis led to the United Nations Security Council Resolution 688, and later to the U.S., U.K., and France establishing a No-Fly Zone over some parts of northern Iraq to enable Kurdish refugees to return safely to their homes. The No-Fly Zone cut across Iraqi Kurdistan above the 36<sup>th</sup> line of latitude. Saddam Hussein's forces later withdrew from parts of Kurdistan and imposed sanctions on the area. Iraqi Kurdistan faced extreme hardships. The desire for self-rule, however, was much greater than the difficulties that the citizens of Kurdistan Region faced. On July 15, 1992, after democratic elections, the Kurdistan National Assembly was formed. That was a historical moment soon followed by the formation of the Kurdistan Regional Government.

During the Iraq War in 2003, the Kurds played an important role in assisting the international Coalition of the Willing in overthrowing Saddam Hussein. The Kurdish leadership also played a big part in drafting the new Iraqi constitution, ratified by the people of Iraq on October 25, 2005. The constitution included several articles on the Kurdish political, economic, and cultural rights. A decade after the birth of the Iraqi new constitution, the Kurds felt betrayed by the central government in Baghdad. They argue that some crucial articles of the constitution have been ignored, in particular Article 140, which stated that a referendum will be held for the people in disputed territories to either accept or reverse the demographical change employed by the Saddam Hussein regime during the genocide campaign at the latter part of 1980s.

The status of Kirkuk was also supposed to be resolved in the referendum that was agreed upon and scheduled for 2007, yet since then, the Iraqi authorities have been obstructing that agreement until the present day. The tensions between Baghdad and Erbil over politics, natural resources, and revenue-sharing have been complex and are only intensifying.

While there is political friction among the main Kurdish political parties resulting in currently non-functioning parliament, the intention and desire for Kurdish independence has never been questioned. Articles in this volume will provide readers with reasons why.

This volume starts with a look back at the history of Iraqi Kurdistan within the Iraqi state. Minister Falah Mustafa, Head of the Department of Foreign Relations (DFR) in the Kurdistan Regional Government reflects on atrocities committed by successive Iraqi regimes against the Kurds, the war with ISIS and its aftermath, and the role of the DFR in the economic and political developments of Iraqi Kurdistan. He reminds us that the referendum is a national demand of the people of Kurdistan, it is not a political one. This legitimate quest of Iraqi Kurdistan represents an opportunity for dialogue and communication with Baghdad, a chance to build bridges with neighbors and the international community, and a time to further engage in domestic reforms and building of democracy.

Bayan Sami Abdul Rahman, the KRG representative to the United States, considers the role of the Kurdish diaspora around the world. The diaspora communities have played an instrumental role in making the question of Kurdistan an international political subject and contributing to the success of the Kurdistan Region, by providing a bridge between Kurdistan and the West, where most have settled. Noting the importance

of the diaspora community, Abdul Rahman offers a recommendation to establish a Ministry of Diaspora Affairs, providing guidance and support for diaspora communities and cultural activities.

With their military victory over ISIS, the Peshmerga forces gained international recognition and are swiftly growing into a leading military force now reforming into a modern army. Peshmerga General Sirwan Barzani offers insight into the fight against the most vicious terrorist group the world has ever seen, sharing his own experience as Commander-in-Chief of the Peshmerga in Sector 6 (Gwer and Makhmur). General Barzani notes that importance of the U.S.-led coalition of allies, whose air support proved crucial in the victory. Nevertheless, international military support was extremely limited due to restrictions imposed by Baghdad on the KRG. Despite the devastating losses, including the lives of 1,700 brave soldiers and 10,000 wounded, General Barzani stresses that the Peshmerga have won the hearts and minds of their Western allies and are now in a strong position to form a united military force to protect the KRI. Furthermore, he offers a historical overview of the Peshmerga forces, praising the important and constructive role of the Kurdish fighters in defeating Saddam Hussein and overthrowing his Ba'ath regime.

In his chapter, Ranj Alaaldin, Visiting Fellow at the Brookings Institution in Doha, offers a detailed overview of the political landscape in the Kurdistan Region. He takes us back to the political climate in the 1970s up till today, and offers an in-depth perspective of current dynamics between the three major political parties: the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), and Gorran. He also offers insights into regional dynamics, noting that the challenge for the Kurdistan Region will be to: “[...] win the political and intellectual debate on Kurdish independence so that friend and foe are convinced that an independent Kurdish state will bring opportunities, not problems for the region.”

According to public international law, there are several judicial authorities concerning the right of different peoples to self-determination. Self-determination is firmly grounded in international law, and both the UN Charter<sup>1</sup> and resolutions of the UN General Assembly incorporate this principle. Gazang Bradosti, visiting lecturer and Fellow at Soran Univer-

---

<sup>1</sup> The Charter of the United Nations was signed on June 26, 1945, in San Francisco, at the conclusion of the United Nations Conference on International Organization, and came into force on October 24, 1945. The right of self-determination is regulated in article 1.2 of the Charter.

sity, offers compelling arguments that the Kurdistan Region of Iraq legally satisfies the criteria for statehood according to the Montevideo Convention, which requires states to possess all four of the following requirements in order to gain statehood: A permanent population, a defined territory, a government, and the capacity to enter into relations with other states.<sup>2</sup> However, as it seems that the modern debate of statehood seems to look also at the pronouncements of state recognition as mentioned in Articles 3<sup>3</sup> and 6<sup>4</sup> of the Montevideo Convention, Bradosti also offers additional arguments in favor of independence, such as the treatment of the Kurds by successive Iraqi governments, the KRI's fair treatment of religious and ethnic minorities, and its importance for stability in the wider Middle Eastern region.

Michael Gunter, in turn, looks at the theoretical framework for a Kurdish self-determination. Implementing the works of sociologists Ernest Renan, Benedict Anderson, and Max Weber to the Kurdish case, Gunter carefully assesses the road to independence for Iraqi Kurdistan. He asserts that the Kurds have managed to maintain their sense of belonging to one nation by expressing what Renan referred to as “a daily plebiscite,” that is, the continuing will to be a nation.

In Part II of this volume, we are looking at the humanitarian crises in the Kurdistan Region throughout history. Ibrahim Sadiq Malazada underlines the mass deportation by the Iraqi government under the leadership of the Ba’ath Socialist Party of the Kurdish people between 1976–86, calling it a Civilizing Offensive,<sup>5</sup> after the work of Norbert Elias. Historically, “civilizing projects” aimed at bringing about cultural shifts and inculcating lasting habits in working-class populations deemed to be “immoral” or “uncivilized.” Implemented under various pretexts following the collapse of the armed Kurdish political movement in 1975, this deportation process or “campaign of the development of the northern region,” formed one of

---

<sup>2</sup> Article 1 of the 1933 Montevideo Convention on the Rights and Duties of States.

<sup>3</sup> Article 3 of the Montevideo Convention: “The political existence of the state is independent of recognition by the other states. Even before recognition the state has the right to defend its integrity and independence, to provide for its conservation and prosperity, and consequently to organize itself as it sees fit, to legislate upon its interests, administer its services, and to define the jurisdiction and competence of its courts.”

<sup>4</sup> Article 6 of the Montevideo Convention: “The recognition of a state merely signifies that the state which recognizes it accepts the personality of the other with all the rights and duties determined by international law. Recognition is unconditional and irrevocable.”

<sup>5</sup> It is over 30 years since the theoretical concept of the civilising offensive (*bet beschavings offensief*) emerged from Amsterdam and the work of Norbert Elias.

the most aggressive and dangerous stages of genocide throughout the history of Kurds under successive Iraqi authorities.

In Part III, five authors look at the different angles of multiculturalism in the Kurdistan Region. Dlawer Alaldeen, Founding President of the Middle East Research Institute (MERI), a policy research institute and think tank based in Erbil, looks at the history and traditions of individual ethno-religious communities, bringing into context their past grievances and status in Iraq, and the Kurdistan Region under the leadership of the KRG. He offers recommendations on how to better include minorities into the governance structure of the Kurdistan Region, looking at best practices elsewhere, and offering a unique legal and political model, as well as three stages of implementation.

In their chapter on the emergence of a nation state and ethno-religious minorities, Muslih Mustafa and Kamal Kolo walk us through the Iraqi history of the last 90 years, where Jews, Iraqi Christians (especially Chaldo-Assyrians), and Yezidis were subject to systematic expulsion and persecution. They argue that the constitution of the Ottoman Empire was more progressive in securing and protecting fundamental liberties of minorities than the new Iraqi constitution of 2005, considering human rights liberties of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. They assert that Kurdish leadership is at a historical moment to carve a model of a viable democratic state that is based on citizenship, freedom, tolerance, prosperity, and modernity within a shared homeland.

Abdulsalam Medeni, CEO of the Rwanga Foundation, looks at the role of civil society organizations in youth development, and the evolution of civil society in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. He focuses in particular on the establishment of civil society groups since 1991, when the civil society movement in the entire region began to blossom. He offers an exhaustive list of achievements reached so far, but also makes policy recommendations for what can be accomplished in the future.

Stafford Clarry, a humanitarian affairs advisor to the Kurdistan Regional Government, offers a moving account of the long and vast experience of Kurdistan and its life. With its visual representations and vivid personal accounts, this article brings the reader, especially one that never been to the Kurdistan Region, closer to it. Clarry offers insightful questions, probing expert and novice alike to delve deeper into the rich heritage of the Kurdistan Region.

In Part IV, we take a look at the economic sustainability of the Kurdistan Region. Ali Sindi, Minister of Planning in the Kurdistan Regional Government, provides a detailed account of the KRI's economic outlook, taking a look at military expenses, fiscal austerity measures, and the issues with budget-sharing with Baghdad. The inflow of IDPs and refugees, the unanticipated budget cuts by Baghdad, Peshmerga fighting against the most dangerous terrorist group in the world, and a global drop in oil prices led to an economically strenuous time for the KRI. By improving its budgetary process through economic diversification while also carrying out austerity measures, the KRG can once again grow its economy. Through independence, the KRI would be able to sell oil at the global oil price, issue a new currency, control its monetary policy, issue bonds and trade on international markets, receive loans from international agencies, and accept more from donor countries for its care of IDPs and refugees.

Kamal Kolo, Dean of the Scientific Research Center at Soran University, looks at the role of oil in creating the Iraqi state in the years 1920–32 following World War I (WWI) and the fall and subsequent disintegration of the Ottoman Empire. He offers recommendations for the KRI leadership, based on Iraq's failed policies to rely on oil revenues, and instead stressing the importance for economic diversification in agriculture, tourism, education, and other sectors. Oil should serve as a tool to economic development, but economic diversification is necessary for a sustainable future.

Ashti Hawrami, the Minister of Natural Resources in the KRG, focuses specifically on the oil sector in the Kurdistan Region, and how its presence has led to decades of distress and conflict. "Ever since oil was discovered in the huge Kirkuk oil fields in 1927, the Kurds have been marginalized as successive governments in Baghdad systematically excluded them from either the production of oil or its proceeds," he asserts, noting the important steps that the KRG has undertaken to increase transparency and regulations for the energy sectors.

Often termed the "breadbasket of the Middle East," the Kurdistan Region has great potential to expand its agricultural sector. Abdulsattar Majeed Qader, Minister of Agriculture and Water in the KRG, delves deeper into the complexities of Kurdistan Region's agriculture. The Kurdistan Region has villages that date back more than 10,000 years, but more than 4,500 villages and towns were destroyed during the Ba'ath regime, which, aside from grave human losses, also led to the demolition of the agricultural sector. The KRG's strategic five year plans that began in 2009 have now led to self-sufficiency in many products (wheat, potatoes), and

average supply of others increase by about 15 percent. Unfortunately, due to budgetary restraints,<sup>6</sup> the 2015–19 strategic plan could not be implemented. Yet, he argues, the financial crisis has also helped diversify the economic focus on the agricultural sector, which has increased employment by four percent.<sup>7</sup>

Part V is reserved for case studies; individual accounts of those in close proximity to various groups and organizations that are crucial for the development of Iraqi Kurdistan. Bashar Matti Warda, the Chaldean Catholic Archbishop of Erbil in the Kurdistan Region of Northern Iraq, looks at the status of the Christians, who have inhabited Northern Iraq for over 2,000 years. He comments also on the disputed territories, especially the Nineveh Plain. Following the ISIS attacks in 2014, more than 150,000 Christians fled to the Kurdistan Region from the Nineveh Plain. He recognizes that the KRG has protected the freedom for communities to practice and live their faith openly, and asserts that the future of Christians in the Kurdistan Region rests in the freedom to practice their faith.

Pari Ibrahim provides a touching personal account of the ISIS attack on Shingal, and her experience in forming the Free Yezidi Foundation. The Yezidis, as a group, have been violently persecuted for many decades, and they have felt neglected by the government in Baghdad and Erbil. The horrendous crimes committed by ISIS against the Yezidis have been recognized by the United States, the European Parliament, and others as acts of genocide. In the current Kurdistan Region Parliament, there are special seat allocations for minorities, and Ibrahim believes that the Yezidi's should have five seats in the parliament in Erbil, like the Christians and Turkmens, and that they should have a representative in the higher layers of the government.

Luqman Sulaiman Mahmood also looks at the Yezidis, offering a glimpse into what an inclusive future could look like, with Yezidi representation. For centuries, the KRI has been the homeland of Yezidi-Kurds, but despite suffering from persecution and genocide for decades, the Yezidis have been able to preserve their religion, language, and culture. Due to the continuous efforts of the KRG, more than 3,400 Yezidi girls, children and women have been freed from the hands of ISIS.

---

<sup>6</sup> These are explained at length in other chapters, such as in Ali Sindi's chapter on the Kurdistan Region's economic outlook.

<sup>7</sup> Reports of agricultural sub-offices in the KRI state that employment in agriculture increased from 16 to 20 percent.

As we witness the demise of ISIS in Iraq and Syria, old challenges remain, while new ones have appeared. Dilshad H. Khidhir, Marriete Hagglund, and Awat Mustafa offer insight into the humanitarian situation of the KRI from 2011 up to the present time, specifically focusing on the work of the Barzani Charity Foundation (BCF). The humanitarian crisis that hit the KRI in 2011 had significant effects on the socio-economic conditions of the region as a whole. Unfortunately, the crisis seems to pose serious new challenges to the region as it moves to a new phase following the planned referendum in September. In order to prepare for the post-ISIS era, the KRI needs to address the humanitarian challenges alongside the obvious political, social, and economic ones. The chapter provides long and short-term policy recommendations to address the volatile political and humanitarian situation in the KRI and Iraq as a whole.

We hope that this timely volume will shed more light on the complex landscape of Iraqi Kurdistan and that it will provide you with a better understanding of the dynamics encompassing the region.

It is our intention to produce another publication to address post-referendum dynamics, of which no doubt there will be plenty.

We hope that this volume will meet your expectations.

*Part I*

**Contemporary Kurdistan**



## *Chapter 1*

# **From a Revolutionary Movement to an Institutionalized Administration**

*Falab Mustafa*

The brutalities committed against the people of Kurdistan by the former Baath regime led to horrendous casualties. The chemical attack in Halabja and other areas in Kurdistan resulted in more than 5,000 deaths, the notorious Anfal campaigns led to 182,000 people being buried alive, 8,000 Barzanis and 12,000 Faili Kurds were kidnapped and never returned, over 4,500 villages were destroyed, and thousands of people were relocated to other areas in Kurdistan and central and south of Iraq. The people of Kurdistan have long been fighting to obtain their rights in Iraq. It has been a rocky road to say the least, and they are still fighting for the same rights today.

The Kurdish–Iraqi armed struggle began in 1961, resulting in major casualties on both sides. The struggle was led by General Mustafa Barzani, in an attempt to establish an autonomous Kurdistan in northern Iraq. The war, which lasted until 1970, engaged over 80 percent of the Iraqi army in the combat against the Kurds.

Despite major losses, the Kurds engaged in a series of negotiations following the war, in an attempt to resolve the conflict, which led to the Autonomy Agreement of 1970. While the agreement was supposed to grant some primary rights to the people of Kurdistan, the Iraqi government embarked on an “Arabization program” in many parts of Kurdistan. This quickly led to the resumption of the war, further escalating the Kurdish–Iraqi conflict. The Kurds made serious attempts to reach out to the international community about the injustice and brutalities they endured from the Iraqi government. Yet, the former regime continued carrying out chemical attacks, bombarding Kurdish areas, kidnapping civilians, and committing mass killing of hundreds of thousands of Kurds.

Twenty-six years later, the United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 688, while the United States, in cooperation with the United Kingdom, France, and Turkey launched Operation Provide Comfort, which established the no-fly zone over the 36th Parallel and shielded

much of what is now the Kurdistan Region from aerial strikes by the Iraqi air force. In the Spring of 1991, when the Kurdish uprising against the former regime of Baath and its institutions began, and within a few days the Kurdish cities and towns were liberated. The first parliamentary elections took place on May 19, 1992; the first parliament was seated on June 4, 1992; and the first government cabinet in the Kurdistan Region was established on July 4, 1992. This marked a new era for the Kurdistan Region in the eyes of the international community. The establishment of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) was a major turning point in contemporary history of Iraqi Kurdistan. It was an important opportunity to introduce Kurdistan to the world and to advocate for its legitimate rights. At that time, cooperating with the outside world in terms of governance and self-rule was an entirely novel process.

Since then, the KRG has taken consistent steps towards expansion and development of its ties with the outside world. It has taken concrete steps to produce skilled employees in the field of diplomacy and international relations by establishing strong academic and government institutions. On the other hand, the adoption of an open-door policy with the international community was based on the KRG's core values of respect and consideration. Together, these practices allowed for the international community to become familiar with the essence of self-governance of the Kurdistan Region.

Looking back at history, the people of Kurdistan have experienced such brutalities and atrocities, but have time and again proven resilient. The Anfal operations, the use of chemical weapons, and the overall loss of hundreds of thousands of people simply encouraged the people of Kurdistan to attempt to broker a power-sharing agreement with Baghdad, which in the end, did not work as Baghdad was not ready to reciprocate on our intentions. The Kurds have always acted as part of Iraq, but were never treated as equal citizens, let alone as partners. Living under centralized rule, a monarchy, a republican system, and even as part of an autonomous region within a federal system, all resulted in the same: their status as equal citizens never improved because the mentality in Baghdad has not changed as they are not ready to share power with us.

After the Iraq liberation operation in 2003, the Kurdistan Region and Iraq stepped into a new era of cooperation with Iraq and the international community. It was an important move for the Kurdistan Region to again demonstrate its capability in dealing with internal and external issues. Since 2003, the U.S. began the operation to liberate Iraq, and while they

spent huge treasures attempting to re-establish a new federal Iraq, the role of the Kurds as their most steadfast ally should not be underestimated. When American forces immaturely departed in 2011, not a single U.S. soldier had lost their life on Iraqi Kurdistan's territory. At that time, the political leadership in the Kurdistan Region gathered its efforts to re-engage with Iraq to be inclusive and representative of the rights of all of its components and communities. In addition, serious efforts were made in distributing power and revenue, and creating a strong federal foundation throughout the country.<sup>1</sup>

### **Department of Foreign Relations (DFR) and its Role in the Economic and Political Developments of KRG**

The first cabinet of the KRG established the Ministry of Humanitarian Aid and Cooperation, which at that time acted as a Foreign Affairs Ministry and worked as a focal point for building bridges with the outside world. Aside from delivering a message of the Kurdish quest to the international community, the ties were on a larger scale focused on cultural ties and receiving humanitarian support. Over time, as the KRG made serious efforts in establishing stronger institutions the means of connecting with other nations were shaped into an institutionalized one for a more formal outreach around the world.

The KRG's Council of Ministers made the decision in 2004 for a minister to be appointed to govern the KRG's foreign relations. Today, the Department of Foreign Relations (DFR) in the KRG has nine directorates and 260 permanent and contract-based employees at the department. The DFR has ties with many countries and there are 36 official diplomatic representations based in the region, including UNAMI and the 14 UN agencies, in the countries of the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council. International organizations are also present in the region and working in various sectors that play a vital role in serving the Kurdistan region. While a number of countries wish to open representations in Kurdistan and wish for the KRG to open representative offices in their countries, the dire economic situation has prevented a decision to be made in this regard on one hand, and on another hand, due to the fact that some

---

<sup>1</sup> In a national referendum in 2005, Iraqis voted in favor of a new constitution. The new constitution, which was approved by 78 percent of voters, recognized the Kurdistan Region's institutions, including the Kurdistan Regional Government and the Kurdistan Parliament. This marked a new era for the Kurdistan Region in reaching out to the international community.

countries do not have representations in Baghdad and therefore not allowed to open representation in Erbil either as per the diplomatic requirements in Iraq.

The Department of Foreign Relations encourages nations to establish and expand their diplomatic missions in the Kurdistan Region, with a goal of strengthening and expanding on economic and investment ties. As a result, many economic fora have been organized due to the efforts of KRG representations abroad in cooperation with The KRG Board of Investment, resulting in attracting foreign investment to the region. Moreover, efforts have been made to establish ties between the KRG's regional economic and investment institutions with similar institutions in other countries. In particular, the KRG has focused on higher education, cultural, and educational partnerships. In this regard, there are many opportunities for study-abroad-scholarships and other educational exchanges for students on all levels. The DFR has worked to operate as a bridge between our local institutions and those of the international community.

Through strong ties with the international community, serious efforts have been made in recognizing the brutalities of the Baath regime against the people of Kurdistan and labeling them as acts of genocide. DFR has worked closely with the higher ministerial committee of holding ISIS accountable and recognition of the crimes committed against Yezidi Kurds among others. The KRG has made a serious effort to raise awareness about these genocides through state visits, meetings with foreign diplomats, the afore-mentioned committee with international organizations and agencies, and diplomatic missions of other countries in the region, which have resulted in fruitful discussions. In the field of human rights, the KRG has managed to cooperate effectively with international organizations and agencies as well as the United Nations in order to protect human rights, the freedom of expression, and the rights of people in prison and captivity in accordance to international human rights values and principles affirmed by the United Nations. The cooperation with international institutions, organizations, and other agencies on strengthening the role of women in society continues. In addition, the KRG has taken on an active role in the general assembly of the Universal Periodic Reviews (UPR) and in attempts to implement UN SCR 1325 on Women and Peace of the United Nations Security Council. As an active member of the KRG committee to fight human trafficking, necessary measures have been considered and applied in cooperation with the responsible institutions of the KRG, and efforts have been made to establish bilateral ties with the international community

on this matter. Hence, the DFR works to empower women and youth, developing the community inclusive of civil society and media outlets, and strengthening institutions.

## **The War with ISIS**

As a result of the wrong and distorted policies of Iraq as well as the political vacuum, ISIS emerged. The terrorist group, claiming to be the “true” Caliphate, occupied large areas of Iraq and Syria, including the city of Mosul. The Peshmerga were fearless in their fight against ISIS, and managed to recapture many areas, including the Yezidi city of Sinjar in November 2015. As legitimate, constitutional forces in Iraq, the Peshmerga should have been paid for, armed, trained and equipped by the federal government in Baghdad, but unfortunately, they were sidelined. Nevertheless, the Peshmerga proved their bravery and resilience and played a key role in the liberation operation of Mosul.

These military victories came at a considerable cost to the people of Kurdistan. Since the beginning of the conflict with ISIS, over 1,781 Peshmerga have been killed and more than 10,168 wounded and 62 still missing (Ministry of Peshmerga Announcement). Most of these fatalities and injuries were caused by improvised explosive devices (IEDs) an insurgency version of a landmine, snipers, booby traps, etc. In addition to the grave human costs, the KRG and the Peshmerga experienced a severe economic crisis. In 2014, Baghdad refused to give the KRG its fair share of the federal budget to which it is entitled; the necessary mechanisms and institutions to be put in place by the Iraqi government to ensure fair distribution of the yearly budget were never established. In addition, the steep drop in oil prices, the KRG’s main source of revenue, further crippled the economy. Yet, despite all this, the KRG remains a prosperous safe haven in Iraq.

The KRG’s DFR has formed diplomatic relations with many countries and officially with 36 missions of states around the world, including the neighboring nations of Turkey, Iran, and the Arab states. These ties have played a vital role in the fight against ISIS. “Since the 2014 crisis, over 1.7 million displaced people arrived in KRI [the Kurdistan Region of Iraq] and majority live with the host communities,” the KRG’s Joint Crisis Coordination Center (JCCC) announced. The Kurdistan Region faced an existential threat due to the onslaught of ISIS, however, the demonstration of an utmost degree of selflessness and dedication among the people, the resilience and sacrifices of the Peshmerga, and the strength of its

leadership, contributed to the military victory. Nevertheless, the challenges of the ideological war and the aftermath of the displaced people still remain. More than 1.7 million IDPs and refugees have registered, according to the JCCC, with 82 percent of IDPs living with host communities and the other 18 percent spread across 38 camps in the Erbil, Duhok, and Sulaimani governorates. According to JCCC statistics, 97 percent of all Syrian refugees in Iraq are in the Kurdistan Region—40 percent of them are living in nine camps, while 60 percent reside in host communities. Of the 500,000-people displaced from Mosul since the offensive to retake the city from ISIL began in October 2016. As of August 18, 2017, 226,000 are being sheltered in the Kurdistan Region Joint Crisis Coordination Centre in Kurdistan (JCCC).

The Iraqi crises, which were talked about worldwide, were mostly caused by Baghdad's poor governance. A sovereign Kurdistan Region, with access to international funds and a wider range of bilateral cooperation with international actors, today's crises could have been prevented. During the darkest times of war, in addition to international funds and loans, that the KRI was prevented from benefitting from, the KRI was even prevented from benefitting from their own resource reserves. The KRI has never been treated as an equal in this so-called federal system, and have always been considered subordinates. While fighting a war, managing the continued inflows of displaced people, and navigating geo-political minefields, the KRI is steadfastly tackling their massive economic challenges, and forging ahead to secure Kurdistan's political and economic viability.

## Referendum

Like every other independent nation, the people of Kurdistan are eagerly awaiting the day to declare their independence. The right of people to self-determination is a cardinal principle in modern law based on United Nations Charter norms (UN Charter). The KRG does not believe in the isolation that the Iraqi government has pushed it into, and they wish to interact and mutually benefit from the international community.

As a friendly and welcoming society, with a culture of hope and optimism, the government believes in its people. The Peshmerga, fighting on the frontlines for the safety of the people of Kurdistan, and whose families do not have enough money to pay for basic everyday necessities such as food, rent, or school, are ready to sacrifice their lives. The Kurdish society rejects extremism and adopts tolerance, peace, and coexistence. Kurdistan,

with all of its components and communities has since the beginning of its history been a land of tolerance and coexistence to different ethnic and religious groups who have been living all in peace. Despite all the wars, destruction and occupation that Kurdistan has faced for centuries, it has remained a land of many religions and beliefs. Kurdistan is the success story of the Middle East today. Nevertheless, the KRI is not claiming perfection, but, compared with its surroundings, the KRI has shown strength and resilience, especially considering that it is a landlocked, not entirely sovereign country.

The referendum is an important step to secure a better future for the people of the Kurdistan Region. All other ways to coexist in the country of Iraq have failed; they have tested decentralization, autonomy, and federalization, with no success. In order to live in peace, one needs a democratic environment, and in order to have a democratic environment, one needs democratic practices and a democratic culture. Unfortunately, fourteen years after the fall of the former regime, Iraq is suffering from the same problems as they did in 2003.

The Kurdistan region opted for a federal, democratic and pluralistic Iraq, and has played an important role in drafting a proper constitution, but the constitution has not been adhered to. Baghdad has been rather selective in implementing articles of the constitution that best serve their interests. The country never established the necessary institutions to ensure a fair distribution of the annual budget. This led to the breaching of the constitution in balancing the laws regulating militia groups, and the establishment of a heavily centralized power in Baghdad. The government in Baghdad went against their own parliament by cutting the budget without any laws being passed through the legislative body. Therefore, the referendum is a step forward in responding to the necessity of securing a better future for the people of Kurdistan but also to bringing about stability and security. September 25th will be an opportunity for the people of Kurdistan to express their will and their vision for a future.<sup>2</sup> That will be a mandate for the leadership in Kurdistan to negotiate with Baghdad to establish a partnership after independence, as they have failed to be good partners in the same country. The Kurdistan Region has demonstrated its stance for democracy, pluralism, power-sharing, an open society and the empowerment of women, respect for religious and ethnic minorities and a strong civil society and a free media. Today, the KRG is engaged in a very ambi-

---

<sup>2</sup> September 25, 2017 is the set date for the referendum.

tious and serious set of economic reforms in order to ensure transparency and good governance. The international community, the U.S.-led coalition, the European Union, and the UN all play an important role in supporting the KRG at this stage.

The referendum is a national demand of the people of Kurdistan; it is not a political demand. This legitimate quest of Kurdistan represents an opportunity for dialogue and negotiation with Baghdad, which we have failed to obtain as part of one country, with whom we can become long-term partners as neighbors in peace and stability in the region. With regards to the broader region, KRI has assured its neighbors that this step will not go against the interest of these nations. The Kurdistan Region wants to build bridges with its neighbors, and assures them that an independent Kurdistan would be a partner and an ally. Kurdistan is determined to fight ISIL militarily and ideologically, and will continue to care for the refugees and IDPs that have sought a safe haven in its territory. Finally, it is important to engage in supporting the reform agenda that was started, empowering the institutions in the Kurdistan Region, strengthening the civil society, and supporting economic developments of this region. The Kurdistan Region is a success story; it is a beacon of hope for more stability and more security in the region.

## *Chapter 2*

# **Keeping the Kurdistan Flame Alive Abroad**

*Bayan Sami Abdul Rahman*

Over the past few decades, Kurdistan's diaspora communities have made significant contributions to their homeland, particularly in raising awareness among the media and political elites, gathering support from the international community, facilitating foreign direct investment (FDI), and bringing expertise and education back to the Kurdistan Region. Kurdistan's diaspora<sup>1</sup> is a product of discrimination, political persecution, war and displacement. Having fled unspeakable atrocities and the destruction of their homes, many Kurds, Christians, and other Kurdistanis found new lives in the West. Although they forcibly resided outside their homeland, they have developed a strong Kurdistan group consciousness and identity in the diaspora, based on their shared memories of trauma and loss but also on the shared political aspiration and emotional hope of returning to their homeland at some point. The diaspora communities that formed have played an instrumental role making the question of Kurdistan an international political subject and contributing to the success of the Kurdistan Region, by providing a bridge between Kurdistan and the West, where most have settled.

### **Brief History**

Iraqi Kurdistan's diaspora is spread throughout the world. Although no reliable statistics on the diaspora population exist, the number is probably on the order of several hundred thousand. They are spread most predominantly throughout Europe, North America, and Australia.

---

<sup>1</sup> This brief account is focused on the Iraqi Kurdistan diaspora and the role that it plays in regards to Iraqi Kurdistan. On many occasions, diaspora communities from every part of Kurdistan have contributed to the same struggle and continue to do so. This article is not an exhaustive study of Kurdish diaspora activities, and omissions are by no means meant to minimize the contributions of Kurdistanis from other parts of Kurdistan. It is my hope that the diaspora will continue to be studied and written about, to memorialize the critical role that millions of diaspora Kurds, Christians, and Yezidis from other parts of Kurdistan play in support of their homeland.

Most of the diaspora from Iraqi Kurdistan fled as refugees from the Ba'athist regime of Saddam Hussein. The first major wave left in the mid-1970s, after the collapse of the autonomy agreement that resulted in the bombing and destruction of villages by the Iraqi military. In the United States, more than 200 Kurds that fled this violence settled in Nashville, Tennessee. Today, the city boasts more than 10,000 Kurdish residents, the largest Kurdish population in the U.S. At around the same time, Britain, Sweden, and other European countries also received refugees, initially in small numbers, but today there are hundreds of thousands of Kurds living across Europe. In Sweden, Kurdish is third-most spoken language after Swedish and English.

Later refugee flows also correspond to the waves of violence and cycles of genocide that have characterized Iraq. The Iran-Iraq war, which raged from 1980 to 1988, forced thousands to flee artillery shelling, chemical bombardment, and conscription into Saddam's army. The attack on Halabja and the brutal, eight-stage Anfal Campaign in the late 1980s, which destroyed more than 4,500 villages and saw 182,000 civilians murdered, sent hundreds of thousands more to seek refuge abroad. Anyone who could find a way to reach the shores of Europe or make it to North America or Australia did so. Today, major Kurdistan diaspora communities can be found throughout the United States, in Tennessee, California, Michigan, Nebraska, Texas, Virginia, New York, and Arizona. Europe hosts the largest populations in Germany, the United Kingdom, Sweden, France, Norway, Denmark, Austria, the Netherlands, and other countries; their ethnic and religious makeup reflects the diversity of Kurdistan. Melbourne and Sydney in Australia and Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver in Canada also host several thousand Kurds.

### **1950s–2003: The Birth of the Diaspora**

Ever since the first waves of refugees from Iraqi Kurdistan began arriving in Europe and North America, they raised awareness of a number of issues through activism and advocacy. Over the years, the diaspora has played an increasingly critical role in lobbying their host governments, garnering media attention for issues, and connecting Westerners with people on the ground in Kurdistan to gather information.

The seeds of Kurdish political activism in Europe and North America were planted the 1950s with the establishment of the Kurdish Students Society in Europe (KSSE), based in Germany. Through the following decades,

the KSSE organized rallies, produced publications to educate the European public about the Kurdish struggle, and met with European leaders.<sup>2</sup>

In the 1970s, many Kurdish political parties began appointing representatives in key capitals around the world. Some of those representatives who were active in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, returned home to take leading roles in Iraq and the Kurdistan Region, including Hoshiyar Zebari, who was the Kurdistan Democratic Party representative overseas and became Iraq's foreign minister, and Barham Salih, who was the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) representative and became the Kurdistan Regional Government's (KRG) prime minister.

In addition to political parties, community and cultural associations, such as the Kurdish Cultural Center in London in 1985, the Federation of Kurdish Associations in Sweden in 1981, and the Institut Kurde in Paris in 1983, were also founded. The latter was founded by Dr. Kendal Nezan, a Kurd from Turkey and a nuclear physicist by training. The Kurdish institute in Paris was a dynamo of activism at every level, from the grassroots to the senior levels of the French government. For years, many academics focusing on Kurdish issues have passed through the Kurdish language course or have used the institute's substantial library. The Institut has also engaged with senior French leadership, including Danielle, the wife of French President François Mitterrand, who played a central role<sup>3</sup> in France's relationship with Kurdistan,<sup>4</sup> and who is still revered in Kurdistan today.<sup>5</sup>

Although the diaspora was active prior to 1988, the genocidal Anfal Campaign and the chemical bombardment of Halabja sharpened their focus. After the attack on Halabja, more than a dozen Kurds and Chaldean Christians from around the United States held a hunger strike in front of the United Nations (UN) in New York City. Driven by the grief and desperation of the time, a swell of support was generated in capitals and cities throughout the world, where thousands of Kurds came out to demonstrate against the Ba'athist crimes. In North America, this led to the foundation

---

<sup>2</sup> "İsmet Şerif Vanlı Biography." *Kurdistanica*. Accessed August 10, 2017. <http://www.kurdistanica.com/?q=book/export/html/12>.

<sup>3</sup> "Danielle Mitterrand et les Kurdes." Mitterrand. January 14, 2013. <http://www.mitterrand.fr/Danielle-Mitterrand-et-les-Kurdes.html>.

<sup>4</sup> "Danielle Mitterrand et les Kurdes." Youtube. January 3, 2012. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PWbTf9UVONM>.

<sup>5</sup> "Danielle Mitterrand." *Kurd1*. December 26, 2011. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f0evXOhRcEU>.

of the Kurdish National Congress of North America, which organized to unite Kurds throughout the continent to provide a unified voice in support of Kurdish political independence. The organization held its 27<sup>th</sup> annual congress in Michigan in 2016.

One of the major achievements of this time was the visit of Congressional staffers Peter Galbraith (who later became Ambassador to Croatia) and Chris Van Hollen (currently Senator from Maryland) to Iraqi Kurdistan. Following their visit, they drafted the Prevention of Genocide Act,<sup>6</sup> which prevented Iraq from obtaining military equipment and international financing, as well as the sanctioning of the sale of Iraqi oil to the United States, in direct response to the Halabja attacks. The Act passed in the Senate but not in the House of Representatives.

The years during and immediately following the Anfal campaign saw drastically increased refugee flows from Iraqi Kurdistan. By the early 1990s, the infrastructure put in place and the experience forged in the 1980s, combined with the increased number of diaspora communities, brought about a critical mass of activists ready and able to engage local communities, members of the press, congressional and parliamentary representatives, and even those at the highest levels of government.

In several European countries in the 1980s and 1990s, Kurdish organizations were established to promote the Kurdish language, community cohesion and support to newly arrived refugee families. Because of the suppression of Kurdish identity, these organizations led the celebration of Kurdish holidays, and viewed themselves as the keepers of *Kurdayati* (“Kurdishness”).

In 1991, the Ba’athist regime again attacked Kurdistan, this time to crush an uprising that first started in Ranya, and later spread throughout Iraqi Kurdistan. Fearing chemical attacks, an estimated two million Kurds fled to the mountainous borders of Turkey and Iran, triggering an extraordinary humanitarian crisis.

Again, Kurdish activists worldwide jumped to action. In the U.K., there were hunger strikes and protests in front of the U.S. Embassy; the United States was leading the coalition against Saddam Hussein following his invasion of Kuwait, and U.S. President George H.W. Bush had encouraged the people of Iraq to rise up against the dictator. Kurdish activists stormed

---

<sup>6</sup> “H.R.5271 - Prevention of Genocide Act of 1988.” Congress.gov. Accessed August 10, 2017. <https://www.congress.gov/bill/100th-congress/house-bill/5271>.

and occupied the Iraqi Embassy in London. A group of Kurds in Britain, including Dr. Dlawer Ala'Aldeen, then a medical doctor and now heading an Erbil-based think tank, met with Margaret Thatcher, who then strongly advocated for humanitarian support to the refugees.<sup>7</sup> In the U.S., demonstrators and hunger strikers took to the streets in Washington DC, Nashville TN, Dallas TX, San Diego CA, and other cities.

Kurdish activism extended beyond demonstrations; members of the community abroad were instrumental in providing information to journalists, connecting them with people on the ground, and helping them safely pass to Kurdistan to report, at a time when Iraq was closed to the world. They also provided support to humanitarian organizations like *Medecins Sans Frontieres*, who arrived in Iran to treat refugees and later established bases throughout Iraq.

The media coverage of the plight of Kurdish refugees triggered worldwide support to a level Kurdistan had never seen. Fundraising initiatives such as the “Simple Truth” concert campaign<sup>8</sup> with major international music artists raised awareness and money—“Simple Truth” alone raised 15 million dollars.<sup>9</sup>

But the most important outcome of Kurdish diaspora lobbying contributed to the decision to launch (the U.S.-led) Operation Provide Comfort and (U.K.-led) Operation Haven,<sup>10</sup> in which American, British, French, Turkish, Spanish, Italian, and Dutch military and humanitarian assets were deployed to provide protection and supplies for the refugees. The operation saved the lives of thousands of people and is considered to be one of the most successful military-humanitarian missions in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Later, Operation Northern Watch helped return hundreds of thousands of refugees to their homes and provided the space for the first elections in the KRI’s history to be held in 1992, which led to the formation of the Kurdistan Assembly and ultimately the Kurdistan Regional Government.

---

<sup>7</sup> “Dlawer Ala’Aldeen asks Thatcher to intervene in Kurdistan.” Youtube. April 3, 1991. Accessed August 10, 2017. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hOnT9iucOGE>.

<sup>8</sup> “MTV Simple Truth Kurdish Relief Concert.” MTV. June 10, 2008. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T-7\\_g3aEO6g](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T-7_g3aEO6g).

<sup>9</sup> “The Simple Truth: A Concert for Kurdish Refugees.” IMDB. May 12, 1991. <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1055314/>.

<sup>10</sup> Rudd, Gordon W. Humanitarian Intervention: Assisting the Iraqi Kurds in Operation Provide Comfort. 1991. [http://www.history.army.mil/html/books/humanitarian\\_intervention/index.html](http://www.history.army.mil/html/books/humanitarian_intervention/index.html)

The fervor on 1991 extended beyond the initial exigency. The 1990s were dark times for every part of Kurdistan: in Turkey, Syria, and Iran, Kurdish identity was forbidden and brutally suppressed. Diaspora Kurdish activists from Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria banded together and were extremely active in raising awareness of the oppression of their people. Local organizations continued to form, such as the Washington Kurdish Institute, the American Kurdish Information Network, the Kurdish Human Rights Project in the U.K. and the Kurdish library in Sweden to educate the Western public and facilitate academic and media engagement on Kurdish issues. Representation offices of Kurdish political parties grew to serve the diaspora communities and better communicate with American and European governments, reflective of the importance that these partnerships had become in only a few short years.

Activism in those days was dangerous. The Ba’athist regime was known to beat up or even murder activists, both inside and outside of Iraq. Their agents would take pictures at demonstrations, and if a protestor had family back in Iraq, they would often be in trouble. Saddam’s agents also tried to assassinate leading Kurdish and Iraqi dissidents who lived in Europe.

## 2003: Liberation and Self-Rule in Kurdistan

The fall of Saddam Hussein’s regime brought the people of Iraqi Kurdistan an unprecedented opportunity to prosper. In 2006, the structures of autonomy built in the 1990s, which had been party-based, were unified into the Kurdistan Regional Government.<sup>11</sup> This peaceful settlement between parties that had been at war only ten years prior, set the foundation for democracy and prosperity in the Kurdistan Region.

In the years that followed, the KRG and the Kurdistan Parliament began building institutions. One of these institutions, the Department of Foreign Relations<sup>12</sup> began establishing representations around the world. Until this day, these representations serve *de facto* as the embassies of the KRG, processing paperwork for the diaspora community and working with the host governments. They play an advocacy role in conducting more formalized public relations, business promotion, and organizational

<sup>11</sup> “Agreement on the Reunification of the two administrations in the Kurdistan Region.” Niqash. January 23, 2006. <http://www.niqash.org/en/articles/politics/1122/>.

<sup>12</sup> “Official Order - Kurdistan Regional Government.” KRG Cabinet. January 25, 2009. [http://cabinet.gov.krd/uploads/documents/Official\\_order\\_25\\_Jan\\_09\\_2009\\_06\\_04\\_h19m0s19.pdf](http://cabinet.gov.krd/uploads/documents/Official_order_25_Jan_09_2009_06_04_h19m0s19.pdf).

support for local diaspora communities. They also work to build greater cultural, political, economic, and educational ties between institutions in the Kurdistan Region and their respective countries. It is worth noting that the representation offices are mostly staffed by Kurdish diaspora. Some offices pre-dated the Department of Foreign Relations, and were formalized following the ratification of the Iraqi constitution. During this period, many Kurds who lived in the diaspora returned to Kurdistan, bringing their expertise, networks, and access to Western capital resources. Kurdish academic Dr. Janroj Yilmaz Keles found that this is driven by an emotional and political desire to participate in the prosperity and reconstruction of Kurdistan, as well as by economic incentives.<sup>13</sup>

In the years 2005–15, Kurdistan saw an influx of 442 million dollars from the United States alone. More than 70 percent of those investments (315 million dollars) were part of local partnerships<sup>14</sup>—Kurdish-Americans undoubtedly played their part in facilitating much of this, either at the executive or implementation levels. Other sectors have grown substantially with vision, expertise, and investment from the diaspora. A number of Kurdish academics based in Britain envisioned the creation of the University of Kurdistan-Hawler, and The American University of Iraq-Sulaimani was a project of former Prime Minister Barham Salih, a British-educated Kurd who sought to bring world-class higher education to the Kurdistan Region. This was followed in 2016 with the American University of Kurdistan, inaugurated through the leadership and investment of Kurdistan Region Security Council Chancellor Masrour Barzani, who lived for several years in the United States and was educated at the American University in Washington, D.C.

In exile, many diaspora Kurdistanis took full advantage of the educational and economic opportunities that their new home countries had to offer; such opportunities were not given to those living under Saddam. In the 1990s, Kurdistan Region was out of the grasp of Saddam but suffering still from the effects of genocide, civil war and economic hardship. Many Kurds abroad supported their families back home with remittances. After the liberation of Iraq in 2003, many decided to return to Kurdistan, bringing with them the knowledge, skills, and capital that they had acquired over time.

---

<sup>13</sup> Keles, Janroj Yilmaz. “Returning Home “ Transnational mobility and social networks among highly skilled British- Kurdish young people.” Accessed August 11, 2017. [https://www.academia.edu/27726243/\\_Returning\\_Home\\_Transnational\\_mobility\\_and\\_social\\_networks\\_among\\_highly\\_skilled\\_British-Kurdish\\_young\\_people](https://www.academia.edu/27726243/_Returning_Home_Transnational_mobility_and_social_networks_among_highly_skilled_British-Kurdish_young_people).

<sup>14</sup> Board of Investment

The KRG includes many officials that have lived or been educated abroad. Qubad Talabani, who grew up in the U.K., later served as the Representative to the United States and today is the Deputy Prime Minister. Dr. Ashti Hawrami was educated in petroleum engineering in Scotland, worked in the U.K. oil sector, and later returned to help develop Kurdistan's oil and gas sector from scratch. After retiring from a prestigious career as a neurosurgeon in Washington, D.C., Dr. Najmaldin Karim returned to run for the governorship of his home city Kirkuk. Dr. Ali Sindi received a Master's in Public Administration from Harvard University and today serves as the Minister of Planning.

## 2014 and Today

The year 2014 marked a revitalization of advocacy by Kurdistan's diaspora communities. Yet again, the Kurdistan Region was under threat, this time by the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham, or ISIS.

In August 2014, ISIS attacked Iraqi Kurdistan, threatening to reach Erbil and beginning a genocide against the Yezidis and other minorities in Sinjar and the Nineveh Plain. In September, the Kurdish city of Kobani in Syrian Kurdistan (commonly called "Rojava" came under siege from the terrorist group.

As diaspora communities reeled from the shock, they were energized, once again taking to the streets of cities around the world to demonstrate. In North America, Kurdish Muslims, Yezidis, Christians, and others traveled to Washington to rally in front of the White House and speak with their Congressional representatives. Social media also played a significant role in engaging young Americans and Europeans to support the cause. And again, social and advocacy organizations popped up to provide support to newly arrived refugees, deliver humanitarian aid to those in need, and bring more attention to the genocide and war.

Iraqi Kurdistan will vote in a referendum on independence on September 25, 2017. It will mark the next step towards the realization of the dreams of millions of people, in Kurdistan and in the diaspora, who struggled for independence. Critically, even those in the diaspora are expected to be able to vote,<sup>15</sup> underscoring the important role that they have played over many years.

---

<sup>15</sup> Dolamari, Mewan. "Diaspora Kurds to participate in Kurdistan referendum via e-voting: Commission." K24. August 11, 2017. <http://www.kurdistan24.net/en/news/972ea419-6250-4333-87a7-bd44f0cbacde>.

## **Future Role for Kurdistan's Diaspora**

The decades have seen swells of support and activism from Kurdistan's diaspora. The ferocity of the demonstrators and the issues that they support have reflected on the environment in the Kurdistan Region, bringing uncertainty and the struggle for survival. Over time, as diaspora populations became more entrenched their host countries, their abilities and effectiveness in advocating for the Kurdistan Region grew in reach and in depth.

Many communities have made a transition from a status of exile from oppression to advocacy, lobbying and integration within their host countries. Perhaps among the most salient are the Armenian and Lebanese<sup>16</sup> communities. The Lebanese have integrated into different societies where they live to such an extent that several leading political figures in Latin America have been of Lebanese descent. Some of the world's most famous names in business and entertainment are originally Lebanese, including Carlos Ghosn, chairman of Renault-Nissan, and actress Salma Hayek. This integration into different societies arguably helps sustain the home country through a support network.

The Armenian diaspora, particularly those based in the United States, successfully merge popular support from the community with targeted lobbying campaigns in Congress and at state level. They also reflect depth beyond the political sphere, with cultural organizations, professional associations and networks, and diaspora members attaining positions of power within their host governments.

## **Conclusion and Policy Recommendations**

In the coming years, it will be important for Iraqi Kurdistan's diaspora to make a transition from a status of exile from oppression to advocacy. They have already started to do so. Nadhim Zahawi, a British Iraqi-Kurd is now a member of parliament in the U.K. In Sweden, six Kurds from all parts of Kurdistan are members of parliament, while Darin Zanyar, a Kurd born to Iraqi Kurdish parents is among Sweden's most popular singers.<sup>17</sup> There are highly successful entrepreneurs, doctors, and scientists of Iraqi

---

<sup>16</sup> A critical difference; the Lebanese diaspora (8-14 million in total) far outnumber their brethren in Lebanon (four million). <http://gulfnews.com/news/mena/lebanon/lebanon-contemplates-a-new-citizenship-law-1.1621325>

<sup>17</sup> Dolamari, Mewan. "Darin: Jag m dde piss." *Aftonbladet*. September 22, 2008. <http://www.aftonbladet.se/nojesbladet/article11518751.ab>.

Kurdish origin across the West. Among the wider Kurdish diaspora community, including those from Turkey, Iran and Syria, there are many well-known names, including Hamdi Ulukaya, a Kurd from Turkey and a renowned businessman and philanthropist in the United States. The KRG has a central role to play in the evolution of the diaspora. One recommendation is for the KRG to inaugurate a Ministry of Diaspora Affairs, to provide guidance and support for diaspora communities and cultural activities. Such a ministry or department could also be a point of contact for community members looking to work in the Kurdistan Region, provide expertise from afar, or move back permanently to the region.

The diaspora community also needs to find a greater role for the younger generation who were born abroad, and may not speak the Kurdish language very well, but whose sense of patriotism and passion remains strong. Their internet and social media skills, their language ability and natural assimilation with their host countries can all be assets for Kurdistan while also providing them with a sense of belonging and pride.

The following poem was written in 1960 by Adnan Khudadad, a Kurd in Munich and one of the early members of the KSSE, shortly before his untimely death in a car accident. It was published in the KSSE journal "Kurdistan."<sup>18</sup> Even today, the poem captures the longing for the homeland of Kurds in exile, and the desire of diaspora Kurds to serve their nation.

### **To My Son**

My son,  
 Do you see what lies yonder,  
 On the mountain peaks,  
 In the plains  
 And the valley beds?  
 The riches of Kurdistan!  
 But  
 Do you see what else there lies  
 Beyond the mountains,  
 Even beyond the borders?  
 There a tyrant rules  
 Who plunders our riches,  
 Draining the lifeblood of our people.

<sup>18</sup> KSSE. *Kurdistan*, p.12. <http://www.kurdipedia.org/files/relatedfiles/2014/100973/0007.PDF?ver=131074565486758646>

<sup>19</sup> Adnan Khudadad, Munich, June 20, 1960.

My son,  
You have both seen and heard,  
But no matter!  
The people shall prevail,  
So rise, my son!  
Give me my trusty blade  
That I may go to join our brave brothers,  
To carry the fight to the border  
And to shatter these shackles.  
If you hear the machine-gun's rattle  
And I am late in returning  
Run to your dear mother's side  
And tell her, 'Mother dear,  
My father has joined the martyrs for Kurdistan'





coalitions are unable to send any weapons to the Peshmerga due to the central government's restrictions. To this day, only minor weapons support from the international coalition have been approved by Baghdad. Yet, the Peshmerga maintain their support for the Iraqi forces in the retaking of Mosul and they are cooperating in the defeat of the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS). Without the support of Peshmerga, the Iraqi army would have not been able to liberate Mosul.

### **Peshmerga before the ISIS invasion of Mosul**

The rise of ISIS in northern Iraq was inevitable; the way some Sunnis welcomed them was no surprise as they had been alienated by the power of the central government of Baghdad. Moreover, ISIS thrived during the civil war in Syria, the bitter Sunni-Shia conflict in Iraq, and the power vacuum in Iraq, particularly in the Sunni-Arab parts. ISIS constitutes an international threat, but it has benefited from a civil disorder in Iraq, not only to recruit fighters but also to gain ground amongst Arab Sunnis. Their existence in Iraq is a direct threat to the unity of the country. However, the unfortunate reality is that Iraq is divided along ethnic, religious and sectarian lines.

Following the ISIS invasion of Mosul,<sup>6</sup> Iraq's second largest city with a population of over two million, along with other areas of the Nineveh province, the Tikkit and Dyala provinces and the later occupation of large parts of Sunni territories in northern Iraq, the country descended into complete chaos, apart from the Kurdish region in the north. The border between the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and the central government was cut-off apart from a few kilometers in the southern area. In a matter of days after the fall of Mosul, ISIS took control of a significant amount of Iraqi territory. On the August 3, 2014, ISIS proclaimed itself an Islamic Caliphate across a sizeable part of Sunni areas in Iraq and Syria with no regard to international borders. Over 3 million Iraqis were internally displaced from their homes with more than half of them coming to Kurdistan to seek protection.

On August 3, 2014, ISIS attacked Sinjar (110 kilometers from Mosul) without warning and quickly took over neighboring towns and villages. The attack on Sinjar, with an overwhelmingly Yezidi-Kurdish population, was a shift of policy by ISIS towards the Kurdistan region. With the attack

---

<sup>6</sup> The invasion of these territories happened between June 4-10, 2014

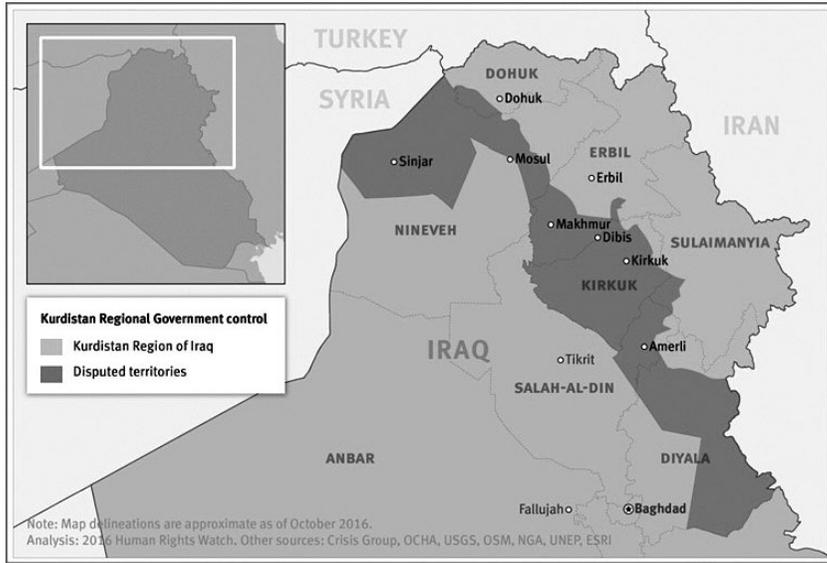
on Nineveh, the international community suddenly woke up to the ISIS threat of global terrorism; prior to that attack, ISIS was not regarded as a “terror threat” but rather a participant in the internal sectarian strife between the Shia and Sunni. Their ability to bring about the repressive control of Mosul and surrounding areas, an important Iraqi territory and geopolitical location on the border between Iraq and Syria, was an example of ISIS’s social, economic, political and military prowess. They gained more credibility amongst their followers, both in the West and in the Middle East, when they easily defeated and humiliated the Iraqi army, seized sizeable amounts of cash from the banks in Mosul, took control over many oil fields and captured modern Russian and U.S. military equipment and weaponry which the four Iraqi army divisions and two federal police divisions had abandoned in their flight from their bases around Mosul. They gained the support of a large portion of the Sunni population of Nineveh. These people felt abandoned by the Iraqi army, who were majority Shia, with no allegiance or desire to fight for the Sunni inhabitants of Nineveh. And the Sunni who were in the Iraqi Army at time, rejected to fight against ISIS. As ISIS advanced and took over control of areas around Mosul, the Iraqi army abandoned their duties and left their territorial domain unguarded; Kurdish Peshmerga forces took control of a wide area of the “disputed territories”<sup>7</sup> of northern Iraq, which had a Kurdish population but were under the control of the federal government of Iraq.

### **Throughout the Fight Against ISIS**

ISIS advanced throughout northern Iraq, all the way to just a few kilometers from Baghdad, and only the Kurdish Peshmerga were able to fight them, despite their inferior arms compared to the Iraqi army; the Iraqi army was in disarray and demoralized. If the Peshmerga had not taken action, ISIS would have taken even larger areas of Iraq. The Peshmerga prevented ISIS from advancing to countries around Kurdistan and Iraq. The Peshmerga were protecting Kurdistan and fighting ISIS on behalf of the entire civilized world.

---

<sup>7</sup> Disputed territories are articulated by Iraqi Constitution as Arabized areas under Saddam Husain’s regime whose population have been dispersed throughout Iraq. The right of a referendum for the original population and residences of disputed territories whether they want to be under the control of Kurdistan Regional Government or the Iraqi Government was defined by Article 140 in Iraqi Constitution but was never stipulated.

**Figure 1. Map of Iraq: Kurdistan Regional Government Control<sup>8</sup>**

When ISIS overtook Sinjar, it was attacking Kurdistan; under the guidance of the Ministry of Peshmerga (MoP), the Peshmerga formed units to protect around 1,050 kilometers of border from Sinjar (between the Iraq-Syria border) down to the Diyala Province and all the way to the Iranian border around Khanaqeen in the western part of northern Iraq. There are four main units of Peshmerga under the umbrella of the MoP: twelve brigades of Peshmerga forces, Unit 70, Unit 80, and the special forces of *Zeravane*. The Peshmerga forces of “*Yekey 70*” (unit 70) and “*Yekey 80*” (unit 80), and the military forces of the two main political parties, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), were distributed and organized across eight border sectors.<sup>9</sup> When ISIS was nearing to the center of Erbil by only 25 kilometers, on August 6, 2014, I was appointed the Commander-in-Chief of Peshmerga in Sector 6 (Gwer and Makhmur), protecting the border of Erbil, the capital city of Kurdistan, which saw some of the bloodiest battles

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.hrw.org/report/2016/11/13/marked-x/iraqi-kurdish-forces-destruction-villages-homes-conflict-isis>.

<sup>9</sup> The process of unifying all the Peshmerga forces began in 2013 but has been delayed because of the fight against ISIS, with the process still ongoing. There is a special committee that has been formed to reform the units of Peshmerga with the help of western coalitions.

with ISIS. My sector was the first to stop the ISIS offensives against Kurdistan and also the first to create a counter offensive against ISIS. As the Commander-in-Chief of all the Peshmerga forces, the President of Kurdistan, Masoud Barzani, had a base in Sector 8 (Sinjar). He bravely led Peshmerga against ISIS in many battles. He also masterminded the liberation of the town in late 2015 and again in 2017 when other areas around Sinjar were liberated from ISIS control.

Since taking up the fight against ISIS, the Peshmerga fought them in many areas in northern Iraq, and along the 1,050 kilometer-border with the ISIS controlled areas, the Peshmerga never lost a fight. The objectives for the Peshmerga was to prevent ISIS from advancing into Kurdish territory, to break up and disrupt their subversive strategies, to wear out their ability to carry out large scale military actions, and to slowly diminish and eradicate their power. It was never the intention of the Peshmerga to entangle themselves in a fight outside of Kurdish territory as this could bring about a backlash ramification and sensitivity from the Iraqi Arabs. With that in mind, the Kurdish leadership supported coalition forces and allied militias as well as the Iraqi Army, should they strike ISIS in their enclaves. The Peshmerga also helped Sunni tribes liberate their lands from ISIS. Therefore, when the operation of liberating Mosul started in 2016, the Peshmerga was a vital partner for the Iraqi army. The Peshmerga, in just a few days, retook several areas from ISIS and destroyed their power in the Mosul front lines from the east Tigris, and cleared the path for the Iraqi troops to advance into Mosul.

## Challenges

The start of the fight against ISIS was a huge challenge for the KRG. The Peshmerga forces felt inferior to their technological and military strength, and initially, ISIS was indeed superior. In addition, the KRG felt isolated in the fight against the ISIS as their allies were few and far between, as President Barzani explained in an interview with Patrick Goodenough on CNS News.<sup>10</sup> The result of a bitter relationship between the central government and the KRG was that the Peshmerga had no money for salaries, trainings, or heavy weaponry to fight ISIS. The KRG was also suffering from a lack of internal and external funding following a drop in oil prices and a lack of their fair share in revenues from the Iraq Govern-

---

<sup>10</sup> Goodenough, Patrick (2014): "Kurdish Government, 'Alone' in Fight Against ISIS Appeals for Airstrikes and Urgent Aid."

ment. Even before the ISIS offensives, the KRG's revenue shares and salaries were cut off completely by the central government. Moreover, around two million refugees and IDPs from both the ISIS and the Syrian conflict were a heavy burden on the KRG.

Most of the younger and newer Peshmerga did not have sufficient training prior to the fighting, and many young civilians volunteered to defend Kurdistan. Initially, there was neither enough time nor personnel for adequate training, as ISIS had moved with no warning and immense speed. ISIS was also spreading fear through social media, with grave impact on the civilian population. However, the Peshmerga knew the lands very well because of their previous fights in the mountains of Kurdistan; their method of fighting had been used for nearly two centuries of guerrilla warfare in these areas. However, many of the battles against ISIS took place in the low borderlands and flat areas which required a different type of fighting, to which the Peshmerga had to adapt quickly. The most immediate task was to bring experienced Peshmerga and organize them into defensive units to protect the borders; this later proved to be the most vital factor in the removal of the ISIS. The expansion of the Peshmerga in such haste was very problematic, and posed a real danger to the collapse of the troop structure.<sup>11</sup>

International aid to the Peshmerga was extremely limited due to restrictions imposed by Baghdad on the KRG. Thus, no armaments or ammunitions were issued to the Peshmerga without the approval of the central Iraqi government in Baghdad. This was a response to the KRG exporting its own oil and was a punishment rather than a legal restriction. However, the coalition liaised with the Peshmerga forces who were able to draw down air support and this was critical assistance to the Peshmerga to weaken ISIS and halt their military advance.

Once the borders were protected by the Peshmerga, the next task was to make the civilian population safe. The KRG security forces managed to completely destroy ISIS compounds and to decipher their communication systems. Even though at times ISIS came very close to cities, in particular Erbil and Kirkuk, Kurdistan was the safest region in Iraq.

Moreover, one of the major challenges that the Peshmerga faced were the land mines and Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) which ISIS used by placing hidden booby traps on the roadways, abandoned houses and in

---

<sup>11</sup> Peshmerga forces often went without salaries for several consecutive months.

buildings and farm lands.<sup>12</sup> There was not enough experience in recognizing these and there was a significant loss of life as the Peshmerga retook ISIS-held territory. Not only were these bombs difficult to recognize, but the Peshmerga had no bomb disposal equipment or expertise to defuse them. Many men were killed due to inexperience and a lack of knowledge.

## **Aftermath**

In the areas of Sinjar that ISIS had captured,<sup>13</sup> they had completely destroyed the villages, towns and cities, rendering them completely uninhabitable. The population was either massacred or, in the case of women and girls, deported to ISIS strongholds in Iraq and Syria where they suffered unimaginable torture, sexual slavery, and violence. No survivors were left among the ruins. The Yezidis that were able to flee before the ISIS onslaught managed to take refuge in the mountains, but many died from starvation and lack of water. ISIS considered the Yezidi-Kurds as devil-worshippers and infidels. Around 40,000 people fled to mount Sinjar; 5,000 men faced death,<sup>14</sup> and approximately 7,000 women were captured alive. More than 3,000 women managed to escape ISIS imprisonment, the majority of which were ransomed out of bondage.<sup>15</sup>

In the fight against the ISIS *jihadis*, the Peshmerga suffered enormous losses with over 1,700 dead and around 10,000 wounded: suffering horrific injuries including loss of limbs, brain injuries and sight. The bravery of the Peshmerga in this fight should be recognized and remembered as the most efficient military campaign in modern Kurdish and Iraqi history. We owe a lot to their bravery and loyalty of Kurdistan and its civilization.

In addition to the loss of lives, ISIS had completely destroyed buildings, mosques, churches, infrastructure and historical religious sites; they aimed to obliterate any signs of life that contradicted their own twisted vision of Islam. The consequences for the KRG and Iraqi government is an almost impossible task of rebuilding the buildings and infrastructure, but also the social society and national security.

---

<sup>12</sup> The Pesh and Jamers have been denied de-mining tools for remote control bombs.

<sup>13</sup> Which was majority-inhabited by Yezidi-Kurds, a non-Muslims Kurdish minority whose religion dates back to time immemorial.

<sup>14</sup> Bradford, Alexandra: *Escape From ISIS: Freedom and Justice for Yazidi Women and Girls*.

<sup>15</sup> Engel, Richard: *Inside the Secret Rescue of Yazidi Sex Slaves From ISIS Captors*.

## Opportunities

The fight against the ISIS was difficult and posed many problems for the KRG. However, the experience of the war also provided some opportunities for the Kurds, and the Peshmerga were a vital tool to gain world recognition and support for the reputation of Kurdistan. The Kurdish Peshmerga began to be recognized as the most reliable, fearless, and effective ground forces; their reputation grew as they began to defeat ISIS. The Peshmerga shed light on the situation of Kurds in Iraq, they brought attention to the region by gaining the admiration of many in the west. The Peshmerga showed the world the bravery of the Kurds, and the world recognized how the culture and mentality of the Kurds differs from others in the region. This situation is an opportunity for the Kurds to leave their mark and influence future political decisions affecting Iraq and the wider Middle East once peace is established.

One of the major developments arising from the fight against ISIS by the Peshmerga was the loyalty to Kurdistan and protecting their lands denied to them by successive Iraqi regimes. A type of Kurdish unity was created, encompassing the armies of other Kurdish regions adjoining the Iraqi/Kurdistan border. This is particularly true when the Peshmerga crossed national borders, by invitation and negotiation, to fight against ISIS in Kurdish towns and areas in Syria (Rojava). The most defining example of this cooperation was the brutal fight for the town of Kobane in northern Syria along the border with Turkey, which was besieged by ISIS and in danger of falling into their hands.<sup>16</sup> Peshmerga forces crossed from Turkey into Syria where they helped in the long battle for the liberation of Kobane and the surrounding areas. This unique cooperation is groundbreaking and shows possibilities for further cooperation between Kurdish military units, and opens the way for further political collaboration.

The reputation of the Peshmerga has always been positive, and there has always been a great pride amongst the population for their freedom fighters who fought a vicious guerrilla war against the oppressive regime of Iraq, especially against the Ba'ath regime of Saddam Hussein.<sup>17</sup> However, after the heroic fight against ISIS, this pride has become an unshakable

---

<sup>16</sup> The PYD forces had retrieved back from nearly three hundred villages to Kobane, which fell into the hands of ISIS.

<sup>17</sup> Between 1980–91, the Ba'ath regime killed around 200,000 people through chemical weapons and genocidal campaigns, with the majority being civilians. Around 4,500 out of 5,000 villages in Iraqi Kurdistan were completely destroyed.

confidence and has engendered a loyalty and unity from, not just the Kurds, but from the ethnic minorities who also claim the Kurdistan region as their traditional homeland. Previously not actively recruited into the ranks of the Peshmerga, the Peshmerga now consist of a diverse and representative cohort, combining Christians, Yezidi-Kurds, Turkmen, Shebeks and others to defend their traditional homelands and in many cases seek revenge for atrocities committed against them.<sup>18</sup>

A major factor that contributed to the successes of the Peshmerga forces was the ability of the commanders on the ground to liaise with each other, despite owing allegiance to different political parties in Kurdistan. There is a real feeling amongst Peshmerga forces, including senior officers, that they could effectively combine the forces into a national force which would effectively become the army of Kurdistan, protecting the institutions and population from outside threats.

Another vital advantage that turned the tide in favor of the Peshmerga and the KRG was the airstrike support they received from their Western allies. Without this air support, the outcome for the Kurdistan Region would have undoubtedly been very different.<sup>19</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The Peshmerga established itself as a leading military force, which overcame the disadvantages of being ill-equipped with outdated weapons and no support from the Iraqi government. By doing so, it won the hearts and minds of its Western allies and put itself into a strong position to form a united military force to protect Kurdistan. The bravery of the forces with heroic individual actions have emphasized the strength of allegiance to the “homeland” and the commitment of the Peshmerga to defend Kurdistan and its people. Despite the tragic loss of life, the destruction and horror inflicted by the brutal ISIS fighters, Kurdistan may receive international recognition given the Peshmerga’s contributions to the now inevitable defeat of ISIS in Iraq.

---

<sup>18</sup> Today, about 90 percent of the Iraqi minorities live in Kurdistan, as it is the safest place in Iraq.

<sup>19</sup> The cooperation has been near-perfect with no civilian casualties. The air strikes were the first in support of the Kurds, as they have always have been the victims of air bombings.



## *Chapter 4*

# **Kurdistan's Political Landscape and the Path Towards Independence**

*Ranj Alaaldin*

Masoud Barzani, president of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), recently announced that a referendum on Kurdish independence will be held on September 25, 2017, a historic moment in history, and one that is likely to produce a yes-vote. As the largest nation in the world without a state of their own, the Kurds have fought multiple battles in pursuit of their own state, ever since imperial powers established the Westphalian nation-state system from the ruins of the Ottoman empire and deprived the Kurds of a state of their own.

The Kurds have suffered countless atrocities and multiple betrayals from the international community in their pursuit of statehood. History, however, is not always unkind to those that persevere. A regional order that many believed was impermeable because of the strength of the Arab state, the oil-wealth at the disposal of the region's regimes (and their alignments with the West) was soon beset with cracks. The Arab-Israeli conflict, social injustice, failures in governance and the credibility deficit of Arab despots and autocrats that followed were later coupled with the destabilizing rise of political Islam in the 1970s and the Iranian revolution in 1979. These radically transformed politics and security in the region and it was the emergence of a Shiite theocracy in Iran in 1979 that encouraged the Ba'ath Party to over-reach and control Iraq over-reached and pursued an expansionist ambition that resulted in the grueling eight-year Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s.

Saddam's war with Iran bankrupted the Iraqi state and precipitated his invasion of Kuwait in 1990. Heavily defeated in the first Gulf War by the international community, the bruised but undefeated butcher of Baghdad shifted his focus to the Kurds, against whom he had already used chemical weapons in a campaign that killed more than 100,000 Kurdish civilians. The imminent threat from the Ba'ath regime resulted in the establishment of Operation Provide Comfort, the Western-imposed no-fly zone over northern Iraq in 1991, which had originally been opposed by the U.S. but

was eventually implemented at the insistence of the British.<sup>1</sup> The introduction of the no-fly zone allowed the two dominant parties, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), to establish their own autonomous region, complete with its own political system (including elections), institutions, and foreign relations.<sup>2</sup> Elections in 1992, the first of its kind in Iraq's history and described as a "full and free expression of the wishes of the Iraqi Kurdish electorate,"<sup>3</sup> set a threshold of 17 percent of the votes for entering the parliament (five out of 105 seats were reserved for Christians). Only the KDP and the PUK managed to cross the threshold, while the Islamic Movement of Kurdistan (IMK) came in third with five percent of the votes.

The 1992 elections and the establishment of a *de facto* state in northern Iraq was, arguably, the single most important milestone in the Kurdish state-building trajectory. It was achieved through a combination of sheer perseverance in the face of the Ba'ath regime's devastating brutality but also luck in terms of Baghdad's miscalculations and overreach. Despite the obstructive geopolitical environment of the 1990s that saw Iraqi Kurdistan surrounded by powerful, resource-rich neighbors—who were far better positioned than they are today—ready to invade and militarily terminate the *de facto* Kurdish state, the 1992 elections established the path towards sovereignty that the Kurds are moving along today. This was, as the Economist remarked at the time, "independence in action."<sup>4</sup> The birth of Kurdish self-governance in the 1990s should additionally be appreciated against the historical backdrop of the 1970 March agreement that the Kurds signed with the Baghdad government, after negotiating with the then vice-president of Iraq, Saddam Hussein. The agreement gave the Kurds representation in Baghdad, enshrined the Kurdish language in official discourse, and legalized Kurdish language publications. During the

---

<sup>1</sup> See Ranj Alaaldin, "Cameron needs to lead like Thatcher did," *Independent*, 3 December 2015, available at <http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/as-a-kurd-i-believe-cameron-needs-to-lead-like-thatcher-in-syria-a6759316.html>

<sup>2</sup> For an elaborate history of the Kurds, see David McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*, New edition (I B Tauris & Co Ltd, 2003). For the most up-to-date book on Iraq's Kurds see Ofra Bengio, *The Kurds of Iraq: Building a State within a State* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2012).

<sup>3</sup> Michael Meadowcroft, Kurdistan Elections for Iraqi Kurdish National Assembly and Leader of the Kurdistan Liberation Movement, 19th May 1992, Monitoring Report (Electoral Reform Consultancy Services, London 1992), 4. For more on this, see Yaniv Voller, *The Kurdish Liberation Movement in Iraq: From Insurgency to Statehood*, (London: Routledge, 2014).

<sup>4</sup> "Independence by Stealth," *Economist*, May, 1992.

short-lived 1970-1974 period of the March agreement, “the Kurds learned the skills of administration and direct governance, skills that were to prove useful in the 1990s.”<sup>5</sup>

## **The Challenges of Governance and Kurdistan's Resilience**

Despite the landmark elections and continued Western enforcement of the no-fly zone, governance was not without its challenges. The Kurdistan Region's political process was still nascent. Hostile neighbors surrounded the Kurds and had no interest in seeing this new emerging democracy advance further, for both domestic and geopolitical reasons. Inevitably, regional powers, including Turkey, Iran, and Syria, alongside the Ba'ath regime began their efforts to destabilize the region, principally through fostering division among the parties, manipulation, and by offering patronage to rival political parties and movements.

To compound these difficulties, the PUK and KDP had their own historic differences. Both leaders of the two main parties believed in their right to lead the Kurdish national movement; the leadership of the two parties had a history of personal divisions. Both Masoud Barzani, the KDP head and son of the legendary Mullah Mustafa Barzani, and PUK founder and head Jalal Talabani (affectionately referred to by Kurds as “Mam (uncle) Jalal”) believed in their right to be the undisputed heads of the Kurdish national movement. The equal distribution of power after the 1992 elections and the split vote also meant that both parties controlled important and influential positions within the government. Ideologically, the parties re-positioned themselves by moving to the center of the political spectrum and by re-defining themselves as moderate secular parties. Yet, they monitored each other through their security services and the effort to weaken each other led to dysfunctional governance and a series of disputes over territory, revenue, and power. These culminated in the 1994 civil war that was known in Kurdish as *brakuji*, or the killing of brothers.

The Kurdistan Region of Iraq became deeply divided as a result of civil war. Territorially, the KDP retained the entirety of Dohuk province, as well as Erbil province. The PUK administered Sulaymaniah and some parts of Kirkuk province. Socially, Kurdistan's population experienced

---

<sup>5</sup> Liam Anderson and Gareth Stansfield, eds., *The Future of Iraq: Dictatorship, Democracy, or Division*, 1st ed. (Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p.166. See also Brendan O'Leary, *How to Get Out Of Iraq With Integrity*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009).

political suppression, to the extent that the local population feared bearing the colors of the two main parties. Kurds living in KDP-administered territory would avoid wearing green, the color representing the PUK, while Kurds in PUK-administered areas would avoid wearing yellow, representing the KDP. The security services of both parties gained notoriety during this period for enforcing displacement policies, with the KDP and PUK alleging the displacement of their members and supporters, numbering the tens of thousands.<sup>6</sup> The conflict additionally saw regional powers back opposite sides, before coming to an end as a result of the 1998 U.S.-negotiated ceasefire.

Despite the challenges, the *de facto* state and autonomous region remained intact. In spite of their concerns and hostility, regional powers did not eliminate the Kurdish state-building project in northern Iraq. The Kurdistan Region remained resilient, in part because of domestic political dynamics and the international influence, particularly the U.S.' commitment to toppling the Ba'ath regime. Saddam Hussein's survival and his track-record of conducting genocidal attacks on the Kurds meant that there was still a moral, in addition to strategic, imperative to ensuring the continued survival of the Kurdistan Region.

Their resilience during this tumultuous period, one that should have witnessed the collapse of the Kurdish state-building project, can be attributed to the nuances that shape the relationship between the two main parties. While the Kurds have historically been disparaged for being divided and incapable of governance and independence, this demeaning, orientalist argument that colonial powers have for long used to suppress the legitimacy of Kurdish self-determination fails to appreciate the distinctions that have shaped the interactions between the two rival parties. The KDP and PUK still, to this day, have serious differences, but both parties were born from the Kurdish national movement; both President Barzani and Jalal Talabani are Kurdish nationalists at their core, who perceive of themselves and their parties as state-builders that strive for a Kurdish state. Their parties have historically been shaped, and continue to function in accordance with this political outlook. That does not mean the rivalry should not be taken seriously or that there is any room for complacency. The resources that go toward fighting party rivalries could be better spent on governance and security. The more the rivalry persists, the weaker the prospects of the Kurdish state-building project. In other words, divisions, at most, con-

---

<sup>6</sup> The author experienced these conditions during multiple visits to the region in the 1990s.

stitute setbacks to the state-building project, rather than death-knells. What has additionally been fundamental to the resilience of the Kurdish *de facto* state is the acceptance by both the KDP and PUK toward the late 1990s that they were both condemned to live with one another and so compromise became, and continues to be, the order of the day.

This political outlook and maturity helped the Kurds achieve the status of a democratic success story. The Kurdish leadership spoke the language of pluralism, human rights and international norms, in the effort to acquire international recognition and legitimacy. In 2002, the democratic experiment in the Kurdistan Region was also endorsed for the first time by the European Parliament, when peers demanded “support for the democratic experiment of the Kurdish administration in Northern Iraq and for projects for the development of civil society.”<sup>7</sup>

In the same vein, the political outlook and consciousness of the 1990s ensured the Kurdish state-building project remained resilient after 2003 amid a series of additional challenges that followed the toppling of the Ba’ath regime. This is not only the result of a more mature political process and the unifying thread of Kurdish state-building but also the experience of governing under two separately administered territories. Unlike the rest of Iraq and the experience of Baghdad’s main parties, the PUK and KDP had a prolonged period of uninterrupted disruption to their governance and were no longer shackled by personal and party-based rivalries. By 2003, there were two sets of civil servants and bureaucrats who had many years of exposure to the international system, interaction with international organizations and years of experience administrating territory.

## **Weathering the Storm**

The biggest challenges facing the Kurdistan Regions are public dissatisfaction over services, corruption, bureaucracy, and nepotism, as well as the appeal of Kurdish Islamic movements, which thrive on public discontent. While another civil war is unlikely, tensions still exist among supporters, members and representatives of the parties. The Peshmerga forces are yet to be unified. Further, security and intelligence forces of both sides remain separate and continue to covertly monitor each other. Mistrust and political jockeying over important ministries including Finance, Nat-

---

<sup>7</sup> European Report, “EU/Iraq: Parliamentary Report to Human Rights Violations,” April 27, 2002, No. 2679

ural Resources, and Planning, which control the largest share of KRG resources, are ongoing and are underpinned by mistrust and a competition for political fortunes and patronage deals. PUK-KDP divisions, thus, persist and remain driven by personalities, mistrust and money. The failure to remedy divisions could hamper the Kurdistan Region's efforts to achieve their goals at the national level as well as regionally. Further, divisions provide an environment conducive to social discontent and polarization.

The Kurdistan Region's political climate was dramatically changed in 2009 with the advent of the Gorran ("Change") Party. Gorran is a PUK offshoot group led by the late Nawshirwan Mustafa, a former PUK deputy and co-founder. Gorran has since aimed to break the two-party dominance and offer the electorate a more acceptable alternative to the two-ruling parties than the far-right Islamist or far-left communist groups are able to offer the region's largely secular Kurds. The party has campaigned on a platform of reform and modernization, lambasting the PUK and KDP for its corruption, cronyism and nepotism. It made its entry into Kurdish politics in the region's 2009 parliamentary elections, which saw Gorran emerge as Kurdistan's first viable opposition group for the first time since the autonomous region was established in 1991, another boost to the KRI's democratic process that has revised the politics of authority in Kurdistan and has forced both main parties to rethink their interactions with the electorate.

The 2009 results saw the PUK and KDP alliance receive only 57 percent of the total votes, a dramatic decline from the previous election in 2005, when they won more than 85 percent. Gorran won 24 percent alone, while other opposition groups got at least 15 percent. The party's advent into Kurdish politics dealt a severe blow to both parties, and in particular the PUK, which saw Gorran take its most important political base, the traditionally-PUK stronghold province of Sulaymaniah. The KRI's stability faced another challenge with the outbreak of the Arab-Spring uprisings in 2010. Arab-world inspired protests took place on February 17, 2011 and resulted in at least five deaths and more than 100 wounded. Protests in the region were not an entirely new phenomenon, however. Protests have regularly taken place in towns and villages, typically because of unemployment or the lack of services. What made the protests different in 2011 was that they were taking place against the backdrop of a dramatically modified Middle East, one that had empowered the civilian population and had enhanced their capacity to contest power and politics. However, the PUK and KDP were able to weather the storm for a number of reasons.

Firstly, the KRI's democratic process, although not perfect, has been deemed free and fair by the international community and enjoys both local and international legitimacy. Whilst the Kurdish population might be discontent with the political process, there is still widespread personal affection toward both Massoud Barzani and Jalal Talabani. The KRI's economic growth and its growing middle class has also helped the PUK and KDP, even if dissatisfaction from these strata of society has grown since the decline of oil process and the economic crisis that followed.

While protests did not take place beyond Sulaymaniah, they were still important for a number of reasons and go beyond merely being symbolic in their impact. In many respects, they constituted a milestone for Kurdish politics, principally because it meant that the KRG was not immune to the challenges and demands other regional governments faced. Further, it signified Gorran's capacity to disrupt Kurdish politics and stability in Kurdistan, meaning the party could also potentially constitute a spoiler for Kurdish independence, its own internal problems notwithstanding.

The political climate continues to be fluid and susceptible to being re-configured. The Kurdistan Region's parliamentary elections in September 2013 showed that Gorran could replace the PUK as the second most dominant force in the region. The PUK, rather than to run on a joint list with the KDP, as it did in 2009, opted to go it alone, for three reasons. Firstly, the party's members were unhappy with its close relationship with the KDP, secondly, they wanted to diminish the KDP's dominance and finally, because they believed they would fare better if the party distanced itself from its historic rivals. Its decision proved to be a miscalculation. The party came in third. Gorran emerged with a total of 24 seats, capturing almost 450,000 votes, compared with the PUK's 18 seats and 320,000 votes. The KDP emerged as the supreme political force in the region, gaining 38 seats and close to 750,000 of the popular vote.<sup>8</sup> Nonetheless, Gorran's aspirations proved to be short-lived in the governorate elections that followed in 2014 (which saw it come third, behind the PUK) as well as because of disintegration and divisions internally within the party, which may not recover to its formative strength now that Nawshirwan Mustafa has passed. The party's anti-establishment identity served it well during the formative stages of its history but no longer resonates as much since

---

<sup>8</sup> "PUK Falls to Third Place in Iraqi Kurdistan Elections," September 21, 2013, *Al-Monitor*, accessed at <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/09/iraq-elections-preliminary-results.html###ixzz2nFvPVDGM> on 12 December 2013.

it became a key component of the 2013 coalition government, holding a series of ministries.

It has not helped the Kurdish state-building project that Gorran's relationship with the KDP has deteriorated dramatically in recent years, despite the former (as the largest bloc) picking Gorran over the PUK as its main coalition partner in the government that followed the 2013 national elections. Relations deteriorated after Gorran led an effort in June 2015 to amend the presidential law of Iraqi Kurdistan as President Barzani's term was coming to an end. This was seen as an attempt to undermine Barzani and a breach of Gorran's obligations as a coalition partner. The law was never amended and a governmental body later extended Barzani's term. When in October 2015 the KDP's offices in Sulaymaniyah came under attack by protesters and resulted in at least five fatalities, Gorran was blamed for the assault on its offices. The KDP then blocked the speaker of the Kurdish parliament (held at the time by Gorran) from entering Erbil in October 2015, effectively ending Gorran's participation in the government.

Gorran and the PUK have attempted—but have so far failed—to band together to counter the electoral and political supremacy of the KDP, whose organization and capacity to keep its internal divisions behind closed doors has afforded it a competitive advantage. Such efforts have failed largely as a result of personality clashes and internal factionalism within Gorran and the PUK. The problem for the Kurdish state-building project is not so much the divisions between, and among, the parties, but rather the multiple lines of authority that have resulted from the factionalism within the two parties. If anything, Kurdistan's problem has been the various centers of power that have emerged within the PUK and Gorran in recent years. As such, it could fall on the KDP to not only ensure its own political competitiveness, but also to manage the differences that shapes the internal politics of its rivals to move Kurdistan toward sovereignty, post-referendum.

## **Conclusion: Convincing Friend and Foe**

State institutions in Iraq and the rest of the region have collapsed or weakened and it is now questionable if statehood can ever be rehabilitated as sub-national identities based around ethnicity and religion continue to thrive in uncontested and ungoverned spaces. War has led to multiple ungoverned spaces in which armed groups that have little respect for

human rights and international norms have become powerful mobilisers of people and resources and have replaced the elites as the administrators of territory. With support from regional patrons, these transnational actors have become the providers of services and security and their networks extend across the region, rendering meaningless the once resilient and impermeable boundaries of the region.

As the tensions between the Gulf states show, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region has a broken system; there are competing regional visions that are currently being violently played out in Syria, Iraq, Libya and Yemen, among others. The proxy warfare that has engulfed these countries has resulted in disastrous and far-reaching humanitarian crises that have led to a global refugee crisis, internally displaced persons (IDPs), and forced displacements. The demographic composition of once vibrant, pluralistic and heterogeneous societies is being violently manipulated by militias and warlords.

The Arab uprisings have placed the region's Kurds in a rare situation where their powerful and historically hostile neighbors are engaged in conflicts elsewhere. Armed conflict and instability since 2011 has resulted in a radical shakeup of geopolitics. Not so long ago did Ankara refuse to deal with the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and decide to oppose its efforts to consolidate control in disputed oil-rich areas such as Kirkuk. Moreover, the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which has fought the Turkish state for more than four decades, has complicated the KRG's efforts to strengthen political and economic ties with its neighbors, all of whom have historically combated Kurdish rebellions within their own territories. Yet, over the past-decade, the KRG's relationship with Turkey has changed significantly. There have been landmark visits and exchanges between senior-ranking Turkish and KRG officials as well as a rapid increase in trade that has seen Turkish companies flood the KRG's market and the building of a pipeline that has enabled the KRG to independently export its hydrocarbons to international markets. Ankara has slowly moved toward accepting a Kurdish state over the past three decades, even if it is not actively pushing for it.

While Ankara has historically opposed autonomy, let alone a state for the Kurds, it has transformed its economic relationship with the KRG into a regional security arrangement of which Iraqi Kurdistan is a key pillar. Despite its initial intransigence after the Kurds gained autonomy in 1991, Ankara has invested extensive resources into Kurdistan's economy that has seen it build on the economic opportunities exploited by around

500 Turkish companies since 2003. Turkey has effectively established an axis that acts as a buffer against instability in the rest of Iraq but also Iranian influence. Turkey simultaneously guarantees its access to the region's huge oil and gas reserves and increases its diplomatic clout. Iraqi Kurdistan continues to be regarded, as it has been since the 1990s, as a conduit through which to counter and manage its own Kurdish issue and the PKK. Turkish influence in Iraqi Kurdistan has largely been framed as a Turkey-KDP project aimed at securing the KDP's position as the dominant party there, to the detriment of the PUK which enjoys closer ties to the Democratic Union Party (PYD) and the People's Protection Units (YPG), the PKK-leaning groups in Syria. But the situation is much more complicated than that. It is commonly believed that Turkey's strong ties with the KRG only recently emerged, when, in fact, the relationship strengthened in the 1990s. Turkey played an important role in alleviating the humanitarian crisis that followed the first Gulf War. The ensuing western-backed no-fly zone and the creation of an autonomous Kurdish region further enabled the space for commercial ties, even if politically, and publicly, relations remained tense and constrained.

Today's political cooperation between Ankara and Erbil is an extension of these ties. Contrary to conventional wisdom, in the past, both the KDP and the PUK have worked alongside Turkey against the PKK, whose Marxist-orientated vision of Kurdish nationalism runs contrary to their social-democratic and liberal outlook. As recently as 2009, Talabani asked the group to leave Iraqi Kurdistan.<sup>9</sup> Both Barzani and Talabani were given Turkish passports, which allowed them to travel freely outside of Iraq and Turkey, and were even allowed to establish official representation in Ankara.

Over the past two years, the spillover from the Syria conflict has complicated Turkey's ties to the region's Kurds, owing to its own domestic confrontation with the PKK but also the ascendancy in Syria of the PYD and the YPG. The Syria conflict has heightened Kurdish nationalistic sentiments and has provided the opportunity for greater Kurdish autonomy throughout the region. This has also made more difficult KRG efforts to balance domestic Kurdish sentiments with their dependency on Ankara. Yet, Turkey is still the only reliable ally for Iraq's Kurds. In a region that can no longer count on United States engagement, Turkey may be the

---

<sup>9</sup> 'Disarm or leave, Iraq's Talabani tells PKK', *Reuters*, 24 March 2009, available at <http://in.reuters.com/article/idINIndia-38665720090324>.

least worst option for the KRG. Partnering with Turkey—a major military power, a NATO member and historic western ally with a resilient economy—provides the Kurdistan Region with its own “buffer” against the atomized security structures in Iraq and the rest of the region. The state and non-state actors that threaten the Kurdistan region in the current political and security environment will think twice before challenging Turkey’s security interests in Iraq and, for now, those interests overlap with the KRG’s own. The KRG will also benefit from increased foreign investment, technological expertise and access to the European markets. Continued interaction could also help to alleviate Turkey’s tensions with other Kurdish groups in the region and, potentially, restart the peace process with the PKK.

The notion of a U.S.-aligned Kurdish state that has vast hydrocarbons, a viable economy, that has strong ties to the U.S. and the Gulf and sits adjacent to its borders constitutes a nightmare scenario for the Iranian regime. While Iran will still need convincing and may even threaten the KRG with invasion (or the deployment of its Shiite militia proxies), Iran has historical ties to Iraq’s Kurds, providing them with a sanctuary and base from which to fight the former Ba’ath regime. There is sufficient historical context and co-existence to try and attempt to manage and ease Iranian apprehensions toward a Kurdish state, in addition to the economic benefits that it could bring. While the KRG may look to rely on the U.S. and the mobilization of American support to constrain the space that allows potentially hostile neighbors to destabilize the KRI if and when it becomes independent, the challenge will be to win the political and intellectual debate on Kurdish independence so that friend and foe are convinced that an independent Kurdish state will bring opportunities, not problems for the region. No one should be allowed to forget the atrocities and genocide committed against the Kurds, but now the Kurdistan Region’s leadership must win the intellectual war of narratives, including in Tehran itself, where a complex political system offers opportunities as much as it does challenges.



## Chapter 5

# Why It Is Time for An Independent Kurdistan

*Gazang Bradosti*

One hundred years ago, in the peace negotiations that followed World War I, the Kurds were promised their own state. Instead of gaining independence, they became divided among Turkey, Iran, Syria and Iraq.<sup>1</sup> The newly established state of Iraq was supposed to be an equal partnership between the Arabs and the Kurds, but this dream soon became a dark reality as all Iraqi governments suppressed the Kurds. Additionally, looking at the Kurdish diaspora around the world today, it is quite clear that Kurds have long lived under oppression and violence under the hands of different regimes.

Kurdistan's case for independence is compelling. Despite the calamity in Iraq, in particular since the United States invasion in 2003, there is hope of peace and stability in the Kurdistan Region. Compared to the rest of the country, violence in the Kurdistan Region has been relatively minor. In many other parts of Iraq, by contrast, different ethnic groups living close to one another are engaged in high levels of sectarian violence. The relative stability in the Kurdistan Region has allowed the Iraqi Kurds to enjoy the country's highest living standard and highest level of foreign investment. Furthermore, the region is stable enough to allow engagement in foreign relations, and to establish a tourism sector, and to host stakeholders from other countries.<sup>2</sup> The stability that the Iraqi Kurds have created since the fall of Saddam Hussein has presented them with ample opportunity. They have long aimed of having a sovereign state, and have suffered greatly as a result. Most notably, they were victims of a genocide inflicted by Saddam Hussein, which took the live of over 100,000 civilians.<sup>3</sup> Given this unfortunate history, their position as the largest ethnic group

---

<sup>1</sup> Kendal Nezan (President of the Kurdish Institute of Paris), *A brief survey of The History of the Kurds*, the Kurdish Institute of Paris. [http://www.institutkurde.org/en/institute/who\\_are\\_the\\_kurds.php](http://www.institutkurde.org/en/institute/who_are_the_kurds.php), accessed July 24, 2017.

<sup>2</sup> Denise Natali, *The Kurdistan Region of Iraq: Stabilizer or Spoiler?* Georgetown University Press, 2013, p. 71-79.

<sup>3</sup> UNPO and KRG, *The Kurdish Genocide Achieving Justice trough EU Recognition*, p. 4.

in the world without a country has made quite a compelling case for statehood. This in particular as a result of the outcomes of the Arab Spring.<sup>4</sup>

The Arab Spring has brought unexpected and enormous changes to the Middle East with varying impact. While some states made a push for more accountable and democratic political rule, others became immersed in internal or regional conflict and instability. In addition, non-state actors, such as militant and non-militant groups and nationalist organizations, have also been an important component of these transformations. These actors' efforts to seize power both at local and national levels have resulted in violent conflict, civil war, the emergence of new political entities and changes in political rule. The different outcomes of the uprisings in different states are largely related to the pre-existing political structures of the states, regime types, state-society relations and power constellations.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, this process has raised important political, legal and theoretical questions about not only the internal political structures of the states, their future and regional and international politics, but also other political actors, such as the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), and their recognition and international legitimacy. For these reasons, and in particular considering the uncertainty of Iraq's future, the principles of self-determination and sovereignty are highly relevant in discussing the recognition and international legitimacy of the Kurdistan Region.

## **An Independent Kurdish State under International Law**

According to public international law, there are several judicial authorities concerning the right of different peoples to self-determination. These cases have involved countries' Supreme Courts, ad hoc international tribunals, and more importantly, the International Court of Justice.<sup>6</sup> In several cases, the International Court of Justice has ruled clearly and unconditionally in favor of peoples arguing for their rights to self-determination. It has clearly articulated that the right of self-determination is a legal and an inherent right. It is absolute and cannot be derogated from.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> Larry Diamond and Marc F. Plattner, *Democratization and Authoritarianism in the Arab World*, Johns Hopkins University Press and the National Endowment for Democracy, 2014.

<sup>5</sup> Mark L. Haas and David W. Lesch, *The Arab Spring: Change and Resistance in the Middle East*, Westview Press, 2012, Part I Spring in the Arab World.

<sup>6</sup> Gentian Zyberi, *Self-Determination through the Lens of the International Court of Justice*, Netherlands International Law Review, 2009.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter 3.

The principle of self-determination is that distinct groups of people have the legal right to determine for themselves to which state they wish to belong. Self-determination is firmly grounded in international law, and both the UN Charter<sup>8</sup> and resolutions of the UN General Assembly incorporate this principle.<sup>9</sup> In order for a group of people to attain the right to determine their political destiny, i.e., to choose which state they belong to, the group must be *distinct*. In order for a group to be *distinct*, it must fulfill the objective and subjective elements.<sup>10</sup>

Based on their history and culture, the Kurds satisfy the objective elements required to possess the legal right of self-determination. Moreover, all religious groups and sects are allowed to freely follow their religious practices in region. They are a distinct group with a common history that dates back to 2,000 years BC.<sup>11</sup> They also satisfy the subjective element of self-determination, as they perceive themselves collectively as ethnic Kurds. National symbols have been displayed throughout the country, in particular the Kurdish flag. In addition to the flag, they have developed a Kurdish national anthem and erected portraits of Kurdish heroes, such as Mustafa Barzani and Mahmud Barznji. Furthermore, the Kurdish culture has a rich oral tradition and literature. Most popular are epic poems called *lawj*, which often tell of adventure in love or battle. Kurdish literature first appeared in the 7<sup>th</sup> century AD. In 1596, Sharaf Khan composed a history of the Kurds in Persian called the *Sharafnama*. About a hundred years later, in 1695, a great national epic called the *Mem û Zin* was written in Kurdish by Ahmed Khani.

The question is then whether the Kurdistan Region satisfies the criteria for statehood. The qualification of a “state” under public international law is defined by the 1933 Montevideo Convention on the Rights and Duties of States.<sup>12</sup> The Montevideo Convention requires states to possess all four

---

<sup>8</sup> The Charter of the United Nations was signed on 26 June 1945, in San Francisco, at the conclusion of the United Nations Conference on International Organization, and came into force on 24 October 1945. The right of self-determination is regulated in article 1.2 of the Charter.

<sup>9</sup> [http://www.un.org/en/decolonization/ga\\_resolutions.shtml](http://www.un.org/en/decolonization/ga_resolutions.shtml), accessed 201707-23. The right of self-determination is also enshrined in Article 1 of both the *International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights* (ICCPR) and the *International Covenant Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*. It is considered essential before any other rights can be recognized.

<sup>10</sup> Jörg Fisch, *The right of self-determination of peoples: the domestication of an illusion*, Cambridge University Press, 2015, p. 35-37.

<sup>11</sup> Ferdinand Hennerbichler, *The Origin of Kurds*, Scientific Research, 2012.

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.ilsa.org/jessup/jessup15/Montevideo%20Convention.pdf>, accessed July 23, 2017.

of the following requirements: “[1] A permanent population, [2] a defined territory, [3] a government, and [4] the capacity to enter into relations with other states.”<sup>13</sup>

### *A Permanent Population*

The Kurdistan region satisfies the criteria of having a permanent population, as they have a permanent population of about five million people. This is more than enough to qualify as a state, as there are countries with populations of less than 300,000 people that are recognized by the UN.<sup>14</sup>

### *A Defined Territory*

Moreover, the Kurdistan Region meets the defined territory element as even the Iraqi Constitution recognizes the region as a territory.<sup>15</sup> The fact that the boundaries of the Kurdistan Region have not been decisively settled does not disqualify Kurdistan from being considered a state since an entity may satisfy the territorial requirement for statehood even if its boundaries are not settled or some of its territory is claimed by another state.<sup>16</sup>

### *A Government*

The Kurdistan Region satisfies the third criteria, because it has a government. Although a state is not required to have any particular form of government, there must be some authority exercising governmental functions. Under Iraq’s Constitution, the Kurdish region is recognized and the constitution gives the Kurdistan Regional Government substantial control of its region.<sup>17</sup> The KRG has the right to cancel federal laws, determine the tax rates of people living in the Kurdish Region, and control the oil and water in the region. In addition, the Kurdistan Regional Government is responsible for security in the Kurdish region and oversees the Peshmerga.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, Article 1 of the 1933 Montevideo Convention on the Rights and Duties of States.

<sup>14</sup> Andrea O Süilleabhain, *Small States at the United Nations: Diverse Perspectives, Shared Opportunities*, International Peace Institute, 2014, p. 3.

<sup>15</sup> [http://www.iraqinationality.gov.iq/attach/iraqi\\_constitution.pdf](http://www.iraqinationality.gov.iq/attach/iraqi_constitution.pdf), accessed 2017-07-24. Iraqi Constitution, Section Five, Chapter One, Article 117.

<sup>16</sup> Brian Taylor Sumner, *Territorial Disputes at the International Court of Justice*, Duke Law Journal, Vol. 53:1779, 2004, pp. 1792-1803.

<sup>17</sup> Iraqi Constitution, Section Six, Chapter Two, Article 141.

### ***The Capacity to Enter into Relations with Other States***

Finally, the Kurdistan Regional Government has the capacity to enter into relations with other states. In many respects, the Kurdistan Regional Government already is conducting its own foreign policy. The region established a Department of Foreign Relations and appointed a head of the department in 2006 to conduct relations with the international community. Today, the Department of Foreign Relations is an integral part of the government with wide-ranging responsibilities.<sup>18</sup> The Kurdistan Regional Government receives members of foreign governments and conducts both foreign policy and public relations independent of Baghdad. It has also several representative offices worldwide. Furthermore, although foreign embassies are in Baghdad, an increasing number of countries recognizes the need for a consulate in the Kurdish capital of Erbil.

It is quite clear that the Kurdistan Region fulfills the legal requirements of statehood under international law. Nevertheless, the modern debate of statehood seems to look more at the pronouncements of state recognition as mentioned in Articles 3<sup>19</sup> and 6<sup>20</sup> of the Montevideo Convention, rather than the legal definition of statehood as regulated in Article 1. Although Articles 3 and 6 of the Montevideo Convention state that the recognition of an entity of as a state is not what makes it a state, the Convention makes room for recognition as a required element for the new state to be able to enter into international relations. Statehood is therefore clearly a product of a balance between the Montevideo criteria and recognition. It is for this reason that it is important not only to highlight the requirements under the Montevideo Convention for statehood, but also to make some statements about why the international community should support the Iraqi Kurds in this matter.

First of all, the arguments against Kurdish sovereignty are outdated. The question is not whether the world should allow the Kurds in Iraq to have an independent state, rather, it is a matter of the international com-

---

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.dfr.gov.krd/p/p.aspx?p=25&l=12&s=010000&r=332>, accessed July 27, 2017.

<sup>19</sup> Article 3 of the Montevideo Convention: "The political existence of the state is independent of recognition by the other states. Even before recognition the state has the right to defend its integrity and independence, to provide for its conservation and prosperity, and consequently to organize itself as it sees fit, to legislate upon its interests, administer its services, and to define the jurisdiction and competence of its courts."

<sup>20</sup> Article 6 of the Montevideo Convention: "The recognition of a state merely signifies that the state which recognizes it accepts the personality of the other with all the rights and duties determined by international law. Recognition is unconditional and irrevocable."

munity catching up with what the Kurds have already done. As was mentioned earlier, the Kurdistan Regional Government has proven that it can stabilize and secure its own territory. Furthermore, the situation for minority groups in Iraq is getting worse due to the sectarian violence that we are witnessing today in Iraq. The Kurdistan Region has been one of the main actors in protection these groups from brutal human rights violation and is home for Muslims, Christians, Turkmen, Bahai's, Mandaeans, Yezidis, Shabaks and other minority factions. It is also important to remember that during the so-called "refugee crisis"<sup>21</sup> in Europe in 2015, when the European countries were busy arguing which country has received most refugees and why some other countries are not taking their responsibility in receiving refugees, the Kurdistan Region hosted around two million refugees and IDPs. And this was despite the budget cuts from Baghdad.<sup>22</sup>

Given how the Kurds have been treated in Iraq, it is no surprise that they are demanding the right to self-government. It is therefore time that the international community catches up and assists in building stable, democratic institutions. Supporting the independence of the Kurdish territory would allow democracy to take hold. It would also contribute to political, economic and social stability in the region. There is great potential among the Kurdish leaders to develop a Kurdish state based on the rule of law, respect for democratic rules, and the coexistence between different identities. Furthermore, we have seen the important role of the Kurdistan Region's Peshmerga forces in the fight against the Islamic State and how the Peshmerga have shown the world that they are an internationally recognized military force, which has played a leading role in protecting all religious components. In addition, the Kurdistan Region has more experience with democracy than any other part of Iraq. Thus, if the Western countries are truly committed to spreading democracy in the Middle East, then supporting Kurdish statehood is its best opportunity to see democracy thrive in this region.

<sup>21</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/echo/what-we-do/humanitarian-aid/refugees-and-internally-displaced-persons\\_en](http://ec.europa.eu/echo/what-we-do/humanitarian-aid/refugees-and-internally-displaced-persons_en), accessed July 24, 2017.

<sup>22</sup> The Iraqi Constitution, Section Four, Articles 111 and 112. See also Maria Lasa Aresti, *Oil and Gas Revenue Sharing in Iraq*, Natural Resource Governance Institute, 2016, p. 9-10. In 2007 when KRG started to independently sign contracts with international oil companies in accordance with its own oil and gas Law No. 28 of 2007, the Iraqi government demanded that the KRG manage its oil and gas exports to the federal oil export system. In exchange, the Iraqi government agreed to offer a 17 percent share of the total budget allocation to the KRG every year. (Ibid, p. 12.)

## *Chapter 6*

# Questions Arising Before and After Independence

*Michael M. Gunter*

More than a century ago the famous French sociologist Ernest Renan noted that a nation was “a daily plebiscite.”<sup>1</sup> By this, Renan meant that a nation’s very existence had to be repeatedly ratified in the minds of its people to continue to survive. In addition, his definition also referred to a nation’s changing/fluid nature as well as how nations rise and fall. (This, of course, was related to what Benedict Anderson more recently has termed “imagines,” when one seeks the origin of a nation.<sup>2</sup>) Renan’s weighty insight into the requirement for a nation to exist, applies particularly to the Iraqi Kurds. That is, do they truly think of themselves as a nation and will they continue to do so? Or do they still owe their ultimate allegiances to their party, tribal loyalties, or religion, especially when basic political and economic problems arise? This question will become particularly important for the future of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) after the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) as well as both before and after any declaration of independence by the KRG.

Several decades after Renan’s celebrated observation, the possibly even more eminent German sociologist Max Weber concluded that a state was that entity which controlled a monopoly of the legitimate use of force

---

<sup>1</sup> Ernest Renan, “Qu’est-ce qu’une nation?” [What is a Nation?], trans. Ida Mae Snyder (Calmann-Levy: Paris, 1882), p. 26-29, in John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith, *Nationalism* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), p.17. Renan’s essay on the nation is the classical statement of civic nationalism, the counterpart to the ethnic nationalism of such German writers as Johann Gottlieb Fichte and Johann Gottfried Herder. Civic nationalism refers to all the people living within a given state belonging to a particular nation whether or not they all belong to the same ethnic group, defined as supposedly descending from some common although probably fictional ancestor. On the other hand, ethnic nationalism refers to all its members belonging to the same ethnic, supposedly ancestrally-related group. Given that almost all existing states on earth today contain some ethnic minorities, most independent states in reality foster some type of civic nationalism, instead of ethnic nationalism, which is often operationalized in secessional terms for the Kurds in Iraq, Turkey, Syria, and Iran.

<sup>2</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991).

within its domain.<sup>3</sup> Thus, this chapter also will raise serious questions as to the KRG's ability to meet Weber's famous requirement of statehood *after* ISIS and both before and after any putative declaration of its independence given the KRG's current internal and external political problems and crushing economic difficulties.

With the creation of the KRG in 1992 following the U.S. victory against Saddam Hussein in the First Gulf War of 1991 and its eventual recognition as a federal entity in the new Iraqi constitution that followed Saddam Hussein's removal in 2003, both Renan's and Weber's insights applied in particular to the Iraqi Kurds, both as a nation and a putative state. Indeed, as early as 1992, this author recognized the situation when he analyzed what he then termed the arising of a *de facto* Kurdish state<sup>4</sup> and shortly afterwards even elaborated on its emerging foreign policy,<sup>5</sup> which is an attribute of independence most important to any state.

In the succeeding years, the Iraqi Kurdish nation has twice almost unanimously, but unofficially, voted for independence,<sup>6</sup> while its leadership has repeatedly declared that it would soon call an official referendum to ratify such a demarche.<sup>7</sup> Independence seemed imminent in June 2014 when ISIL suddenly seized Mosul, Iraq's second largest city, and knocked out the Baghdad authority in Iraq's north. This striking *coup de main* allowed the

---

<sup>3</sup> Max Weber, From *Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, ed. H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1948), p. 78. Max Weber first used this famous definition in a speech he made at Munich University in 1918 on *Politik als Beruf* [Politics as a Vocation.]

<sup>4</sup> Michael M. Gunter, "A De Facto Kurdish State in Northern Iraq," *Orient* 34 (December 1993), pp. 379-401; and *Third World Quarterly* 14 (no. 2; 1993), pp. 295-319. See also Michael M. Gunter, "Unrecognized De Facto States in World Politics: The Kurds," *Brown Journal of World Affairs* 20 (Spring/Summer 2014), pp. 147-164. For further excellent background, see Ofra Bengio, *The Kurds of Iraq: Building a State within a State* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2012); and Mohammed Ihsan, *Nation Building in Kurdistan: Memory, Genocide and Human Rights* (London and New York: Routledge, 2017).

<sup>5</sup> Michael M. Gunter, "The Foreign Policy of the Iraqi Kurds," *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies* 20 (Spring 1997), pp. 1-19.

<sup>6</sup> Kurdistan Referendum Movement—International Committee, "98 Percent of the People of South Kurdistan Vote for Independence," *KurdMedia*, February 8, 2005, [www.indybay.org/newsitems/2005/02/09/17205061.php](http://www.indybay.org/newsitems/2005/02/09/17205061.php), accessed September 20, 2016; and Seth J. Frantzman, "2016: The Year Kurdistan Finally Breaks from Iraq?" *The National Interest*, February 26, 2016, [nationalinterest.org/feature/2016-the-year-kurdistan-finally-breaks-iraq-15321?page=show](http://nationalinterest.org/feature/2016-the-year-kurdistan-finally-breaks-iraq-15321?page=show), accessed September 20, 2016.

<sup>7</sup> David Romano, "A Step Closer towards a Referendum in South Kurdistan," *Rudaw*, June 24, 2016, <http://rudaw.net/english/opinion/24062016>, accessed September 20, 2016; and Hannah Lynch, "Is 2016 the Kurdish Goodbye to Iraq?" *Rudaw*, January 8, 2016, <http://rudaw.net/english/kurdistan/080120161>, accessed September 20, 2016.

KRG quickly to occupy Kirkuk and its surrounding disputed territory. This, in effect, not only implemented Article 140 of the Iraqi Constitution on the future of these territories, but appropriated the very oil reserves that might make the KRG's independence financially viable. Indeed, KRG president Massoud Barzani quickly stated that the time to declare independence had arrived and would soon be ratified by a popular referendum.<sup>8</sup>

However, the Monday morning of reality swiftly dawned to haunt the seemingly inevitable march to independence when ISIS suddenly attacked the KRG and drove within a mere 20 miles of Erbil, its capital. Turkey, the KRG's supposed ally, offered no military succor. It was only the United States, which hastily deployed enough air support to buttress the KRG's response to save itself. However, by its attack and genocidal assault on the Yezidi-Kurds, ISIS had demonstrated how fragile the reputed basis of KRG independence actually was.<sup>9</sup>

In the succeeding months, two additional issues preventing independent KRG statehood even in a post-ISIS world would arise: the economic crisis that rapidly bankrupted the financial basis of successful KRG independence, and the equally challenging political crisis of KRG disunity. Thus, on two separate occasions—first in 2013 and then again in 2015—President Massoud Barzani's terms were challenged by the Gorran Party.

A political crisis of the first order had arisen that made any talk of KRG independence challenging, politically as much as it already was economically. Soon, the other historic Iraqi Kurdish party, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK)—already rent by Gorran splitting away from it in 2009—itsself divided between two factions led by Hero Talabani, the wife of its incapacitated longtime leader Jalal Talabani, and Mala Baktiyar, the leader of the party's politburo on the one hand, and Barham Salih and Kosrat Rasul, on the other. On top of all this, the virtually required U.S. support for independence remained lacking. As did that of all the remaining regional actors, including Iran in particular, but in an effect Turkey as well.

---

<sup>8</sup> "Iraq Kurdistan Independence Referendum Planned," BBC News, July 1, 2014, [www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-28103124](http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-28103124), accessed September 20, 2016.

<sup>9</sup> For background, see Michael M. Gunter, *The Kurds: A Modern History*, 2nd ed. (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2017), pp. 175-206.

## Problems Associated with KRG Independence

Too often, Kurds and others discuss independence as if it were the end of a process, rather than the beginning of one. Thus, it also becomes necessary to suggest the likely problems associated with KRG independence.<sup>10</sup> In the first place, it should be clear that we are talking about sequenced or cascading independence for the KRG only, not some type of pan-Kurdish state that would also include the Kurdish portions of Turkey, Syria, and Iran. Although practically every Kurd dreams of a pan-Kurdish state, this is highly unlikely given the vastly different stages of Kurdish nationalist development in each state the Kurds inhabit.

Thus, at present, the Kurds in Iraq are the most likely to soon become independent, followed by those in Syria. Given the continuing strength of Turkey and Iran as viable states, the Kurds in those two countries are much less likely to follow suit, although those in Turkey are more likely to achieve some type of ethnic rights. Thus, the question arises, what would be the relationships between an independent KRG and the other constituent parts of Kurdistan still part of Syria, Turkey, and Iran? Would the KRG make irredentist claims on these other Kurdish areas? Would the KRG offer automatic citizenship for all Kurds like Israel does for all Jews? Would an independent KRG allow dual citizenship for Kurds living in other states?

What about other likely legal problems involving separate visa regimes and financial laws? How would an independent KRG organize its economy? Abdullah Ocalan's PKK still seems a staunch advocate of socialism (Marxism), while the KRG pursues a capitalist route. Would the gas-rich KRG share its oil resources with the gas-poor Kurds living in Turkey? In other words, would the KRG's oil be a pan-Kurdish resource, or would it be a localized one? Similar problems exist among the Arab states, and indeed were argued by Saddam Hussein as a justification for his invading Kuwait in 1990.

In addition, what kind of economic infrastructure would an independent KRG have? At the present time, real banks are non-existent, forcing many people to carry their life savings around in their pockets or to keep them stashed at home. ATMs remain few. The KRG is largely a cash economy lacking a long-term sophisticated monetary policy, fiscal discipline, and

---

<sup>10</sup> The following discussion owes much to Michael Rubin, *Kurdistan Arising? Considerations for Kurds, their Neighbors, and the Region* (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute, 2016).

sufficient reserves. Any attempt at creating a KRG currency would probably collapse. A possible compromise might be to create a symbolic currency pegged to the U.S. dollar or the euro. A precedent for this already exists in Liberia, Panama, and East Timor, which use the U.S. dollar. Furthermore, what about the large-scale crony capitalism and corruption prevalent today in the KRG? And in Turkey, what would be done with the Village Guards who still provide an income for some 50,000 Kurds and their families?

What about water resources? An independent Kurdistan in Turkey would inherit a large proportion of that state's fresh water supply and its ability to generate hydroelectric power, which, of course, is an important reason why Turkey would continue to oppose Kurdish independence. The KRG and Rojava, on the other hand, obtain their fresh water supplies from upstream Turkey and are thus in a potentially much less advantageous position than their Kurdish brethren in Turkey. A lesser, but still important symbolic problem involves choosing a flag and national anthem. Currently, many Kurds do share "Ey Raqip" (Hey Enemy) as a common anthem.

Early in 2016, the World Bank Group released a 219-page economic report on the KRG proposing reform options for fiscal adjustment and the diversification of the economy. The report addressed the high dependency on the oil sector, excessive role of the public sector in the economy, dependency on imports, weaknesses in the financial system and dependency on a cash economy. Economic diversification could plausibly be affected by taking much better advantage of land and water resources, greatly expanding the private sector through available human resources and entrepreneurial spirit, exploiting the advantageous geographic location on east-west trade routes between highly productive industrialized economies, and taking advantage of foreign expertise. A World Bank study carried out in conjunction with the KRG ministry of planning estimated stabilization needs in 2015 at 1.4 billion dollars.<sup>11</sup>

In another important report, John Roberts, a senior non-resident fellow at the Atlantic Council's Dinu Patriciu Eurasia Center and Global Energy Center, agreed with this chapter when he identified a series of almost unprecedented challenges facing the KRG: "Its economy, its relations with Baghdad, and its own internal politics are all in turmoil."<sup>12</sup> His report

---

<sup>11</sup> World Bank Group, *Kurdistan Region of Iraq: Reforming the Economy for Shared Prosperity and Protecting the Vulnerable* (Washington, D.C.: World Bank Group, 2016).

<sup>12</sup> John Roberts, *Iraqi Kurdistan Oil and Gas Outlook* (Washington, D.C.: Atlantic Council, September 2016), p. 1. The following discussion is taken from this source.

went on to discuss the many major problems regarding the physical capacity to deliver KRG oil and gas to the market as well as issues concerning the corruption involved in the process. Security risks along the major export route in Turkey threatened the export of crude oil through the Turkish port of Ceyhan. In addition, the long-running dispute with Baghdad over the crude oil produced at Kirkuk, and the manner in which oil revenues accrued to Baghdad and Erbil further complicated the matter. Roberts' report also pointed out the severe polarization of government in Erbil and Baghdad that led to constant feuding and inability to reach necessary solutions. Hence the question of how an independent KRG might survive.

In yet another recent study, Nyaz Najmaldin Noori found that economic reform in the KRG largely relies on the ruling authority's willingness to share power with the people and each other. Indeed, since the birth of the Iraqi state and subsequently the KRG, the interaction of traditions such as corruption, rent seeking, and centralization, have caused a vicious circle hindering economic reforms necessary to sustain development. "Thus, the economic problem has remained as it is: relying on one source of national income, whether externally or internally, to provide civil servant salaries and public services as well as to support domestic investment, in addition to the expenditure of a huge public sector."<sup>13</sup>

In analyzing the KRG's economic "transition from boom to bust in detail," Mark DeWeaver states that "last year's 50 percent drop in oil prices, the occupation of neighboring provinces by Islamic State (IS) militants, and the suspension of fiscal transfers from Baghdad to the KRG have resulted in a government-budget crisis of epic proportions."<sup>14</sup> He notes how "state-sector salaries have gone unpaid for months at a time,

<sup>13</sup> Nyaz Najmaldin Noori, "The Failure of Economic Reform in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (1921-2015): The Vicious Circle of Uncivic Traditions, Resource Curse, and Centralization," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, published online September 3, 2016, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13530194.2016.1225258>, accessed September 25, 2016. This argument is also found in Michael M. Gunter, "Economic Opportunities in Iraqi Kurdistan," *Middle East Policy* 18 (Summer 2011), pp. 102-109; and Michael M. Gunter, "Iraqi Kurdistan's Two Contrasting Economic Images," *International Journal of Contemporary Iraqi Studies*, 6:1 (2012), pp. 80-95.

<sup>14</sup> Mark DeWeaver, "Iraqi Kurdistan Economic Report 2016: Kurdistan's Great Recession," January 8, 2016, <http://www.macropolic.net/iraqi-kurdistan-economic-report-2016-kurdistan-s-great-recession.htm>, accessed September 24, 2016. For further background, see Yaniv Voller, "Kurdish Oil Politics in Iraq: Contested Sovereignty and Unilateralism," *Middle East Policy*, 20 (Spring 2013), pp. 68-82; and Denise Natali, *The Kurdish Quasi-State: Development and Dependency in Post-Gulf Iraq* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2010).

KRG-controlled banks have no cash to fund depositors' withdrawals, arrears to construction contractors are piling up, and billions of dollars in payments due to foreign oil companies have not been made." He further adds that "the impact on the private sector has been little short of catastrophic," noting that "property prices have crashed, occupancy rates at four and five star hotels have plummeted, and work on many projects has come to a virtual standstill."<sup>15</sup> DeWeaver also agrees that "in many ways the KRI [Kurdistan Region of Iraq] fits the definition of a rentier economy quite closely." However, "the current situation in Kurdistan is difficult to quantify because almost none of the statistics commonly published for most other economies are available." For example, "no monthly or quarterly time series data covering GDP, industrial production, capacity utilization, fixed asset investment, or employment" are available. Nevertheless, "if there were a business sentiment index for the KRI, our sources suggest that it would be at an all-time low." Thus, "this is truly a great recession by any definition of the term." DeWeaver adds that unfortunately the KRG also lacks three important corrective economic policy tools that most sovereign states possess: It "does not issue its own currency, it cannot increase the local money supply, [and] given the limited scope of its tax base, it cannot hope to solve its budget problems by raising taxes."<sup>16</sup>

However, despite the KRG's dire economic situation, DeWeaver points out that "outside of Iraq, Kurdistan's great recession has attracted surprisingly little attention [because] . . . the war against the Islamic State continues to monopolize the headlines." He concludes that "this one-sided emphasis on the security situation is unfortunate because it obscures some of the most serious problems the region is facing [and leads to] . . . the impression that everything in Kurdistan will be fine once enough precision guided munitions have found their targets in the IS-controlled areas south and west of the border."<sup>17</sup> In other words, the KRG will remain in an appalling economic and therefore political and security crisis after ISIL, to the detriment of being in any position successfully to become an independent state. Kurdish independence would not automatically be the solution to Kurdish problems, but more likely the beginning of a host of new ones. Thus, it behooves all who hold a stake in the Kurdish future and its increasing importance for developments in the Middle East to be aware of these problems and consider them sooner rather than later.

---

<sup>15</sup> Mark DeWeaver, "Iraqi Kurdistan Economic Report 2016: Kurdistan's Great Recession."

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

## Conclusion

This chapter has considered the future after ISIS of the Kurdish *nation* and the KRG *state* in light of what Ernest Renan and Max Weber, two of the most illustrious sociologists who ever lived, most heuristically and famously posed as significant definitional questions regarding their nature. Although often used synonymously and therefore confusingly, as employed by Renan and Weber, the two concepts: nation and state, are not the same thing. Therefore, a nation is a cultural/sociological term referring to a fairly large group of people who share certain common traditions and a common culture on the basis of which they feel they constitute an entity. However, since each nation was created by different historical factors, no one factor or group of them defines all nations. Indeed, one wit has concluded that a nation is a group of people united by common error as to its origins and an irrational aversion to its neighbors, which, of course, leads into Benedict Anderson's famous observation referred to also at this chapter's beginning, that a nation's origins are largely imagined.

A state is a sovereign, legal entity. If a nation has its own independent state, it is a nation-state. In reality, very few states meet the national homogeneity required to constitute a true nation-state because almost all of the more than 190 states on earth today contain minorities. The KRG is no exception, as its population is comprised of Turkmen, Assyrians, Arabs, and Armenians, among others. Thus, some refer to the population of the KRG as "Kurdistanis," a term which covers everyone, whether or not they are an ethnic Kurd.

Given these prodigious political and economic problems, applying Weber's famous definition of a state as a territorial entity that possesses a monopoly on the legitimate use of force is problematic. Divisions among KRI political parties is so great that it is difficult to argue that the KRG has the monopoly on the legitimate use of force. Under such circumstances, it is impossible to conclude that the KRG would constitute a state in the Weberian sense. Indeed, Weber's famous definition would suggest that the current situation in the KRI is not a propitious time to declare KRG independence. In other words, at present, an independent KRG state would lack the required monopoly on the legitimate use of force to prevail.

Despite a division into four separate states since the end of World War I, the Kurds have managed to maintain their sense of belonging to one nation by expressing what Renan referred to as "a daily plebiscite," that

is, the continuing will to be a nation. Although ethnic Iraqi Kurds constitute no more than 20 percent of the overall Kurdish nation, they have manifested the will to constitute a separate Iraqi Kurdish nation, minorities, refugees, and internally displaced persons (IDPs) notwithstanding. Indeed, Renan's definition of a nation continues to help us understand how the Iraqi Kurds have managed to persevere despite so many challenges and problems. However, the current problems of political unity and economic viability may challenge the future of Renan's insight into what an Iraqi Kurdish nation is by lessening or even destroying the will to remain a nation.



*Part II*

**Humanitarian Crises**



## Chapter 7

# Forced Displacement and Concentration Camps As a Civilizing Offensive<sup>1</sup>

## A Case Study on the Mass Deportation of the Kurdish People Between 1976 and 1986

*Ibrahim Sadiq Malazada*

The Ba'ath Party destroyed thousands of Kurdish rural areas and deported its residents to complexes in order to restrict Kurdish autonomy. The alleged plan of the Ba'ath Party was to "develop the northern region," but was in fact a road map in the frame of a process of genocide. Here, the Ba'ath Party pursued a political and ideological strategy to succeed in its plan in order to terminate any kind of political, economic, and cultural freedom.

The deportation and gathering of people in camps all around the Kurdistan Region of Iraq<sup>2</sup> (KRI) was implemented under various pretexts following the collapse of the armed Kurdish political movement in 1975. This process of forced displacement of wide rural areas did not receive any attention from the international community or international human rights organizations. It had different dimensions in the policy of the Iraqi government under the leadership of the Arab Ba'ath Socialist Party (ABSP). One can find these dimensions in Ba'ath Party literature, including the Ba'ath Party's constitution, which was issued in 1947.

The Ba'ath Party evacuated the Kurdish rural areas under the allegation of modernization of the Kurdish people and the facilitation of their lives in modern complexes. This begs the question, to what extent is this argument valid? If it is valid, then why were the villages destroyed, the targeted areas completely scorched, and the people humiliated and violently forced to leave their homes? What was the difference between the modern com-

---

<sup>1</sup> It is over 30 years since the theoretical concept of the civilising offensive (*het beschavings of-fensief*) emerged from Amsterdam and the work of Norbert Elias.

<sup>2</sup> After 2003, the Iraqi Kurdistan region was ascertained in the Iraqi constitution, but it is confined to around half of the actual size of Iraqi Kurdistan. Therefore, I am not using the term the "Kurdistan region," as the deportation process included all Kurdish areas in Iraqi Kurdistan and not merely the term coined in the Iraqi constitution.

plexes and the villages? The argument here is that the procedure of the evacuation of rural areas was a stage in a larger genocidal process, including the extermination of an entire way of life and habitat. Thus, according to the displaced people, the claim that this was for the development and modernization of Kurdish rural areas, does not exceed the ideological propaganda. It is apparent in the difficult reality of life experienced by the deportees, as well as the security reality that was imposed on the residents of these complexes, and the restriction on their freedom. Additionally, these camps have been easily utilized as part of the “extermination mobile killing operations in extermination camps.”<sup>3</sup>

This study will attempt to understand only one stage of genocide in a sociological framework in order to understand the motivation and explanation of the Ba’ath Party for their actions. Thus, a figurative approach will be used in an attempt to handle the hidden pages of this process and give it enough consideration. As explained by Alan Whitehorn: “genocide is not an accident. Rather, it is premeditated and follows recognizable patterns.”<sup>4</sup> Hence, it is important to conceptualize the process of the evacuation of the rural areas from any kind of population and its appropriateness for human life.

Thus, sociology can form a methodology for linking the past and present, and it can recognize all elements in this process. In other words, this framework is used to understand Iraqi state policy against non-Arabs, as well as the circumstances before, during, and after the process of forced displacement. Aside from official documents of the Iraqi state that constitute evidence for the forced deportation, this author has performed interviews with many of the displaced people who experienced this firsthand. Around 40 years have passed, and many of these villages have yet to be rebuilt, and the economic and ecological impact is visible to all observers.

## Civilizing Offense

This research is an attempt to use the theoretical framework of civilizing offensive to examine the deportation process of the Kurds. This approach has been taken for specific reasons: If we accept the argument that the Kurds were removed from their homes in order to develop the northern

<sup>3</sup> Federico Finchelstein. “The Holocaust Canon: Rereading Raul Hilberg.” *New German Critique* 96 (2005): 3-48.

<sup>4</sup> Alan Whitehorn. The steps and stages of genocide: Genocide is not an accident. Rather, it is premeditated and follows recognizable, 26(3), 16. doi:10.1093/hgs/5.3.337, 2010.

region under the name of “campaign of the development of the northern region” and building “modern villages,” this means that the Ba’athists would have attempted to “civilize” or “Arabize” them in these modern camps, as Ali Hassan al-Majid argued:

I am keeping them close to me, to let them hear my voice to implant in their minds what I want of thinking, culture and consciousness.<sup>5</sup>

However, the Ba’athists did not conceal their “national ideal” of pan-Arab-centrism in the form of “one Arab Nation, with an eternal message.” These Ba’athist national ideals are close to those of the Nazi national ideal and “were also more exclusive than other national ideals in emphasizing the primacy of one race and one nation.”<sup>6</sup> Civilizing offensive is a theoretical framework that has been derived from Norbert Elias’s work. It has been applied “to various historical civilizing projects aimed at bringing about cultural shifts and inculcating lasting habits in working-class populations deemed to be “immoral” or “uncivilized.”<sup>7</sup> Additionally, Ryan Powell describes it, as he concludes: “The term ‘civilizing offensive’ is used by Dutch sociologists and historians to refer to a wide range of phenomena, from nineteenth-century bourgeois efforts to elevate the lower classes out of their poverty and ignorance and convince them of the importance of domesticity and a life of virtue, to the oppression of popular culture in early modern times and, in general, “the attack on behavior presumed to be immoral or uncivilized.”<sup>8</sup>

Such an offensive can take many forms and lead to a variety of consequences, including what has been termed “stolen generation.” Amanda Rohloff has used this description for the Australian stolen generation, as she states, “Some aboriginal children ‘in Australia’ were forcibly removed from their families in order to ‘civilize’ them to become more like the European colonists.”<sup>9</sup> The Australian authority’s “stolen generation,” is similar to the Iraqi authority’s deportation of tens of thousands of villagers

---

<sup>5</sup> Majid, M. 2009 The cruelty of Saddam Hussein blog “the heroic of Anfal operations” the fifth part, al-quswat lada Saddam Hussein [http://saddamscruelty.blogspot.co.uk/2009/04/blog-post\\_1809.html](http://saddamscruelty.blogspot.co.uk/2009/04/blog-post_1809.html)

<sup>6</sup> Jonathan Fletcher. *Violence and civilization: An introduction to the work of Norbert Elias*. John Wiley & Sons, 2013.

<sup>7</sup> Ryan Powell. “The Theoretical Concept of the ‘Civilising Offensive’(Beschavings offensief): Notes on Its Origins and Uses.” *Human Figurations* 2, no. 2, 2013

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Amanda Rohloff. “Shifting the focus? Moral panics as civilizing and decivilizing processes.” Routledge, 2011.

to the new forced camps (called Modern camps), under the allegation of civilization; although in reality these were concentration camps. In this regard, van Krieken elaborates on this point by describing a civilizing offense as any type of encroachment on the lives of others and their way of existence. In addition, Robert van Krieken has argued, "Central here is the question of colonialism and imperialism, the ways in which nation states have established a brutal and violent relationship between their own 'civilization' and the supposedly 'barbaric' cultures of subjected peoples."<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, "it is important to supplement, systematically, the concept of civilizing processes with that of civilizing offensives, to take account of the active, conscious and deliberate civilizing projects of both various powerful groups within societies and whole societies in relation to other regions of the world."<sup>11</sup> Hence, during a civilizing offensive, the relationship becomes counterproductive and centrifugal between the civilizing process and the de-civilizing process. In the same field, but from another aspect, the resort to aggression and the discharge of the Kurdish inhabited region, according to Fletcher, can be attributed to a decline in power and identity issues, as he argues, "The deeply conditioned responses of aggressiveness and destructiveness in crisis situations prevalent in Nazi Germany were the result of a long intergenerational tradition bound up with successive defeats, a decline in power, uncertain national identity and an orientation towards the past."<sup>12</sup>

Additionally, the Arab defeat at the Six-Day War in 1967, according to al-Hamdani, insulted Arab dignity.<sup>13</sup> In the same notion, it was considered by Ba'athists to be one of the reasons for the Ba'ath Party's coup. In order to return the dignity of the Arabs (the Ba'ath manifesto of the July, 17 and 30, 1968). On the other hand, after the defeat of the Kurdish Gulan's armed movement for Kurdish rights in 1974,<sup>14</sup> the BP's Arabization process continued and systematically started to discharge the Kurdish areas. So, why did the BP engage in violence as a passage to reach its ideological goals? If Arab dignity had been assaulted in 1967, and the BP attempted to return Arab dignity through the coup of 1968, what happened in 1974

<sup>10</sup> Robert van Krieken. *Norbert Elias (Key Sociologists)*. Routledge, London, New York, 1998.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Jonathan Fletcher. *Violence and civilization: An introduction to the work of Norbert Elias*. John Wiley & Sons, 2013.

<sup>13</sup> H Al-Hamdani. "Years of hell: Forty years of BP rule in Iraq, 1963-2003, the years of heal - 40 years of the Baath's authority in Iraq 1963-2003." *Vaxjo: Vesbun Media Sweden*, 2007.

<sup>14</sup> Michael M Gunter. *The A to Z of the Kurds*. Vol. 35. Scarecrow Press, 2009.

that led to a large portion of the Kurdish inhabited areas to be affected? Here, Fletcher is drawing on the situation in Germany that is very close to that of Iraq, “the deeply conditioned responses of aggressiveness and destructiveness in crisis situations prevalent in Nazi Germany was the result of a long inter-generational tradition bound up with successive defeats, a decline in power, uncertain national identity, and an orientation towards the past.”<sup>15</sup>

What is notable here is that the situation in Iraq has many similarities with Germany. The Arabs were defeated in the war with Israel in 1967, and the Iraqi Army was executing a dirty war against the Kurds between 1974 and 1975. Moreover, Iraq gained victory over the Kurdish armed movement in 1975 and re-occupied all the liberated areas. The Ba’ath Party was attempting to build its authoritarian system and to exclude and marginalize the non-Arabs through a specific policy, influenced by other authoritarian and tyrannical systems like Germany. Under these circumstances, the most critical point is the essence of the interrelationships that connected the Kurds to the majority of the Iraqi population or Iraqi institutions. Was this relationship between the Kurds and the Arab majority based on citizenship, or was it based on a specific relationship involving the so-called occupied people and the occupier? On the other hand, the interrelationship between successive Iraqi authorities, particularly the Arab Ba’ath Socialist Party, and the Kurds, needs to be considered.

It is important to present the background to the situation before delving into details of the research, and so the following is a short introduction to the emergence of Iraq as a state, and as an official member of the League of Nations. This importance of the Iraqi position goes back to the importance of the essence of the relationship between the Kurds and the state of Iraq, because the Kurds were forcibly colonized and annexed to Iraq in 1926. The story of annexation was dependent on two stages:

The first stage was the occupation of the region after the collapse of the Ottoman sultanate, as has been argued by Zeynep Arıkanlı, “Post-World War I (WWI) witnessed the breakup of Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires and saw an ensuing transition from massive multinational political entities to nation-states.”<sup>16</sup> Accordingly, during the treaty

---

<sup>15</sup> Jonathan Fletcher. *Violence and civilization: An introduction to the work of Norbert Elias*. John Wiley & Sons, 2013.

<sup>16</sup> Zeynep Arıkanlı. “British Legacy and Evolution of Kurdish Nationalism in Iraq (1918-1926): What Significance the Mosul Question.” *Alternatives: Turkish Journal of International Relations* 9, no. 4, 2010.

of Sevres in 1920, it was confirmed that the Kurds had the right to an independent existence similar to the rest of the population in the region. In this regard, Carole A. O’Leary said, “following World War I and the breakup of the Ottoman Empire, the Kurds were promised their own country under the terms of the 1920 Treaty of Sevres only to find the offer rescinded under the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne.”<sup>17</sup> The second stage represented the division of the region within a new structure under the surveillance of colonialism. This division, due to the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923, was followed by the annexation of Mosul province<sup>18</sup> to two other Ottoman provinces—Baghdad and Basra, and nothing was put in place to bring these two provinces closer together. In this regard, Hanna Batatu argued, “Iraq was composed of plural, relatively isolated, and often virtually autonomous city-states and tribal confederations, urban ‘class’ ties tended to be in essence local ties rather than ties on the scale of the whole country.”<sup>19</sup> This argument, from one of the most important Arab historians and insiders concerning the current history of Iraq, is indicative of several decisive factors regarding social structures and the demographic designation of Iraqi communities within important key areas of isolated, autonomous city-states, and tribal confederations.

Dependent on this divisional designation of the region by Western colonialists, the fate of the Kurds was left to the regional colonials. Additionally, it is impossible to understand BP’s conduct in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region without examining the inter-relationship between colonial forces and the occupied population. This issue, present throughout decades of the Kurdish struggle for freedom, has not been conceptualized and did not result in a strategy being formed by the Kurdish political movement. Consequently, because the Iraqi authorities were not considered to be colonial rulers who dealt with the Kurdish people as occupiers, the issues remained incomplete.

The critical relationship between the established “colonial” power and the indigenous people considered outsiders, can be described as a civilizing relationship. We can consider this a leading frame of thought for the state

---

<sup>17</sup> Carole A O’Leary. “The Kurds of Iraq: Recent history, future prospects.” *Middle East Review of International Affairs* 6, no. 4 (2002): 17-29.

<sup>18</sup> In the administration system of the Ottomans, Mosul, Baghdad and Basra, were a Vilayat, forming one of the autonomous regions which followed the Ottoman sultanate’s authority. A Vilayat includes more than a city and is in contrast to a province.

<sup>19</sup> Hanna Baṭāṭū. *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq: A Study of Iraq’s Old Landed and Commercial Classes and of Its Communists, Ba’thists, and Free Officers*. Princeton University Press, 1978.

of Iraq and its successive administrations, which have attempted to assimilate all components into the hegemonic culture of Sunni-pan-Arabism in order to build a nation state. Thus, the Iraqi BP authority as an inheritor of previous Iraqi authorities, and as a type of Arab nationalist party, in order to complete what its predecessors failed (building a nation state), pursued a specific aggressive policy towards the Kurds. Additionally, as Mufti and Bouckaert conclude, "Since the 1930s, but particularly from the 1970s onwards, successive Iraqi administrations have forcibly displaced hundreds of thousands of ethnic Kurds, Turkomans (a Turkish-speaking Iraqi minority), and Assyrians from northern Iraq, and repopulated the area with Arabs moved from central and southern Iraq."<sup>20</sup>

Accordingly, and in agreement with the interviewees, the behavior of the Iraqi army, its militias and the Iraqi authorities, did not differ from an occupying army, and the procedures carried out by the administrative authorities in the region were no different than procedures followed by the colonial authorities in the occupied territories. However, the Kurdish dilemma is its inability to conceptualize its situation and designate its occupier. This type of situation has been explained by Frederick Cooper in his book "Colonialism in Question. Theory, Knowledge, History," as he cites Ashis Nandy's argument that "history is inseparable from its imperialist origins, that it necessarily imposes the imperialist's understanding of people's past over their own."<sup>21</sup> Rewriting history, which Saddam Hussein<sup>22</sup> attempted to do, could be the extension of this attitude.

## **The Process of Evacuation**

Alongside different kinds of genocide procedures, three kinds of deportation were in process: firstly, against the Faili Kurds to secure Baghdad and the surrounding area. Saddam Hussein openly discussed this process widely in the political report of the eighth region Conference for Ba'ath Arab Socialist Party in 1974, under the allegation of the threat from foreigners. The most reiterated justification in this report is the "appropriate treatment of the dangerous foreigners."<sup>23</sup> The second process was the

---

<sup>20</sup> Bouckaert, Peter, and Hania Mufti. "Claims in Conflict-Reversing Ethnic Cleansing in Northern Iraq." Human Rights Watch, 2004

<sup>21</sup> Frederick Cooper. "Colonialism in Question. Theory, Knowledge, History." 2005

<sup>22</sup> He was Iraqi president from July 16, 1979 until April 9, 2003; he was sentenced to death, and hanged on the first day of Eid ul-Adha on December 30, 2006.

<sup>23</sup> BASP "Political report of the eighth region Conference for Ba'ath Arab Socialist Party." *Al-thawra press*, Baghdad, 1974.

deportation of the Kurdish residents of mixed areas in Kirkuk, Khanaqin, and Shingal, and their replacement with emigrant Arabs in order to narrow down the Kurdish territory. In this regard, the Iraqi Arab author, Hamin al-Hamdani, said,

Ba'athists resorted to Arabizing the province of Kirkuk by bringing Arab tribes in order to change the nature of the demography. They also encouraged Arab citizens from various parts of Iraq to live in Kirkuk, and pledged to give each Arab family that agreed to live in Kirkuk a piece of land for free with a grant of ten thousand dinars to build a house. They did the same thing in Khanaqin, Sinjar, Sheikhan and where they construct resident camps under Arabic names to accommodate the Arab tribes" (Al-Hamdani, 2007:91). In a similar direction, al-Hamdani, argues, "Ba'athists prevented the Kurdish citizens from building new homes and even the restoration of the old buildings. They came to falsify the census records of 1957, which was agreed to be adopted as the basis for the census."<sup>24</sup>

The third, and largest campaign, was the evacuation of the areas adjacent to the borders to a distance of 15 to 50 KM, which was concluded in the third act of the Algeria Agreement, "accordingly, the two parties shall restore security and mutual confidence along their joint borders."<sup>25</sup> In this regard, the UN report concludes, "In the mid- and late 1970s, the regime again moved against the Kurds, forcibly evacuating at least a quarter of a million people from Iraq's borders with Iran and Turkey, destroying their villages to create a cordon sanitaire along these sensitive frontiers."<sup>26</sup>

After consideration, the Iraqi authority claimed that in order to develop the northern region, they would build modern camps for local villagers. This allegation started under the name "The campaign of the development of the northern region" and has also been called "the modern villages."<sup>27</sup> The UN report also confirmed, "In their propaganda, the Iraqis commonly refer to them as "modern villages;" in this report, they are generally

<sup>24</sup> H Al-Hamdani. "Years of hell: Forty years of BP rule in Iraq, 1963-2003, the years of heal - 40 years of the Baath's authority in Iraq 1963-2003." *Vaxjo: Veshun Media Sweden*, 2007

<sup>25</sup> IMCM *Why Algiers convention were canceled between Iran and Iraq*, Boçî Rêkewtinnameî Cezair Le Nêwan Êraq u Êran Helwe\_ayewe. Iraqi Ministry of culture and media edn. Baghdad: Al-Hurriya House Publishing, 1981

<sup>26</sup> Human Rights Watch/Middle East *Iraq's crime of genocide: the Against the Kurds*. Human Rights Watch, 1995

<sup>27</sup> O Muhammad. *The Anfal military campaigns in its eight stages*, Pelamare Serbaziyekany Anfal le Heshit Qonaxda. Sulemani: General Directorate of Libraries, 2013

described as “complexes.”<sup>28</sup> The Iraqi claim was that these areas, despite being far away from the cities, deserve prosperity like the rest of Iraq, such as better schools, hospitals, and accommodation. “In Iraq, there was no overall policy of forced assimilation to the Arab majority, but there was rather the deliberate annihilation of traditional Kurdish rural life and its economic basis by the wholesale destruction of Kurdish villages and the deportation of their inhabitants (i.e., those that were not killed) to strategic villages, ‘new towns,’ or concentration camps.”<sup>29</sup>

Here, an important gesture in Van Bruinessen’s research is that the deportation did not include Arabs living in villages, in houses made from reeds and in areas that were barren and dry. They had no clean water supply and no modern accommodations, unlike the Kurdish villages that were mostly green, with flowing water from the mountains, agricultural zones and orchards. The Kurdish villages had strong houses made from stone and mud, and many of these houses contained aesthetic designs and various inscriptions. In this regard, Michael Field described the un-cultivation of most of the land in central and southern Iraq, as follows: “Traveling through central and southern Iraq one is struck by how uncultivated most of the land appears.”<sup>30</sup> Despite this, there is no indication that any Iraqi Arab villages were exposed to such deportation until the invasion of U.S. troops in Iraq in 2003. Thus, the UN report confirms, “Most of the displaced Kurds were relocated into *mujamma’at*,<sup>31</sup> crude new settlements located on the main highways in army-controlled areas of Iraqi Kurdistan.”<sup>32</sup> Thus, a military process was implemented to dominate the Kurdish population living in rural areas. This means that the Iraqi authority’s intention was different than what they had announced, which was to develop the northern region.

---

<sup>28</sup> Human Rights Watch/Middle East *Iraq’s crime of genocide: Against the Kurds*. Human Rights Watch, 1995

<sup>29</sup> Martin Van Bruinessen. “Genocide of the Kurds.” *The Widening Circle of Genocide. Genocide: a Critical Bibliographic Review* 3 (1994): 165-191, 1994

<sup>30</sup> Michael Field. *Inside the Arab world*. Harvard University Press, 1994.

<sup>31</sup> *Mujamma’at* is an Arabic word for a complex, referring to bringing people in a place together.

<sup>32</sup> Human Rights Watch/Middle East *Iraq’s crime of genocide: Against the Kurds*. Human Rights Watch, 1995

## The Practical Side

This research deals with different situations in two dissimilar places in society during two distinctive periods of time. Therefore, to address this, 10 interviews have been conducted with people who have spent a significant part of their lives in their birthplace, before being subjected to forced deportation from their hometowns to the so-called “modern complexes.” The important factors in these interviews are the differences and advantages between these two dissimilar places, including the psychological position of those who were exposed to the deportation. These people spent the first stage of their lives in their villages, and later moved to the complexes.

The deportations date back to the years 1977 and 1978, after the collapse of Gulan’s Kurdish military movement and the Algerian agreement between Iraq and Iran in 1974. In order to compare the villages and complexes’ accommodation, an attempt was made to discover the differences between Kurdish villages and complexes. The majority of the Kurdish villages had police stations, schools, health centers, mosques and religious schools, and village associations including projects for water supply. Many of these villages and surrounding areas were linked to the cities via motorways. According to the interviewees, the only shortage was electricity, and some of the villages were not linked by motorways.

Interestingly, according to the interviewees, the only difference between their villages and the government complexes were not the presence of electricity or water projects, but rather the existence of Ba’ath bureaus and security forces. They were afraid of the Ba’ath’s bureaus and security forces inside and around the complexes. These complexes were surrounded by public security, intelligence agencies, special mercenary teams, mercenary forces, and the Iraqi army. In contrast, these people felt completely secure in their own villages. In addition, according to the interviewees, these complexes lacked any type of “civil” attractions such as movie theatres or community halls.

In our questionnaire, the interviewees were given a choice of one or more of the following options:

1. “I have been uprooted and kidnapped”
2. “I felt alienated and very worried”
3. “I felt a lack of respect and a sense of loneliness”

4. "I felt very happy that I was changing my place for the first time in my life."
5. "It was an ordinary event; I do not care if I live here or there. The importance is to live anywhere"
6. "I feel that life's troubles began here"
7. "I felt a severe horror and I am still under the influence of that horror"
8. "Other..."

Here, the interviewees opted for all of the answers, except the fourth and fifth options, and most of them added one or more painful answers. The key words we encountered were: uprooted, kidnapped, alienated, worried, lack of respect, loneliness, troubles and horror, all indicating a real and serious psychological illness. This is a list of the added answers (as described by point eight in the list above):

- "I still re-live those days and I cannot forget those scenes"
- "Although some people have become vigilant, on the other side we faced huge challenges"
- "I felt disappointed because I knew we could not defend ourselves"
- "I felt it was the beginning of our end"
- "I felt shame because I surrendered"
- "On that day I cried a lot, I was depressed for more than a year, but later I was able to save myself from collapse"
- "My husband ended up having a stroke and I suffer from depression"
- "I cannot forget the days of deportation. The images are always in front of my eyes"
- "I cried a lot"
- "They raped us and exterminated us. We will never be the same again"

The interviewees said that the majority of them remained unemployed for long periods of time, exceeding a year's time. According to the interviewees, many of those deported people were depressed or died from the consequences of depression. However, one of the interviewees admitted that he joined the Peshmerga<sup>33</sup> forces after a few weeks in the complexes.

---

<sup>33</sup> Peshmerga were Kurdish freedom fighters against successive Iraqi governments in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

After the uprising of the Kurdish people in 1991 and the liberation of Kurdish areas from state control, many of the deported people returned to their villages. Thus, we asked the interviewees whether they had returned or not. They were given five options in order to find out the causes of returning to the rural areas.

The options were:

1. "Because in the village I felt more calm and free"
2. "In order to manage my possessions and agricultural products"
3. "Because of the harshness of life in these complexes and the new cities"
4. "Because the village is my homeland, all of my memories are there"
5. "Because I could keep worshipping in the village"

The majority, 7 out of the 10 interviewees showed that they returned for more than one reason. Three of the interviewees chose options 1, 2, and 4. The rest of the interviewees had not returned, but had rebuilt their village homes and went back in the summer time. The reasons for not returning were work or children who were studying.

In order to compare the satisfaction of interviewees between their lives in the villages and the complexes, they were asked: "could you remind us of the difference between your life in the village and in the complexes? The interviewees provided various reasons, but all answers pointed to their preference to live in the villages, as shown below.

1. "I always felt homesick."
2. "In fact, the complex was not far away from our area, but because we had been deported by the Ba'athists, they destroyed us on two levels. First, we were disrespected, and second, they have destroyed everything; here were our memories, so they destroyed our memories."
3. "In the village, I felt that I am the son of the land. But here I feel that I have been destroyed. After all these years, I cannot find a taste of life in this complex. I had a big house and my living room was as large as a house in this complex. I had an important position in the community of the village, which I have lost in this complex. In the village, we were working together- with my wife. We were together, but the depression captured her because of the deportation, and two years later she died. And I'm staying scarcely in this life. With her death, my soul died."

4. "We were comfortable in the village, even today, because it is the home of our ancestors. Before the deportation, we made a sacrifice for Pirabab<sup>34</sup>. We slaughtered 27 animals as a donation. At that moment, we were hit by a rocket from a military airplane but it hit the mountain of Bogaw<sup>35</sup>. God saved us. So, we resorted to everybody, even God, without any result"
5. "We were dehumanized in the complex, but when we returned, we have restored our humanity"
6. "Here we are owners of our dignity, but in the complex, we were not. If someone is treated so horribly in one a place, and lived in peace in another place, which do you choose?"

The relationship of mankind with the homeland is an intimate and profound relationship. When a person is forced to leave his land, it is like being transplanted and uprooted from their source, as happened to many West Africans who were captured and deported from their homeland into exile and slavery. This shows that people did everything to save their territory from destruction, yet the military campaign was so big that there was no solution.

The process of attempting to forcibly build a nation-state has been repeated in many places around the world. Building a nation state without taking into account the specificities of other components has been shown to lead to different kinds of assimilation and even genocide.

The Ba'athists claimed that the process of deportation was for the development of the Kurdish region because they could not bring government services to remote areas. When we mentioned Ali Hassan al-Majid message, "we will civilize them," our interviewees reacted emotionally, "Through what? By giving us a television to view it and sitting at home unemployed? Civilization is not merely beautiful buildings, even though the homes they had built in the complexes were not suitable for respectable life, the civilization for human beings is to have their own free will. The Ba'athists have taken our will, so we became like poultry."

---

<sup>34</sup> The real name of Pirabab is Faqe Mohammed. He was one of Sheikh Balkan's followers. He is known as a knowledgeable man and is given a lot of respect. His name as Pirabab (old father) is common in the region of Balakayati. His inheritance became the endowment for his grandchildren until today. He was known as a friend of animals, particularly the wild goats, so his grandchildren still do not eat the flesh of these animals.

<sup>35</sup> Bogaw is a mountain range located in the foothills of the Hasarrost's mountains.

These people understood the intention of the process of deportation. Thus, they were aware of the consequences of living in these complexes, as one interviewee put it, “In the village we were relying on ourselves to find a piece of bread, but in the complex a lot of people have become mercenaries for money. In the village, there was mutual respect and cooperation, but we have lost many of these values in the complex. So, I do not know what civilization is.” This explanation means that the Ba’athists were successful in their plan to dominate people and to leave them in a chaotic situation. People in the complexes suddenly became unemployed, strangers to each other; they lost their values and the norms of village life. Another interviewee said, “What is civilization if they built libraries, and opened two companies in the region, and built a theatre, we could call it civilization, but the Ba’athists used weapons and told us that [this weapon] is the source of your food [...] is this civilization? The villages were paradise in terms of foliage and the beauty of nature, but in the complex, we were almost drowned in the dust. As a result, we became like a flock of sheep.”

One of the benefits of these complexes for the Iraqi regime was the recruiting of thousands of residents to become mercenaries, and the actions carried out by the Iraqi regime point to a strategic plan of “divide and rule.” Hence, the process of the deportation in itself was one of the stages of genocide, and even if it had led to some positive aspects, this does not mean that what happened was a positive step towards civilization.

## Conclusion

This chapter attempted to highlight the deportation of the Kurdish rural areas after the collapse of the Kurdish political armed movement in 1975 led by the Ba’ath Party, under the claim of the modernization of the Kurdish people. This deportation process, called the “campaign of the development of the northern region,” formed one of the most aggressive and dangerous stages of genocide throughout the history of Kurds and successive Iraqi authorities, particularly the Ba’ath Party authority.

According to the evidence we gathered from various sources, including from firsthand accounts, this process can be described as a civilizing offensive, considered an aspect of the de-civilization process. Additionally, it was in preparation for the intended strategy of destroying any type of Kurdish autonomy and possible Kurdish prosperity. Through this strategy, the economy of the Kurdish rural areas was destroyed, and the people were forcibly gathered into specific areas and forced to surrender control

over any kind of activities, and to prevent the relationship with the Peshmerga forces. Furthermore, these complexes can be considered prisons, used to facilitate arrests when necessary, as happened to thousands of Barzani Kurds until they were taken to the mass graves in south Iraq. The consequences of this process are still visible in Kurdish society.



*Part III*

**Multiculturalism**



## Chapter 8

# Kurdistan Region of Iraq's Ethnic and Religious Communities: The Need for Power-Sharing and Genuine Partnership

*Dlawer Ala'Aldeen*

The Kurdistan of Iraq (KI, also known as Southern Kurdistan) is one of the most diverse and culturally richest parts in the world. These areas include the constitutionally defined “Kurdistan Region of Iraq” (KRI) and the Kurdish-majority areas that are described in the constitution as “disputed territories.”<sup>1</sup>

Over centuries, KI has become home to a myriad of different ethno-religious communities (ERCs) due to the Kurds' tolerance for multiculturalism and religious expression. The ethnic communities in the KI are comprised of Kurds, Turkmen, Arabs, Chaldeans, Assyrians and Armenians, while religious groups, in addition to Muslims—both Sunni and Shia—include Christians, Yezidis (pronounced *Eyzidis*), Kaka'is, Shabaks, Zoroastrians, Sabeen-Mandaeans, Baha'is and Jews.

Currently, there are no reliable statistics to accurately demonstrate these group's population sizes and their evolution over time. This is mostly due to the “Arabization” policies of the Ba'ath regime, when many ethno-religious groups registered (or forcibly registered) as “Arabs,” in part because many religious communities refused to reveal their true identity for fear of persecution by the authorities and the Muslim majority. Importantly, almost all the ERCs in Iraq and the KI have faced displacement and continuous emigration, leading to a detrimental decline in their numbers.<sup>2</sup>

To introduce the ERCs in the KI and the rest of Iraq, their faith and history are briefly outlined in this chapter. Of course, each deserves greater in-depth analysis which is outside the scope of this report.

---

<sup>1</sup> For the purpose of this chapter, KI includes both the KRI and Kurdish-majority areas, unless otherwise specified.

<sup>2</sup> Minority Rights Group (2016, July). No Way Home: Iraq's minorities on the verge of disappearance.

## Ethno-Religious Communities

### *Turkmens*<sup>3</sup>

The Turkmens are the second largest ethnic group in the KI after the Kurds, and consist of a heterogeneous population of Turkic settlers and an assimilated native population, whose adherence to a language and sense of identity has maintained a coherent community.

Turkic settlers are thought to have arrived in waves, as part of the occupying armies over the centuries before the creation of Iraq. The biggest of these waves occurred under the Ottomans, particularly during the reigns of Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent and Sultan Murad IV. Large numbers of fighters, traders, and government bureaucrats were brought to the KI to settle in the string of cities and towns that bordered the Kurds and Arabs in the “Wilayet of Mosul.” These stretched from Tel Afar to Erbil, Altun Kupri, Kirkuk, Tuz Khurmatu and Mandali. Turkmens often refer to these cities as “Turkmeneli,” home to an estimated three million Turkmens.<sup>4,5,6</sup>

The majority of the Turkmen community are Muslim, 60 percent are Sunni and 40 percent are Shiite. Unlike the majority of Sunni Kurds who follow the Shaffi’i school, the Sunni Turkmen are mostly Hanafis, following the same school as the Turkish settlers and endorsed by the Ottomans.

### *Yezidis*

The Yezidis (or *Eyzidis*) are linguistically, culturally, and socially indistinguishable from the rest of the Kurmanji Kurds. However, they have a strong sense of religious identity, and hence prefer to be addressed as Yezidis first, then as Kurds. Following recent atrocities perpetrated by the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS)<sup>7</sup> against their communities, and their disappointment with both the Iraqi and KRG authorities, some voices are now promoting the notion of Yezidis as a distinct ethno-religious

<sup>3</sup> Turkmen (pronounced Turkman) is singular, Turkmens is plural.

<sup>4</sup> Anderson L & Stansfield G. (2009). *Crisis in Kirkuk: The ethnopolitics of conflict and compromise*. University of Pennsylvania Press.

<sup>5</sup> Fuccaro, N. (1993). A 17th century travel account on the Yazidis: implications for a socio-religious history. *Annali dell’Istituto Orientale di Napoli*, 53(3), 241-253.

<sup>6</sup> Wassim Bassem (2014, 24 July). Iraq’s Turkmens call for independent province. *Al-Monitor*.

<sup>7</sup> “After the occupation of Mosul, in June 2014, the group re-branded itself as the “Islamic State.” In this publication, their older name “The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS)” is used.

identity. However, these are mainly sentimental reactions to the tragic events of August 2014.

Their religion, Yazidism (or Eyzidism), is linked to ancient Mesopotamian religions, heavily influenced by Zoroastrianism, Islam, Christianity and Judaism. They believe in God as the creator of the world, and in the seven angels. The chief angel is the Peacock Angel (Melek Taus), who fell from God's favor but later reconciled with Him, and is responsible for ruling the world and for the good and bad in human lives.<sup>8</sup>

As a way of protecting themselves, Yazidis have preserved their oral history, but it has been subject to manipulation. Arab and Muslim invaders wrongly labelled them as "Devil-worshippers" in reference to the Peacock Angel, and erroneously tried to attribute their origin to Sheikh Adi ibn Musafir who settled in the 12<sup>th</sup> century in Lalish in Shekhan. Yazidis believe that Sheikh Adi is the chief Yazidi Saint (not the originator) who achieved divinity through reincarnation, and who will meet every Yazidi's soul after their death. The Yazidis believe that they will continue to reincarnate until they achieve a certain level of soul purity. At that time, they will be eligible to enter a heavenly realm and exist there for eternity.

Population estimates for Yazidis in KI vary between 700,000–1,000,000, due to the absence of reliable census data.<sup>9</sup> They live primarily in the Districts of Shingal (Sinjar), Sheikhan and other smaller towns and villages across the Nineveh and Dohuk Provinces. According to their oral history, Yazidis faced 73 campaigns of genocide, under Ottoman rule in the 18th and 19th centuries alone, by neighboring Muslims, be it Arabs or Kurds.<sup>10,11</sup> This may partially explain the spread of their communities, which have been well established in Armenia, Georgia, Turkey, Iran, and Syria for centuries. Under the Ba'ath regime, they went through an unprecedented process of Arabization.

---

<sup>8</sup> Fuccaro, N. (1993). A 17th century travel account on the Yazidis: implications for a socio-religious history. *Annali dell'Istituto Orientale di Napoli*, 53(3), 241-253.

<sup>9</sup> Raja Jalabi (2014, 11 August). Who are the Yazidis and why is Isis hunting them? *The Guardian*

<sup>10</sup> Allison, C. (2017). The Yazidis. In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion*.

<sup>11</sup> Macfarquharjan N (2003, 03 January). *Bashiqa Journal; A Sect Shuns Lettuce and Gives the Devil His Due*. New York Times.

*Christians: Chaldeans, Assyrians and Armenians*

Christianity was brought to Mesopotamia in the first century A.D., leading to the conversion of many of the native communities. After the Islamic conquest, the majority of the Kurds were converted while a minority remained Yezidi. Since then, the term “Christian” has become synonymous with the Chaldeans, Assyrians, and Armenians, even though these ethnic groups differ in their languages, cultures, and the churches they follow. Under the Ba’athist regime, Christians were also subject to Arabization policies and were often referred to as Christian Arabs. Chaldeans form the majority (almost 80 percent) of the Christians, and follow the Rome-affiliated Chaldean Catholic Church. The Assyrians mainly follow the Assyrian Church or the Ancient Churches of the East.<sup>12</sup>

Chaldeans and Assyrians are indigenous Semitic people of North Mesopotamia, and are believed to be direct descendants of the region’s ancient civilizations. They speak Syriac, the Aramaic language of Jesus Christ, and the liturgy of their Church is written in the Syriac alphabet. It is important to stress that Syriac is a language, not an ethnicity. Since recently, many Christian politicians have started calling themselves Syriacs or Chaldo-Assyrians to promote unity.

In contrast, the Armenians (or Armans) are non-Semites, who speak Armenian (Western dialect), a branch of Indo-European languages. They converted to Christianity in 301 A.D., after their King (Dirtad III) was cured by St. Gregory the Illuminator from a disease. Modern-day Armenians attend either the Armenian Apostolic Church (Orthodox) or Armenian Catholic Church. Those who inhabit the KI are part of the diaspora, relatively recent migrants who settled in different parts of Kurdistan and Iraq. The largest wave of Armenians arrived as they fled modern-day Turkey during the Armenian genocide, perpetrated by the Ottoman army in 1915.<sup>13</sup>

*Kaka’is*

Kaka’i (also called Yarsanism or Ahli Haqq), is a distinct monotheistic religion that is found along both sides of the border between Iran and Iraq. It was originally founded in the Hawraman area among Goran Kurds

---

<sup>12</sup> Castellino J & Cavanaugh KA (2013). *Minority rights in the Middle East*. OUP Oxford.

<sup>13</sup> Barkey K (2008). *Empire of difference: The Ottomans in comparative perspective*. Cambridge University Press.

by Fakhr-ul-Ashiqin Sultan Ishaq Barzanji (Sultan Sohak), born in 1272 AD.<sup>14</sup> The religion later spread among other ethnic groups (including Turkmen, Persians and Arabs) across many countries. In the KRI, Kaka'is lived mainly around the provinces of Kirkuk, Halabja, Sulaymaniyah, and the towns between Erbil and Mosul.

The Kaka'is view their religion as the product of a cycle of divine essence, one of which was made manifest in Ali Abi-Talib (Prophet Mohammed's cousin). The final cycle, named "Ultimate Truth," was made manifest in Sultan Sahak, who freed the community from observing the Muslim rites of daily prayers and fasting during Ramadan. The Kaka'is believe in reincarnation, such that the human soul goes through a cycle of 1,001 incarnations to become more purified based on their actions. Every Kakai man has to have a full moustache to take part in religious rites at the worship house, the *jam khana*, where they use the tambour, a musical instrument, for meditation.

Kaka'is try to avoid persecution by performing their rituals and ceremonies in secret and by trying to fit in with their Muslim neighbors, often pretending to be Sunnis or Shi'ites. Kaka'is have always suffered discrimination in the countries in which they have existed, and are often described by Muslim fundamentalists as infidels. In Nineveh, they were specifically targeted by ISIS and were forced to flee their homes.

### ***Shabaks***

The Shabak people are a small community whose religion was founded in the 14<sup>th</sup> century by the Kurdish mystic Safi'addin Ardabili, and then spread locally, mainly among the Kurds but also among Arabs and Turkmen. Over time, they formed a coherent rural community with a form of tribal structure, which is now concentrated in the Hamdaniya and Sheikhan districts.<sup>15</sup>

Shabaks identify with Islam, with 30 percent of them identifying as Sunni and 70 percent as Twelver Shias.<sup>16</sup> However, their actual faith and rituals differ from traditional Islam, and their belief is that divine reality is more advanced than the literal interpretation of Qur'an.

---

<sup>14</sup> Saloom S (2013). *Minorities in Iraq: Memory, Identity and Challenges*. Baghdad-Beirut.

<sup>15</sup> Vinogradov A. (1974). Ethnicity, cultural discontinuity and power brokers in northern Iraq: the case of the Shabak. *American Ethnologist*, 1(1), 207-218.

<sup>16</sup> Saloom S (2013). *Minorities in Iraq*.

Under the Arabization policies of the Ba’athist regime, many Shabaks registered as Arabs to avoid persecution or deportation from their lands. After the regime change in 2003, they faced some of the worst instances of sectarian violence. Sunni Arab insurgents and Islamic extremists targeted Shabaks for being Shiite, Kurdish, or Iranian agents, and for rejecting Islam. Shabak places of worship, shrines, holiday celebrations, rituals and even funerals were targets of terrorist attacks. The Shabaks were forced out of Mosul and re-settled among the Christians of the Nineveh Plain. Even as displaced people in the KI, they experienced tension with other minority communities, in particular with the Christians of Hamdaniya.<sup>17</sup>

### *Sabean-Mandaeans*

The Sabean-Mandaeans are a distinct community of Semitic people who speak Mandaic, a dialect of the Eastern Aramaic language, and follow Mandaism, one of the oldest gnostic religions.<sup>18</sup> Because of a clear reference to Sabeans in the Qur’an, Islam considers them to be “believers,” hence their persecution is prohibited. The Sabean-Mandaeans believe in one God and revere ancient prophets, but do not accept Abraham, Moses, or Jesus. John the Baptist, locally known as Yahya ibn Zakariyya, is central to their religion as the final and most revered prophet. Baptism (total immersion) in flowing water every Sunday is an essential ritual in the Sabean-Mandaean faith, so the community has historically lived near waterways and in close vicinity of the Tigris and Euphrates in Southern Mesopotamia. The highest concentrations were in Amarah, Qalat Saleh, Basra and Baghdad, until they were uprooted and driven to near extinction over the past few decades.

In the 1990s they numbered in the tens of thousands, but after the regime change in 2003 they faced targeted violence, discrimination, and intimidation. The majority left their homeland altogether, and settled in the KI (around 5,000 of them) or emigrated abroad.<sup>19,20</sup> Except from the KI, they are now too scattered to be able to preserve and pass on their culture, traditions, language and full religious rituals.

<sup>17</sup> Van Zoonen D & Wirya K. (2017, August). The Shabaks: Perceptions of Reconciliation and Conflict. Policy Report. August, 2017. The Middle East Research Institute

<sup>18</sup> Saloom S (2013). *Minorities in Iraq*.

<sup>19</sup> Van Zoonen D and Wirya K (2017, July). *The Sabean-Mandaeans Perceptions of Reconciliation and Conflict*. Policy Report. The Middle East Research Institute.

<sup>20</sup> Deutsch N (2007, 06 October). “Save the Gnostics”. *The New York Times*.

### **Zoroastrians**

Zoroastrianism is one of the world's oldest, if not the oldest, monotheistic religion, predating Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, and influencing them all. The religion is named after its founder, Zoroaster (*Zarathustra*), who is believed to have lived in the second millennium B.C. The songs and writings of Zoroaster, which define the religion's precepts and scripture, are included in their holy book, the Avesta. Zoroastrianism promotes a deity of the Wise Lord (Ahura Mazda) as its Supreme Being.

Zoroastrianism eventually became the state religion of the pre-Islamic Iranian empires. The Kurds were among its earliest converts, and many archaeological remains, particularly of their worship caves, have been discovered throughout the KI. However, their religion later disappeared from Kurdistan after the Islamic conquest. Recently, the older Mithraic version of the faith has returned to become by far the fastest growing in the region, particularly after the emergence of ISIS and the genocidal attack on the Yezidis. An estimated 100,000 Muslims have converted to Zoroastrianism in the KRI over the past few years and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) officially recognized the religion in 2015.<sup>21</sup> The first fire temple of Zoroastrianism was inaugurated in 2016 in Sulaymaniyah.<sup>22</sup>

### **Baha'is**

The Baha'i religion was formed relatively recently by Baha'ullah, who lived in Iran in the second half of the nineteenth century and preached for the unity and equality of all people. The faith is based on a reinterpretation of Shiite Islam by Baha'ullah's forerunner, Bab, an Iranian merchant.

Baha'is consider God to be singular and all-powerful, whose commands are revealed through manifestations, including Abraham, Krishna, Zoroaster, Moses, Buddha, Jesus, Muhammad and Baha'ullah. They regard the major religions as unified in purpose yet varied in interpretation.

Baha'u'llah spent 10 years preaching in Baghdad, where he converted a relatively small community that became formally recognized under Hashemite rule, as per the 1925 Constitution.<sup>23</sup> Baha'is elect a global net-

---

<sup>21</sup> Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor (2015). *International Religious Freedom Report for 2015 United States Department of State*.

<sup>22</sup> EKurd (2016, 22 September). The First official Zoroastrian temple opened in Sulaimani, Iraqi Kurdistan.

<sup>23</sup> Saloom S (2013). *Minorities in Iraq*.

work of Spiritual Assemblies that govern the affairs of the religion, which then elect the Universal House of Justice, residing in Haifa, Israel.

Baha'i followers have faced discrimination and persecution by Muslims since the faith's inception, being accused of blasphemy and atheism. The Ba'athist regime in 1970 banned the Baha'i religion and any reference to it, and many of their political and religious followers were sentenced to prison or death. The Baha'i religion is still officially banned in Iraq, except in the KI where it is legally recognized. The small number of Baha'is who have remained in Iraq have settled predominantly in Sulaimaniyah.<sup>24,25</sup>

### *Jews*

The Jews had lived in Iraq and the KI since Nebuchadnezzar's days and the time of the Babylonian exile almost 2,600 years ago, before they were uprooted in the twentieth century. The Jewish communities had not only maintained their distinct culture, religion, and language, but also remained affluent and influential in business and governance. Under the Hashemite rule, there were more than 130,000 Jews in Iraq, who were represented in parliament, government, judiciary bodies, and other public institutions. Hence, they contributed significantly to the prosperity of the country and the state-building process.

In the 1940s, life for Iraqi Jews became increasingly difficult, particularly during and after the Second World War (WWII) when Arab nationalism and anti-Semitism was on the rise across the Middle East. In 1948, the Iraqi government began an unprecedented campaign to drive the Jews out of the country through harassment and exclusion from government employment. The Zionists, at the same time, facilitated their move to Israel. By the end of 1951, the vast majority of Jews had left Iraq, leaving only a few thousand behind.

The Jews who remained in Iraq had to survive the tyrannies of the Arab-nationalist dictators, especially after the defeat of the Arab armies in the Six-Day War of 1967. In 1968, one of the first acts of the Ba'athists when they came to power was to arrest large number of Jews, and in 1969 they publicly hanged nine of them on charges of spying for Israel. As a result, in the early 1970s most of the remaining Jews in much of Iraq emi-

---

<sup>24</sup> U.S. Department of State.

<sup>25</sup> Al-Mamouri (2013, 01 August). Iraq's Baha'is Continue to Face Persecution, Social Exclusion. *Al-Monitor*.

grated. By the time of regime change in 2003, there were half a dozen Jews in Baghdad and several hundred Jewish families in the KI.

After regime change, the new Iraqi government failed to recognize the Jews in the 2005 Constitution, whereas in the KRI, they are legally recognized as native ERCs, and have a representative within the Ministry of Endowment and Religious Affairs. Interestingly, a growing number of Muslims of Jewish descent (through their mothers) are revealing their ancestors and making contact with their relatives around the world.

## **The Ethno-Religious Communities Under Successive Iraqi Governments**

While the ERCs vary significantly in terms of their culture, language, and sense of identity, they have plenty in common in terms of a shared history of grievances and persecution that they suffered under the successive rulers of Iraq.

For centuries before the First World War (WWI), Kurdistan was ruled by the Ottomans. Modern day southern Kurdistan and the rest of Nineveh Province were governed via a single administrative unit, or *wilayat*, with its capital in Mosul. The *wilayat* of Mosul contained the greatest presence of ERCs in the entire empire.

After the WWI and upon the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the British took the mandate over the *wilayat* of Mosul as well as the two *wilayats* of Baghdad and Basrah. Early intentions were to create Iraq out of the latter two *wilayats*. However, the Shiites, who had already revolted against the British, would have had an overwhelming majority. The British therefore decided to annex the Mosul *wilayat* to the rest of the new Kingdom of Iraq in order to boost the non-Shiite population, before inaugurating a Hashemite, a Sunni Arab King.

### ***ERCs During the Hashemite Kingdom***

From the outset, the new Hashemite Kingdom adopted a constitutional democracy. The constitution of the Iraqi Kingdom of 1925 explicitly recognized the freedom of religions and beliefs.<sup>26</sup> Iraq was ruled from 1921 to 1958 by a Sunni-Arab dominated elite, who refused to share power.

---

<sup>26</sup> Saloom S (2013). *Minorities in Iraq*.

Nevertheless, the state institutions and the government were tolerant of ERCs, and grievances were mainly related to their demands for greater cultural and political rights.

The Kurds, who were promised statehood in the past (at the 1920 Treaty of Sevres, following the end of WWI), continued their demand for autonomy over Kurdish majority areas, but were invariably met with military suppression. The Assyrians were also among the first communities to demand autonomy and, in August 1933, the state army of King Faisal I moved in to suppress their uprising in the district of Simele (now part of Dohuk governorate). Thousands of Assyrians were killed.<sup>27</sup>

King Ghazi, son of Faisal, and his ruling circles were known for their support of Arab nationalism. The Kurdish political movement faced violent suppression, and many Kurds were forced to flee. Many of the ERCs, particularly the Jews, suffered persecution, discrimination and uncontrolled violence. For example, in 1941 riots broke out in Baghdad between pro- and anti-British parties, and many Jews who had little to do with these riots were targeted during the course of events. During this violent dispossession (locally named “Fahud”), more than 150 Jews were killed and hundreds of Jewish-owned homes and businesses were looted or destroyed.<sup>28</sup> Worse still, the Iraqi government’s policies to expel Jews from Iraq permanently uprooted the greatest part of the community in the late 1940s and early 1950s.

### ***ERCs Under the Arab Nationalist Rule***

After the 1958 *coup d’état*, a series of ultra-nationalist Arab regimes ruled Iraq. The constitution and institutions of democracy were abolished, power was centralized, and the ruling elite monopolized the legislative and executive powers. The rule of law began to deteriorate particularly after 1968 when the Ba’athists came to power.

The Ba’athist doctrine promoted the creation of a unified Arab state through the leadership of a single vanguard party over a revolutionary government.<sup>29</sup> They adopted forceful Arabization policies which their founders had preached even before they took power, and systematically

<sup>27</sup> International Federation for Human Rights (2003, January). Iraq: continuous and silent ethnic cleansing Displaced persons in Iraqi Kurdistan and Iraqi refugees in Iran.

<sup>28</sup> *The Farhud. Holocaust Encyclopedia*. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

<sup>29</sup> Salem P. Bitter Legacy (1994). *Ideology and politics in the Arab world*. Syracuse University Press.

applied these policies against the Kurds and almost all the ERCs. All groups faced increasing violence, wars, ethnic cleansing and Ba'athification.

### *The New Iraq*

After the regime change in 2003, Iraq entered a new phase. In 2005, a democratic constitution was adopted and general elections were held regularly thereafter. Iraq's judiciary system was made independent, the parliament became a powerhouse, and the government was increasingly in charge.

The Iraqi constitution recognized both Chaldeans and Assyrians in Article 125 as distinct ethnic groups and guaranteed their administrative, political, cultural and educational rights. However, apart from these two groups and the Turkmen, none of the other ERCs were mentioned by name in the constitution, and in reality, very little of Article 125 was implemented in the first place.

Instead, from 2005 onward, the ERCs—in much of the middle and south of Iraq—faced one of the worst periods in their history. They remained vulnerable and were exposed to intimidation, violence and outright persecution by extremist Muslims. During the sectarian war between Shiite and Sunni Arabs, many of the ERCs, particularly the Christians, Sabean-Mandaeans and Baha'is, were almost entirely uprooted from the middle and south of Iraq and resettled in the KI or emigrated. Over one million Christians are thought to have emigrated since 2003.<sup>30</sup>

### *The Presence of ISIS*

In the summer of 2014, ISIS emerged in Mosul and rapidly advanced in all directions across the provinces of Nineveh, Dohuk, Erbil, Kirkuk, Tikrit and Anbar. The collapse of the Iraqi army in these provinces, and the retreat of the Peshmerga from the Shingal areas, exposed the population, including the ERCs, to ISIS atrocities.

ISIS not only brought war and destruction, but specifically targeted the ERCs, killing thousands and displacing hundreds of thousands. Large numbers of ERCs lost their livelihoods, heritage, and way of life in what amounts to acts of genocide.

---

<sup>30</sup> Genocide against Christians in the Middle East. (2016, 09 March) A report submitted to Secretary of State John Kerry by the Knights of Columbus and In Defense of Christians.

The Peshmerga and Iraqi forces, assisted by the international coalition, quickly contained the ISIS advance. In Kirkuk and parts of the Nineveh governorate, where the Iraqi Army first collapsed, the Iraqi government requested the KRG's help in filling the void. Forces affiliated with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) played a vital role in saving civilian lives in the Shingal district.

In 2015 and 2016, great milestones were achieved in the fight against ISIS when the homes of many ERCs on the Nineveh Plain and in the Shingal district were liberated. By October, 2016, the Iraqi Army, supported by Hashd-Al-Shabi (Shiite paramilitaries, known as Popular Mobilization Forces), the Peshmerga forces, Iran, and the International Coalition had liberated the rest of Nineveh Province, except for Tel Afar.

These victories helped in re-building some degree of trust between the ERCs and the authorities (in Baghdad and Erbil), but the process is still far from sufficient or complete. Members of the ERCs blamed both the Iraqi state and the KRG for their initial failure to defend and protect their territories. The vast majority of the displaced population, including Sunni Arabs and ERCs, have sought refuge in the KI, but lost faith in Iraq as a functioning state and in Baghdad for leading the post-liberation recovery. Many have decided to settle permanently in Kurdish-controlled areas or emigrate for good.

### *Post-ISIS*

Over the past two years, since the beginning of the liberation of the towns and villages from ISIS, a serious debate has begun regarding the return of displaced families of ERCs. Clearly, the challenge of recovery and regaining normality is immeasurable. It requires the provision of security and services, reconstruction of the infrastructure, reconciliation between communities and regaining trust and confidence in the authorities. People expect justice, compensation and assurances about the future governance of these territories. All of these challenges are far from achievable in the current political climate in Iraq, and hence the ERCs feel more exposed than ever.<sup>31,32,33</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Ala'Aldeen DAA (2017, 15 June). Post-ISIS Recovery of Nineveh: The Need for a Comprehensive Governance Roadmap. Workshop Report. The Middle East Research Institute

<sup>32</sup> Van Zoonen D & Wirya K. (2017, August). The Shabaks: Perceptions of Reconciliation and Conflict. Policy Report. The Middle East Research Institute

<sup>33</sup> Van Zoonen D and Wirya K (2017, July).. Turkmen in Tal Afar: Perceptions of Reconciliation and Conflict. Policy Report. The Middle East Research Institute

Reconciliation is one of the most challenging issues that both the authorities and community leaders will have to face, and the problem is exacerbated by historic divides between different ERCs. For example, the Christians and Shabaks have had a conflictual relationship in the Nineveh Plain over land ownership. Eager to liberate their areas and incentivized to form armed units within the inflated Iraqi armed forces, their competition over seizing land and establishing control has grown, causing fissures to widen even further. Now, individual ERCs are also internally fragmented, polarized and militarized. For example, the Hamdaniyah and Tilkef districts of Nineveh Plain contain no fewer than a dozen disparate local military groups, with diverging interests and affiliations.<sup>34,35,36,37,38</sup>

There are perceived pro- and anti-ISIS families within the Arab Sunni population of Nineveh, and within the Sunni-Shiite Turkmen groups of Tel-Afar. Yezidi groups in Shingal, affiliated with the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the PKK are already causing friction that may spark greater violence. Many members of ERCs have resorted to forming armed groups, with or without affiliation to other local or regional actors, including Peshmerga forces, PKK or Hashd Al-Shabi. For example, Al-Babylon regiments were established as part of the Hashd-Al-Shabi forces in 2014 to liberate Mosul. In the same year, the Nineveh Protection Unit was formed with the aim of liberating the Christian Areas in Nineveh. Both of these forces have different and competing affiliations and have participated in the fight against ISIS, and now have presence in various areas on the Nineveh Plain. Of course, these exist in addition to pre-existing Assyrian paramilitaries which were formed as early as 2008 to protect their towns and villages against terrorists.<sup>39,40,41,42,43</sup>

---

<sup>34</sup> Protsyk O (2010). Representation of minorities in the Romanian parliament. Inter-Parliamentary Union (Geneva) and United Nations Development Programme (New York).

<sup>35</sup> Huyodo (2010, 7 January) The Establishment of Nineveh Plain Forces. Syriac International News Agency.

<sup>36</sup> War is Boring. (2015, 06 March) Inside the Christian Militias Defending the Nineveh Plains.

<sup>37</sup> EKurd (2017, 17 August). Division among Iraq's Shabak minority reveals Kurdish-Arab land rivalry.

<sup>38</sup> Salloum S (2015, 05 May). Iraqi Christians take up arms to regain lost land. *Al-Monitor*.

<sup>39</sup> Van Zoonen D & Wirya K. (2017, August). The Shabaks: Perceptions of Reconciliation and Conflict. Policy Report. The Middle East Research Institute

<sup>40</sup> Van Zoonen D and Wirya K (2017, July). *Turkmen in Tal Afar: Perceptions of Reconciliation and Conflict*. The Middle East Research Institute

<sup>41</sup> Protsyk O (2010). Representation of minorities in the Romanian parliament. Inter-Parliamentary Union

<sup>42</sup> Kawa M (2014, 27 November). Northern Iraq's Minorities Form Militias 'We Will Defend Ourselves'. Niqash

<sup>43</sup> Kavalek T (2017, June). Competing Interests in Shingal District: Policy Recommendations for Defusing Tensions. Policy Report. The Middle East Research Institute

## The ERCs Under the Kurdistan Regional Government

In 1991, after the establishment of a “safe haven” to protect Kurds fleeing from the Iraqi regime’s military attacks, Saddam Hussein decided to withdraw Iraq’s security and administration from three KI governorates: Dohuk, Erbil, and Sulaimaniyah,<sup>44</sup> in addition to some districts (such as Kalar, Chamchamal and Akre) of the provinces of Diyala, Kirkuk, and Nineveh. These areas became formally recognized in the Iraqi constitution after regime change as the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, or KRI. The KRI has remained under the jurisdiction of the Kurdistan parliament and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) since the first elections in 1992.

The other Kurdish-majority areas outside the KRI, including the ones that were totally Arabized in the governorates of Nineveh, Kirkuk, and Diyala, were later defined in Article 140 of the 2005 Iraqi Constitution as “disputed territories.” This article provided a three-step process for the Iraqi federal government to resolve disputes between Baghdad and Erbil, and determine which territories should become integrated into the KRI. However, the federal government’s failure to implement this article over the past 12 years has left these territories subject to political disputes and power rivalry between Baghdad, Erbil, local governments, and local communities.

In 2003, upon the invasion of Iraq, the Kurdish Peshmerga controlled parts of the disputed territories, including Kirkuk, Makhmoor, and Khanaqeen. From the subsequent years until 2014, the Kurds, along with other Iraqi institutions, were in charge of security in these areas, while Baghdad presided over their administration. The Kurdish political parties had a dominant political influence in these Kurdish-Controlled Areas (KCAs), and the KRG gained a solid presence, particularly in the area of education, when they established schools for teaching in Kurdish. After the emergence and subsequent retreat of ISIS, the Peshmerga forces secured the majority (but not all) of the Kurdish-majority areas outside the KRI.

For the purpose of this section of the chapter, the main focus is on the KRI (under the KRG) and less on KCAs. It is interesting, however, that the KRI and KCAs are almost equal in terms of territory, population mass, and ERC diversity, but that there are nevertheless significant differences

---

<sup>44</sup> Halabja was not yet a governorate.

in terms of their community's outlooks, aspirations and socio-political experiences.

In the KRI, the ERCs were more actively engaged in the political process and have secured greater representation within institutions compared to in KCAs. They have also had better access to employment and business opportunities in the private and public sectors. Inhabitants of KCAs, Kurds, non-Kurds, and ERCs, frequently complain of neglect, corruption, political polarization, and militarization. These chronic problems have largely been blamed on Baghdad-Erbil rivalries and the two governments' failure to reach agreements on resolving the problem of disputed territories.

### ***Legal Provisions to Protect ERCs***

Since 1992, the KRI's legislative and executive system of governance has evolved independently from the rest of Iraq's government. Despite economic, political, and security hardships, as well as internal and external conflicts, the KRI protected and promoted its ethno-religious diversity. In 1992, the Kurdistan National Council (later renamed the Kurdistan Parliament) consisted of 100 generic seats and five protected ones dedicated to the KRI's Christians. In the 2005 election, six additional seats were created, five dedicated to Turkmens and one for Armenians residing in the KRI.

Equality of rights were embedded in basic KRG legislation and regulations. In 2015, the Kurdistan Parliament approved Law No. 5, "Protecting Components in Kurdistan," which explicitly mentions most ERCs by name, including the Turkmens, Chaldeans, Assyrians, Syriacs, Armenians, Christians, Eyzidis, Sabean-Mandaeans, Kaka'is, Shabak, Faylie (Shiite Kurds), Zoroastrians, and "others." The law also stipulates that the government commits to protecting their respective mother languages by guaranteeing learning and education. The government is also required to open a special department for national languages of ERCs in Kurdistan's universities.

Until now, religious education in primary and secondary schools was focused on teaching Islam with minimal exposure to other religions. However, the Ministry of Education has now changed its curriculum by introducing religious studies, where all religions are taught and religious tolerance is promoted.

The KRG's Ministry of Endowment and Religious Affairs created a special directorate for the affairs of non-Muslim, with Christian and Yezidi senior representatives, and recently representatives from other religious communities, including the Kaka'is, Zoroastrians, Bahais, and Jews.

### *Genuine Partnership Means Power-Sharing*

As far as the ERCs are concerned, the current system of governance in the KRI is inadequate and does not reflect the aspirations of the ERCs, nor does it match the promises and intentions of the policymakers. The approaches of the past, mere legislation and symbolic gestures, will no longer be satisfactory to them. Currently, positions of power are dominated by the majority Kurdish Muslims, with inadequate representation for the smaller and more vulnerable ERCs. Importantly, the years of conflict that have plagued Iraq have created rifts which recently worsened, especially among the Yezidis, after the emergence of ISIS. Regaining trust and reconciling communities require serious investment in building inter-communal confidence.

A critical factor that can contribute greatly towards the achievement of peace and stability in any nation is the existence of a collective sense of shared ownership of the country and its governance system by all citizens. The ERCs need to feel that they are full citizens, able to address their issues and develop their societies in ways that guarantee rights and equality.

Countries such as Iraq, which have failed to invest in nation- and state-building and the unification of their communities, are likely to face irreversible internal rifts. If the KRI aspires to maintain lasting stability under which its communities can coexist harmoniously, it has no choice but to ensure the rights of its ERCs and invest in institutions of democracy.

The system of governance in the KRI should reflect the mixed composition of its community at all levels, and become a model for Iraq and the broader Middle East. The rights of all the groups residing within the KRI should be protected by law and enshrined in the future constitution. The drafting of this constitution, which is currently suspended but likely to be reactivated after the next election, is a unique opportunity to review the region's system of governance while fostering an increasing level of democratization. This can be achieved through the provision of rights for all who reside within the region, irrespective of their religious and ethnic background. The result will be an improvement in levels of social justice, a vital factor required to maintain peace, stability, and security.

Moreover, there should be legal provisions to ensure that all of the KRI's communities are provided with the opportunity to engage in the system of governance. To achieve this, a unique mechanism which guarantees true representation of a diverse ethno-religious constituency is required. This must be designed with the specific aim of engaging ERCs in the decision-making, implementation, and monitoring processes. A product of rigorous research involving key representatives of the ERCs within the KRI and the KCAs, and this report aims to provide such a mechanism.

### ***Current Representation of ERCs Is Inadequate***

Constitutional recognition and legal enshrinement do not always translate into true access to rights, which requires the presence of a dedicated institution that is representative of, and trusted by, all ERCs. For any such institution to have legitimacy and impact it needs to be legally and administratively embedded in the structure of governance of the KRG. Such an institution would provide assistance to the government in matters related to the ERCs, particularly in the process of legislation, implementation and monitoring. Such a body does not currently exist in Kurdistan.

In the KRI's parliament, no seat is currently allocated to the Arabs, Yezidis, Kaka'is, Shabaks, Zoroastrians, or the other smaller ERCs. In the KRG Council of Ministries (cabinet), ruling parties have so far failed to assign any specialized ERC-specific ministerial positions to the ERCs representatives. In every cabinet since 1992, members of different ERCs have regularly been appointed to various ministerial positions. However, these token measures are carried out without taking into account the individual minister's professional competence or leadership qualities. This has inevitably caused further grievance among the ERCs' communities because such appointments would naturally fail to win the ERCs' basic rights or deal with their ethnic or religious issues. Furthermore, the selected ministers have not been perceived as legitimate community representatives; rather they are often viewed as affiliated with the ruling Kurdish parties which promoted them. Consequently, the participation of minorities in the KRG remains inadequate and at times counter-productive, because it has failed to build sufficient trust and confidence between the KRG and the ERCs both within KRI and beyond.

Taken together, the system of governance in the KRI has not only failed to develop into an inclusive and democratic model, but also it has not provided an attractive model for ERCs living in KCAs and other disputed

territories. Such a failure will become a major barrier should a referendum on the disputed territories take place in the near future. Even if areas of the KCAs were formally integrated into the KRI, the fears and concerns of these ERCs could undermine stability and create unbridgeable gaps in the future. Such sentiments have been clearly expressed by Turkmens in Kirkuk who criticize the way the Kurds have governed the oil rich-city.

### *Successful Models Elsewhere Still Inadequate for KRI*

In well-established democracies, such as the United States (U.S.) and in Western Europe, the rights of ERCs are guaranteed through the protection of the rights of individuals. Additional mechanisms are also in place at central and local authority levels for protecting the cultural and linguistic identities of all societal components. Moreover, groups or caucuses have the ability to lobby in the parliaments, influence legislation and have access to decision-makers. Clearly, sovereignty of law and democratic values can help mitigate the possibility of ethnic and religious inter-communal conflicts.

In recently emerged democracies, such as in Eastern Europe, a number of models have developed in countries that have diverse demographics. Romania, Serbia, Bosnia and Croatia have all created special councils for minorities in their parliaments.<sup>45,46</sup> These advisory bodies were established with the aim of influencing legislation and monitoring implementation for minority groups. While there are clear cultural and social differences between the KRI and the Eastern European countries, a model based on democratic principles can be adapted to the KRI and further modified to ensure adequate ERC representation within the legislative and executive bodies. From now until the KRI develops into a full democracy, the KRG needs to design and adopt a tailor-made model of its own to reflect its history, culture and political power dynamics.

---

<sup>45</sup> Protsyk O (2010). Representation of minorities in the Romanian parliament. Inter-Parliamentary Union.

<sup>46</sup> Constitutional Law on the Rights of National Minorities—Zagreb (December 13, 2002). Supreme Court of the Republic of Croatia.

## **A Tailor-Made Model for Power-Sharing: Councils for Ethnic and Religious Communities**

The genuine intentions of the Kurdish authorities need to first be demonstrated in a series of practical, legal and symbolic (yet meaningful) steps designed to build confidence between the KRI and the KCA's diverse communities. Measures could include:

- The alteration of the KRI's flag and the national anthem to incorporate symbols of diverse groups
- An effective mechanism to protect the various distinct cultures and languages should be developed, in addition to the full implementation of Law No. 5 of 2015.
- There should also be provisions to make their languages official in the localities where they form a majority. For instance, the Turkmen language in Kirkuk and Syriac language in the Nineveh Plain should be officially recognized for administrative communications alongside Kurdish and Arabic.
- Depending on population ratios, senior positions in local government should be granted to representatives of those communities.
- The creation of formal entities within the Government and Parliament for ERCs, and embedding them in the decision-making, implementation and monitoring processes. A tailor-made model for power-sharing needs to be established for ERCs, and enshrined in the law and in the future constitution.

### *The Need for an Ethnic and a Religious Council*

In the summer of 2015, the Middle East Research Institute (MERI) proposed a model for ERC power-sharing in the KRI, which consisted of the creation of two separate but identical councils for both ethnic and religious components.<sup>47</sup>

- A Council for Ethnic Communities, to represent Turkmens, Arabs, Chaldeans, Assyrians, and Armenians.
- A Council for Religious Communities, to represent Yezidis, Christians, Kaka'is, Shabaks, Zoroastrians, Sabeas-Mandaeans, Baha'is, and Jews.

---

<sup>47</sup> Ala'Aldeen, DAA (2015, 12 October). Protecting Minorities' Rights in the Kurdistan Region: A Tailor-Made Model. Policy Report, The Middle East Research Institute.

The structure and function of these councils would be designed to take the local system of governance and power dynamics into consideration, while also remaining culturally sensitive. The overall objective is to guarantee that each council meets the expectations of all ERCs, while providing access to both Parliament and Government processes.

The establishment of these councils is not intended to replace the current process of minority representation within the Kurdistan Parliament. It conflicts with neither its objectives nor authority. In fact, it reinforces the influence of current minority representatives by institutionalizing the rights of ERCs.

In the KRI there are a number of bodies (councils and boards) which represent specific groups or sectors, such as the High Council for Women Affairs, the Council for Human Rights, the Investment Board and the Tourism Board. These are all bureaucratic executive bodies that are responsible to the KRG Cabinet. The administrative structure of these organizations varies, depending on their specific objectives. However, there are none that adequately address the needs or aspirations of ERCs, and the bureaucratic executive bodies are not suitable for ERCs' power-sharing.

Considering the rights of ERCs, any new ethnic or religious council should be an integral part of both the parliament and the government to guarantee them influence on the decision-making processes at the highest legislative and executive levels. Such a mechanism can assist in the protection and promotion of their cultural, educational, linguistic and religious rights.

### *Aims of the ERC Councils*

Primarily, the aims and role of the two Ethnic and Religious Councils should include:

- Assisting in the resolution of issues that affect ERCs residing within the KRI. This includes the drafting of legislation, policies and long-term strategies that address the provision of rights for ERCs.
- Lobbying on behalf of ERCs with the aim of influencing the policy- and decision-making processes at the highest level.
- Playing an active role in monitoring the implementation of legal provisions that are designed to protect and promote ERCs' rights. Each council should produce a quarterly report on the status of ERCs which would be submitted to the Parliament and the public.

- Communicating the views and needs of ERCs residing within the KRI to relevant authorities in order to ensure greater levels of social equality.
- Engaging both governmental and non-governmental institutions locally and internationally in order to exchange information and promote the protection of ERCs' rights.

### ***The Administrative Structure of the ERCs Councils***

The administrative structure of the two Ethnic and Religious Councils should include:

- To ensure efficiency and minimize bureaucratic barriers, the councils should be administratively embedded within the parliament. A small secretariat would be required to run council affairs. New legislation would be required to formalize this arrangement.
- The current representatives of ERCs in the Kurdistan parliament should become members of the two councils, as appropriate. These members of parliament (MPs) will then be able to influence and monitor the legislative process within both the parliament and the KRG.
- Representatives from relevant KRG ministries, at the level of Director-General, will be permanent members of both councils. These representatives need not be from ERCs themselves, as their role is to represent specific ministries in order to exchange information.
- Any future ministers or holders of sovereign positions that might be allocated to ERCs, for instance Vice-President of the KRG or Deputy Prime Minister, via future political agreements, will also become *ex-officio* council members.
- A chairman and one or two deputies should be elected for each council on a rotational basis among the MPs or holders of sovereign positions.
- The chairmen of each council will attend KRG Cabinet meetings as “observers” or “full voting members” in order to influence the decision-making processes at a governmental level. It is important that the chairmen who attend cabinet meetings hold the title of “representatives” and not “ministers.” This will help facilitate the rotation of their position among ERCs without the need for parliamentary approval, and will help avoid internal competition over ministerial privileges.

- The creation of a number of specialized sub-committees will be required to address issues of data collection and analysis, coordination, and policy formulation. It should be made possible for external experts to join the sub-committee as members.

## **Implementation in Stages**

This unique model for ERCs in the KRI should be implemented in milestones over three separate phases:

### ***Transitional Phase***

Currently, there are eleven MPs representing Turkmens, Chaldeans, Assyrians, and Armenians. These numbers and ratios must change through political agreements in the future to become truly representative of the ERCs. An accurate census and appropriate legislation will be required to do this. Meanwhile, the eleven MPs should coalesce to form a single “pre-cursor council” for both ethnic and religious communities. In collaboration with relevant parliamentary committees, legislation should be drafted in order to define the framework and future internal constitutions of the two proposed Ethnic and Religious Councils.

### ***Full Implementation Phase***

It is essential to have the new draft law that allocates additional parliamentary seats to the unrepresented ERCs, and another that establishes the Ethnic and Religious Councils, completed and endorsed as soon as feasible. Ideally, these laws should be effective from the round after the next elections. Thereafter, both councils should become fully developed.

### ***The Long-Term Phase, After the Resolution of the Disputed Territories***

After the resolution of the disputed territories issue, through referendum or an overarching political agreement, and possible integration of parts of these territories into the KRI, the number and proportion of the different ERCs within the KRG-administered areas will change dramatically. This is irrespective of which parts of the disputed territories will be integrated under KRG administration. Conducting a census in these territories is therefore necessary to help legislators allocate the required number of seats for each ERC in the KRI parliament. Consequently, the

overall number of parliamentary seats and those allocated to minorities will change again.

## **The Constitution**

The future stability of the KI, and the Middle East as a whole, is affected by the extent to which people's rights are provided and protected. Typically, this is undertaken through the enactment of legal provisions and regulations. However, constitutional rights will provide more powerful protection.

A constitution is deemed to be a long-term social agreement between a government and its people in order to protect and enshrine their rights. Including protection mechanisms for ERCs can help ensure future stability and democratic development in the KRI.

To enshrine the formation of ERCs Councils within the constitution, the constitutional committee in the KRI should add the following section to the draft constitution:

“The establishment of two councils for ethnic and religious minorities, linked to the Parliament to guarantee their participation in the legislation, decision-making, implementation and follow up process.”<sup>48</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Despite its rich social tapestry, the political system within the KRI does not reflect its diversity. The genuine intentions of the Kurdish authorities need to first be demonstrated in a series of practical, legal and meaningful symbolic steps designed to build confidence between the KRI's ERCs. Importantly, this diverse ethno-religious constituency requires true representation at the top of the decision-making process in both governance and civic life. This can be achieved through the establishment of an ethnic and a religious council which should be integral parts of both the parliament and the government to guarantee their influence over the decision-making process at the highest legislative and executive levels. The future stability of the KRI, Iraq and the Middle East as a whole, is affected by the extent to which rule-of-law is implemented and human rights are provided and protected.

---

<sup>48</sup> Ala'Aldeen, DAA (2015, 12 October). Protecting Minorities' Rights in the Kurdistan Region: A Tailor-Made Model. Policy Report, The Middle East Research Institute.



## Chapter 9

# Kurdistan: The Emergence of Nation State and Ethno-Religious Minorities

*Muslib Mustafa and Kamal Y. Kolo*

In light of this sacred event, I reaffirm once again that either we die together in this country or we live in glory [...] Therefore we assure our Christian brothers and sisters that under these circumstances and with this culture of co-existence in Kurdistan they will be secured and their dignity and rights will be preserved.

—*President Masoud Barzani*<sup>1</sup>

When talking about the history and successful experience of coexisting of Kurdistan, we should not forget that despite all the violence, intolerance, extremism terror of darkness, terror acts and genocide against different religious and ethnic groups of the Kurdistan Region, especially against our Yazidis and Christians sisters and brothers, the peaceful coexistence in Kurdistan has remained intact.

—*Nechirvan Barzani*<sup>2</sup>

In the last 90 years of Iraq's history, three indigenous minorities: the Jews, Yezidis, and Christians have faced systematic persecution and expulsion from their native homeland, Mesopotamia. This process led to the uprooting of nearly 140,000 Iraqi Jewish people in a very short period of time. The Christian and Yezidi minority group is about to face the same fate. The Iraqi Jews and Christians, as Semitic people, shared a common homeland and history that dates back more than 2,500 years. The Jews were part of ancient Mesopotamia since Babylon was the capital of Chaldea, and Nineveh the capital of Assyria, and since their exile from the kingdoms of Judea, Israel, and the capital Jerusalem at the hands of the Assyrian and

---

<sup>1</sup> President Masoud Barzani to Christians on Easter Sunday: Either we die together or live in glory. *Rudaw* 27/3/2016. <http://www.rudaw.net/english/kurdistan/270320161>

<sup>2</sup> Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani speech at a conference on "Tolerance, Life: Terror Threats and Experience of Coexistence in the Kurdistan Region" 13 Dec, 2016 Erbil-Kurdistan. <http://www.gov.krd/a/d.aspx?s=010000&l=12&a=55205>

Chaldean kings between the years 721 and 586 B.C. Yet, the Jews who settled in Mesopotamia had a deeper and more religious relationship to this land of exile that became their homeland for the following 25 centuries; it was Abraham of Ur of Chaldea who the Jews, Christians, and Muslims consider their first ancestral father.

The cuneiform writings from ancient Assyrian and Babylonian mud tablets tell stories of cultural interactions between these peoples: the Hebrews, Chaldeans and Assyrians. A phrase in ancient Babylonian:<sup>3</sup>

*Um nukh libbi shabattum*

Literally translated, this phrase would be “Day of rest of the heart” or *shabattum*. At first sight, this would seem to indicate an organized a day of rest, a term that certainly suggested the Hebrew Sabbath.<sup>4</sup> The Chaldo-Assyrians of today’s Iraq, reading the transcript mentioned above, would recognize its meaning as it differs only slightly from their language today. They would understand it as saying:

“The day of rest of my heart”

And in their present language they would write:

*Yoma d’niakha d’libbi*

While history, tradition and language provide the strongest evidence of belonging to a certain land, Iraqi Jews, Yezidis, and Christians—though they tried for many centuries to prove their identity as Mesopotamians—were and still are called and considered as “Others,” in official government documents and daily life. They are described as belonging to the category “other religions” and “other Iraqis.” Those who decided to ignore their religion and nationality deliberately, understood the historical link to Mesopotamian heritage of both nationalities and religions. They understood that this link would built cumulative rights to country and state which under the “law of the land” did not allow for others as equals in status. The identity of the “others” among the identity of the majority became shameful as much as a taboo.

This doctrine of obscurity towards ethno-religious minorities is not limited to a certain time frame or political circumstances in ancient or

<sup>3</sup> Rawlinson, PI. 32, Nr I, 16 = Cuneiform Texts from Babylonian Tablets, etc., in the British Museum, Part XVIII, PI. 23, 17 (K. 4397): In Morris Jastrow: Hebrew and Babylonian Traditions (1914).

<sup>4</sup> Morris Jastrow (1914) *Hebrew and Babylonian Traditions*. Scribner Pub., New York, 376p.

modern Iraq. In modern times and during the various Iraqi governments, monarchy, parliamentary, dictatorships, quasi-communists, conservative, ultra-nationalist Socialist-Baathist and finally “democratic” leaders, the essence of position and status of those minorities in government and society was invariable and unfortunately always a reflection of the old image of conditionally protected minorities under the religious-based laws of the majority.

The preamble of the Iraqi Constitution adopted in 2005 reflects this doctrine and maybe more dangerously, legalizes it towards the non-Muslim minorities. The abstention from mentioning the Christians as a religion or Chaldo-Assyrians, and Yezidis as ethno-religious peoples marked the coming policy of Iraq towards the Christians and Chaldo-Assyrians and Yezidis.

[...]invoking the pains of sectarian oppression inflicted by the autocratic clique and inspired by the tragedies of Iraq’s martyrs, Shiite and Sunni, Arabs and Kurds and Turkmen and from all other components of the people, and recollecting the darkness of the ravage of the holy cities and the South in the Sha’abaniyya uprising and burnt by the flames of grief of the mass graves, the marshes, Al-Dujail and others and articulating the sufferings of racial oppression in the massacres of Halabcha, Barzan, Anfal and the Fayli Kurds and inspired by the ordeals of the Turkmen in Bashir and the sufferings of the people of the western region, as is the case in the remaining areas of Iraq where the people suffered from the liquidation of their leaders, symbols, and Sheiks [...]

Although the Iraqi Christians, and specifically the ChaldoAssyrians, have endured periodical episodes of persecution,<sup>5</sup> and the Yezidis who were subjected to systematic massacres in recent history, they were only considered in the constitutional preamble as “Other components of the people.”

The preamble and articles 2, 3, 4, 125 in the New Iraqi Constitution of 2005, do not go beyond the Ottoman constitution of 1878 during the reign of Sultan Abdulhamit II. Considering the history and structure of the Ottoman Empire, the “the Kanun-i Esasi” constitution was more progressive in securing and protecting fundamental liberties of the Christian

---

<sup>5</sup> In the periods 1895-1896, 1915-1918, 1933, 1963, 1968-1969, 1975, 1988-1989, 2003-2007.

and Jewish minorities<sup>6</sup> than the current Iraqi constitution, taking in consideration the 21<sup>st</sup> century human rights liberties dynamics where constitutional rights are enforced through a body of applicable laws. In fact, since the formation of the Iraqi state in 1921, Iraqi constitutions consisted of flawed protections of minority rights. The Iraqi state failed to provide for minorities since 2005 and up to the present, leading to the near-extinction of Christians and Yezidis from major cities such as Baghdad, Basra, Mosul, and Mosul Plain cities and villages. Kurdistan provided the much-needed shelter and protection for the terror-stricken Christians and Yezidis.

### Christians and Jews in Kurdistan

The Mesopotamian Christians consider themselves direct descendants of the ancient Assyria and Chaldea, a fact that is reflected in their Aramaic language, culture, and history. Already within the first century AC, Christianity was well established in Mesopotamia as the inhabitants of that ancient land gradually but steadily converted from paganism to the Christianity. In addition to the indigenous population of Chaldea and Assyria there was a large number of Jews, who had been brought by Assyrian kings from Judea, Israel and Jerusalem as war prisoners and adopted Mesopotamia as their new homeland. For 25 centuries, Mesopotamia was their homeland until they were uprooted from Iraq in the 1940s and 1950s. The historical ancestors of the Mesopotamian Christians and Jews have been present for thousands of years before the Arabs conquered their homeland in the 7<sup>th</sup> Century A.C.

Already in the first century A.C there were three Diocese in Mesopotamia: *Hidiab* in the north (Aramaic: Beith Arabai), *Babylon* in the center (Aramaic: Beith Karmai) and *Abwas* in the south (Aramaic: Beith Aramai).<sup>7</sup> The travelogues of European travelers and American missionaries during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries give detailed accounts of the Christians, Jews, Kurds, and Yezidis and their way of life, traditions, social fabric,

---

<sup>6</sup> See e.g.: Devereux, Robert, (1963): *The First Ottoman Constitutional Period: A Study of the Midhat Constitution and Parliament*, The Johns Hopkins Press, Baltimore; Ergun Özbudun (2015) *The Ottoman Constitution of 1876 Oxford Constitutions*, Oxford University Press; and Huseyin Korkut (2016) Critical analysis of the ottoman constitution (1876), *Journal of Transdisciplinary Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 1.

<sup>7</sup> Scher, Addai (1993): *The History of Chaldaea and Assyria*. Vol. 2. Michigan, The Chaldean Academy Publications. [Published 1912 by the Jesuit Catholic Press, Beirut]

rites, and rituals. Those travelogues represent a rich record on the demographic structure of Kurdistan and inter-communal relations.<sup>8</sup>

The first census-like record on the demographic composition of the Iraqi population was carried out by British mandate authorities in 1920.<sup>9</sup> It was followed by the first official census in 1947, which showed that the major centers of Christian population were in the then *Wilayat al Mosul*, which included the current Duhok province and its administrative boundaries in addition to the Mosul Plains. The Jews, according to the results of the 1947 census, numbered 118,000, or 2.6 percent of a population of nearly 4.65 Million.<sup>10</sup> After the forced exodus during 1950–1951, only 5,000 of them remained as recorded by the 1957 census.<sup>11</sup> By 1973, Iraq had practically lost its Jewish population. In Kurdish villages, there were hardly any Jews left after 1951. Mutzafi<sup>12</sup> gives an example of the Jewish village of *Betanure*, where the entire Jewish community disappeared. In Zakho city, the approximately fifteen thousand Jews still living there in 1945, fled into exile<sup>13</sup>. Thus, the history of the large and important Jewish community in Mesopotamia ended in the 20<sup>th</sup> century after nearly three thousand years of continuous existence.

While the Jewish persecution had its roots in the Arab ultranationalist fervor that appeared in Iraq after 1936 (starting with the first military Coup d'état led by Bakr Sidqi), strongly flamed by the events in Palestine between Arabs and Jews, culminated in 1941 with the Pogrom (Arabic: Farhud)<sup>14</sup> against the Jews in Baghdad, Basra, and Mosul. What followed was the government's systematic harassment and persecution that ended with the well-known denaturalization law which stripped Jews of their Iraqi citizenship. The Christian persecution after the establishment of the

---

<sup>8</sup> See e.g.: Badger, George Percy (1852), *The Nestorians and their Rituals with the Narrative of a Mission to Mesopotamia and Kurdistan in 1842 to 1844, and of a Late Visit to those Countries in 1850*. 2 Bde. London, Joseph Masters; and, Sachau, Eduard (1883), *Reise in Syrien und Mesopotamien*. Leipzig, F.A. Brockhaus.

<sup>9</sup> Shibliak, Abbas (2005): *Iraqi Jews: A History*. Saqi Books. 180p.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> <https://web.archive.org/web/20120227040146/http://www.capiraq.org/Maps/Data1/1957/Iraq1957.pdf>.

<sup>12</sup> Mutzafi (2008): *The Jewish Neo-Aramaic dialect of Betanure*. Harrassowitz Verlag. Wiesbaden

<sup>13</sup> Sabar, Juna (1982): *The Folk Literature of the Kurdistan Jews: An Anthology*, Volume 23. Yale University Press. 250p.

<sup>14</sup> Daphne Tsimhoni (2001): The Pogrom (Farhud) against the Jews of Baghdad in 1941. In Roth, J., Maxwell, E. (Eds.), *Remembering for the Future the Holocaust in an Age of Genocide*, Palgrave Macmillan, UK.

Iraqi state in 1921 had a more complex structure resulting from the characteristic historical duality of religion (Christianity) and ethnicity (Chaldeans and Assyrians) of the Iraqi Christians, who were persecuted, either for their religion by Islamic extremism, or ethnicity by the nationalistic Arabs, or for both at the same time, which historically was the case.

### Christians Under the New Iraqi State

After the establishment of the monarchical Iraqi state in 1921 headed by its first Hashemite King Faisal the first, minorities enjoyed relative public liberties of religion, ethnicity, civil, education, culture, and politics. Christians and Jews were represented in the nascent council of representatives and a few held ministerial positions. The first Iraqi Constitution of 1925, under King Faisal, embodied the fundamental rights of all Iraqi citizens.<sup>15</sup> But the extension of those rights, in principle, to the Christians and Jews can be seen as a British influence, because subsequent political events corroded the very essence of those rights.

Christians, with their denominations: Catholics, Nestorians, Jacobites, and Orthodox and ethnicities: Syriacs, Chaldeans or Assyrians (mainly dialectal differences), generally enjoyed a large margin of religious and cultural freedom. The churches and monasteries did not suffer from restrictions, and priests graduated from seminaries and theology schools.

The Christian communities, similar to their Jewish counterparts, had separate schools where their respective native languages were taught. Only higher educational institutions were restricted to the state, but Christians and Jews were able to enroll freely (in the 1940s, heavy restrictions were imposed on the Jews' enrollment in higher education). Access to public offices was also common; some positions were quite in higher administrative hierarchy mainly due to higher educational qualifications of the two Jewish and Christian communities due to private westernized schooling. Christians owned printing houses and newspapers, and many were quite influential.<sup>16,17</sup>

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.constitution.org/cons/iraq/iraqiconst19250321.html>

<sup>16</sup> See Sarah D. Shields (2000): *Mosul before Iraq: Like Bees Making Five-Sided Cells*. State University of New York Press.

<sup>17</sup> To mention only a few names: Razouk Ghannam, a well-known journalist, established the Iraq Press in 1921 in Baghdad. Tawfiq El-Sama'ani, founded Al-Zaman press in 1937, and Yousif Hermoz established Ul-Umma Press in 1935. Rafael Butti stands as the prominent journalist, writer and newspaper publisher in the history of Iraqi journalism.

This newly-found freedom (with memories of Armenian-Assyrian genocides during WWI by the Ottoman Empire military still fresh in their minds, and where many survivors inhabited Kurdistan), was brutally broken in 1933 with a bloody massacre committed by the Iraqi army against Christians, who were inhabitants of *Semelle* village in Kurdistan, and at least 600<sup>18</sup> Assyrian Christians were killed.<sup>19,20,21</sup> This massacre came just after few years after the establishment of the Iraqi state and followed the end of British mandate in 1932. It was this massacre that inspired the Polish lawyer Raphael Lemkin<sup>22</sup> to coin the term “genocide” for the first time. The Simele massacre opened the door for systematic persecution of Christians and Kurds. Government authorities quickly learned that the use of brutal military force against civilians *en masse* could proceed and even be rewarded as an act of heroism.<sup>23</sup> The Armenian-Assyrian genocide during WWI was an example of unpunished atrocities. It also showed that military dictatorships learn from each other, and with minimal international intervention, dictatorships will proceed with increased barbarism towards their subjects. The Ottoman atrocities of 1896, 1915–1918,<sup>24,25</sup> the Jewish holocaust, and the Anfal campaign against Kurdistan in 1988–1989, are stark examples.

## New Cycles of Persecution

Kurdistan is the native habitat of Christianity and Christians since the first century A.C. Their villages, spread all over the Kurdistan with increased presence in the mountainous area of the Duhok province, gen-

---

<sup>18</sup> Assyrian resources give much higher estimates above 3,000 (see Hysri *op.cit.*)

<sup>19</sup> Russell A. Hopkins (2016): *The Simele Massacre as a Cause of Iraqi Nationalism: How an Assyrian Genocide Created Iraqi Martial Nationalism*. Unpublished MA Thesis, University of Akron.

<sup>20</sup> Husry, K (April 1974). “The Assyrian Affair of 1933 (I)”. *International Journal of Middle East Studies*. Cambridge University Press. 5 (3): 161–176. JSTOR 162587. doi:10.1017/S002074380002780X.

<sup>21</sup> Husry, K (April 1974). “The Assyrian Affair of 1933 (II)”. *International Journal of Middle East Studies*. Cambridge University Press. 5 (3): 344–360. doi:10.1017/S002074380003498X.

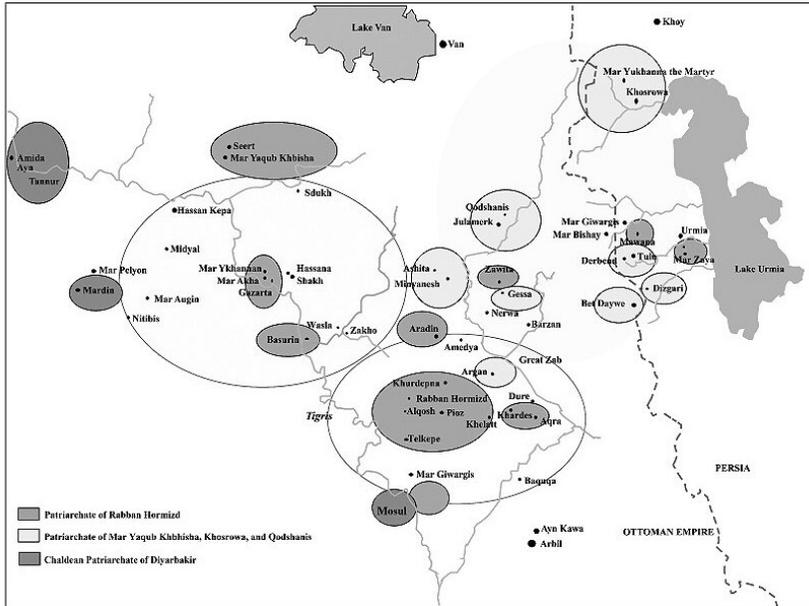
<sup>22</sup> Douglas Irvin-Erickson (2016): *Raphael Lemkin and the Concept of Genocide*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 320p.

<sup>23</sup> Husry, K *op.cit.*

<sup>24</sup> Toynbee, Arnold J. (1915), *Armenian Atrocities. The Murder of a Nation*. London: Hodder & Stoughton.

<sup>25</sup> Toynbee, Arnold Joseph (1917), *The Murderous Tyranny of the Turks*. London: Hodder & Stoughton.

**Figure 1. A map showing the three patriarchates between the 17<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> Century to which Christianity in current Kurdistan and Hakari areas adhered. (Modified after: Murre-van den Berg H.L., 1999).<sup>26</sup>**



erally following the Tigris and Greater Zab rivers courses (Figure 1). Traditionally, the Christian and Kurdish population and villages occupy same areas and usually in quite near vicinity to each other. In larger cities (Zakho, Duhok, Erbil, Kirkuk, Sulaimani) a mixed population is the norm. The proximity of Christians and Kurdish villages made them share not only the homeland but also the same fate.<sup>27</sup>

### *The 1961–65 Period*

The period between 1961-1965 was very significant in shaping the fate of Christians and approximately 250 Christian villages in Kurdistan, specifically in the mountain area. The Kurdish revolution was resumed during this period and led by the late Mulla Mustafa Barzani, spanning

<sup>26</sup> Murre-van den Berg H.L. (1999), *The Patriarchs of the Church of the East from the Fifteenth to Eighteenth Centuries*, *Hugoye. Journal of Syriac Studies* 2(2).

<sup>27</sup> President Masoud Barzani eloquently expressed this idea when addressing Christians in Kurdistan, quote: “*either we live [together] or [we] die together.*”

three successive regimes: Abdul-Karim Qasim (1958-1963), the Baathists (1963), and Abdulsalam Arif (1963-1966), all of which came to power during a bloody coup d'état, and shared a strong nationalist Pan-Arab ideology. To subdue the revolution, the Iraqi army attacked villages and civilians using excessive military force. The bombardment, especially in the Dohuk province, led to the destructions of villages and inhabitants became refugees, mostly in Baghdad and Mosul. It is during this period that many Christian villages were abandoned, destroyed and their actual numbers went from 240 to less than 70. North-South displacement and migration resulted in confrontation with Arabic language and culture in major Arabic cities.

### ***The 1968–89 Period***

The second coup d'état by the Baathists in 1968 brought another cycle of destruction to both Christians and Kurds in Kurdistan, especially in 1975. Some 180 Chaldo-Assyrian villages were destroyed and their residents deported during this period and as a result of the ANFAL Campaign launched by Iraqi regime in 1988, the government decided to destroy all Christian and Kurdish villages within a twenty-kilometer-wide strip along the Iraqi-Turkish border, in addition to churches and buildings of great historical value that date back to the 4th century A.D. With the threat of chemical gassing of Chaldo-Assyrians, Kurds, and others, in Zewa in 1987, followed by the Halabja chemical massacre in 1988, fear had spread among the civilian population in all of Kurdistan. Chaldo-Assyrians fled, many disappeared, some took refuge in Turkish refugee camps and many moved abroad.

### ***The 1991–2003 Period***

Towards the end of the Iraq-Iran war, Saddam Hussein gradually shifted to increased Islamic rhetoric, reflected in the media and the educational system. The political language became heavily impregnated with Islamic texts. The Iraqi population quickly adopted this new trend. Christians and Yezidis felt the changes and the already present alienation resulted in estrangement and isolation. Traditional Christian names were rejected by civil authorities for newly borns, and only Arab names were allowed. Shops and bars selling alcoholic drinks were closed. An anti-Christian mood developed, first as a counterattack to the coalition lead by the Americans and other western countries to liberate Kuwait after Saddam Hussein's invasion in August 1990. For the first time, the Iraqi society associated its Christian

population with the “infidel west” and “guilt by association” reemerged, first used against Iraqi Jews, associating them with Zionism and Israel. Turning Iraq into a religious society did not benefit the regime, but the damage was done. Extremism took root in many Iraqi cities. The fabric of Iraqi society was changed forever. Large parts of the Christian population sought refuge in western countries. Some moved back to their ancestral villages in Kurdistan from where found they their way to the west.

### *The 2003–2007 Period*

By the time of the American invasion of Iraq, the political rhetoric was already speaking of a Jihad against the infidels. Foreign extremists and al-Qaida had already infiltrated Iraqi society. A full-blown Shiite-Sunni sectarian conflict resulted in a bloody campaign against Christians and their churches in all major cities: Baghdad, Basra, and Mosul. The Shiite and Sunni political parties, through their armed militias (including al-Qaida), made their goals quite clear: Christians must either convert to Islam, leave, or die. A mass exodus of Christians began. In Baghdad and Basra, the Christian population went from numbers in the hundreds of thousands to just a few. The total Christian population shrank from 1.4 million in 1980 to only 500,000 in 2007.<sup>28</sup>

### **ISIS: Cataclysmic genocide of Christians and Yezidis**

On February 3, 2016, the European Parliament adopted a resolution designating the atrocities of ISIS against the Christians and Yezidis in Mosul, Nineveh Plains, and Sinjar as genocide and crimes against humanity. On March 14, 2016, The American House of Representatives adopted a similar resolution and urged the United Nations and other governments to follow suit. The French parliament and the U.K House of Commons designated those atrocities as genocide.

It is one of history’s tragedies that both Christians and Yezidis have been the subject of genocidal atrocities several times in their recent history and under similar religious extremism perpetuated under the reign of Ottoman caliphs<sup>29</sup> Sultan Abdul Hamid II and Mehmed V in the years

<sup>28</sup> Kolo K. (2007): The Exodus of Oriental Christians: Similarities and parallels with that of the Jews (A case study from Iraq). Presented at the EU parliament 17/10/2007.

<sup>29</sup> Sultan Abdul Hamid II (1876–1909); Mehmed V, 1909–18

1894–96<sup>30</sup>, 1915–18<sup>31</sup>, the Iraqi government in 1933<sup>32</sup> and now Daesh, the Islamic Caliphate state.

The Yezidis' bitter history did not differ in essence from that of the Assyrian Christians under the Ottoman Caliphate. Iraqi sociologist Ali Al-Wardi documented how Yezidis men, women, and children were gathered by the Ottoman Wali (governor) from Mosul, Tel Afar, Sheikhan, and Jabal Sinjar, and were made to choose between converting to Islam or accept death. Thousands were killed, and many women and children enslaved.<sup>33</sup>

In his book “the Yezidis,” Iraqi historian Siddiq Al-Damaloji<sup>34</sup> gives a detailed account of systematic and successive military campaigns by the Ottoman army against the Yezidis of the Mosul Wilayat and Jabal Sinjar. The methods of the atrocities and their underlining ideology have such strong similarities that we are left with no doubt to conclude that Daesh and the Ottoman Caliph and the Walis of Mosul follow the same evil religious ideology:

In the Mosul calendar year of 1312 Hijri (1894 A.C) the Wali of Mosul the Einjah BeraQdar attacked Sinjar after he had subdued and annihilated rebellious Tel Afar, he beheaded them and packed the heads in baskets and sent them to Mosul as a lesson and to instill terror<sup>35</sup>

The campaigns against the Yezidis stronghold in Jabal Sinjar extend from 1750 to nearly the entire 19<sup>th</sup> Century. The last military campaign against them was in 1918 at the hands of the Sinjar military administrator Haji Ibrahim Beg. Dozens of Yezidi villages were ransacked and burned.<sup>36</sup>

It is not the persecution, torture and even death, though horrible, that induces fear in a human being. The real horror is when those people realize that the actions taken against them are an effort to lead to extinction.

---

<sup>30</sup> Toynbee A. opt. cit.

<sup>31</sup> Toynbee A. opt. cit.

<sup>32</sup> Husry opt. cit.

<sup>33</sup> Alwardi Ali (1994): *Mahzalat Al'Aql al-Bashari*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Kufaan Publishing, UK. 302p.

<sup>34</sup> Al-Damaloji, Siddiq (1949): *Al Yazidiyya (the Yezidis)*, al-Etihad Press, Mosul, Iraq. 547p.

<sup>35</sup> Op. cit. p. 499.

<sup>36</sup> Al-Damaloji, Siddiq, op. cit.

Then marriage, birth, children, hope, happiness, and future stop having a meaning.<sup>37</sup>

## **Independence of Kurdistan: the State and the Minorities**

The emergence of an independent state in Kurdistan is a matter of time. The planned referendum on September 25, 2017 on the establishment of the state of Kurdistan is widely expected to support the declaration of independence from Iraq. The establishment of this nation-state will mark a historic geopolitical change in the region. In the last 70 years, apart from Southern Sudan, no other state has been declared based on self-determination and secession in the Middle East, which itself was formed as a result of the Sykes-Picot treaty in 1916.

Regional geopolitical challenges will be serious following the referendum, and it is likely that neighboring countries will see Kurdish independence of Iraq as a threat to their national integrity through the setting of a precedence for more political rights, autonomy, and eventually self-determination for their own Kurdish populations. Turkey,<sup>38</sup> Iran, and Syria will be the main foes to this nascent state. Historically, Arab countries only had Sudan as an example of territorial secession following the Sykes-Picot treaty, WWI, and the end of the British-French colonial period. The Arab countries are expected to oppose the declaration of independence out of solidarity with other Arab countries and fears of domestic religious Sunni-Shiites fragmentations.

Having outlined this, we argue that the most vital challenge to this statehood declaration would be domestic: political, social, tribal, and territorial, in relation to the structure within the state itself as much as with relation to Baghdad. A conflict with Baghdad, aside from fear for state integrity, is more than probable along traditional ethno-religious (Arab-Kurds, Shiites-Sunnites), demographic, and oil territory friction lines, all of which have a profound historical background.

Within this complex picture stands the fate and destiny of the main ethnic-religious minorities in Kurdistan, the Christians (Assyro-Chaldeans) and the Yezidis. History shows that territorial changes between states, whether agreed or *de facto*, usually force the minorities to face major

---

<sup>37</sup> Kolo K. op.cit.

<sup>38</sup> Turkey has already called the referendum of independence a “mistake.”

challenges, including a loss of citizenship, property, land, or acquired rights (political, cultural, civil, religious etc.). Any resettlement or mass movement of population, voluntary or forced, will incur difficulties that might continue to persist up to second or third generations.

As already stated, Christian and Yezidi minorities have been subject of deliberate and systematic terror campaigns in the 2005–17 period, designated as acts of genocide by United Nations and European Parliament in 2015. Because of this continuous persecution, the Christian population diminished to fewer than 250,000 Christians in Iraq, down from a pre-2003 estimate of 1.4 million.<sup>39</sup>

The coming new state of Kurdistan can be the last safe haven for Christian and Yezidi minorities. If they are not protected by the state, their very survival would be put into question. Iraq has already lost one of its indigenous minorities, the Jews, when they were forced into exile in the mid-20th century.

The liberation of Mosul, the last stronghold of Islamic State (IS) in Iraq, appears imminent. Kurdish and Iraqi forces, alongside a U.S.-led coalition, have managed to secure surrounding towns, enter the city, and retake several neighborhoods in Mosul. This important development offers the Kurdish leadership and international community a unique opportunity. It is a chance to finally allow the region's most vulnerable minorities the possibility of self-preservation and self-determination. The forming of a province for these minorities in the area known as the Nineveh Plains, their ancestral homeland in the northwest boundaries of Mesopotamia would be the right answer in securing a stable future and prevent any atrocities in the future. Under the terms of the United Nations' Genocide Convention, states must "undertake to prevent and to punish" genocide. This prevention could take substantial form in the creation of a protected province in the Nineveh Plains.

The liberation of Nineveh Plains and the city of Mosul from Daesh opens a crucial window of time and territory. To create an autonomous, democratic, pluralistic province for Iraq's Christians, Yezidis, and other minorities, within the region that IS has occupied since the summer of 2014. The territorial initiative would also be an opportunity to repatriate many of the nearly 2 million refugees who have fled to the relative safe

---

<sup>39</sup> United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, 2017 Annual Report. Retrieved July 8, 2017. <http://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2017.USCIRFAnnualReport.pdf>

Kurdistan region in northern Iraq. Even now, members of vulnerable ethnic minorities from the Nineveh Plains continue to flee to Kurdistan, Turkey, Syria, and neighboring regions.

Such a territorial initiative would be fraught with dangers, which any viable plan must take into consideration. International peacekeeping forces will be indispensable. The Nineveh Plains are rich in natural resources, with vast, largely untapped oil reserves, and control of these resources will be strongly contested, which in the long or short run will be a basis of conflicts if not dealt with in advance.

Kurdistan has long been a land of tolerance and coexistence to different ethnic and religious groups who have been living all in peace for centuries. Despite all the wars, persecution and occupation that Kurdistan has faced for centuries, it has remained a land of many religions and beliefs. The historical cohesion among different ethnicities and religions is a solid base for peace and coexistence. Therefore, Kurdistan society has become a beacon of hope in the Middle East. This culture of peaceful coexistence has made people from the rest of Iraq who were forced to flee their homes due to violence, atrocities and prosecution they have faced by ISIS to see the Kurdistan Region as a safe haven for themselves.

## **The Internal Challenges and Trust Building Process**

Kurdistan's Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani stated:

Making a real national agreement based on the principles of politics, social, geography and demography of areas in Mosul and its surroundings, which are special areas for all ethnic and religious groups, is the only guarantee for peaceful future for all ethnic groups. This agreement will also prevent a fire, which many sides try to light in order to serve an internal and regional agenda. If all interested parties do not show concern, no one can predict a stable situation and peaceful future for the area. We have to be aware that this is a serious direct threat.<sup>40</sup>

The parties involved in the fight against Daesh realize that the aftermath will bring many of them in a collision course of a territorial and power struggle to control liberated areas, mainly the city of Mosul, Nineveh

---

<sup>40</sup> Nechirvan Barzani, opt.cit

plains, and the Sinjar-Tel Afar areas. On the other hand, Kurdistan's position on the issue of minorities is well-defined and its basic thesis is that it's the right of those minorities to choose their future and decide whether to join Kurdistan as autonomous area, or opt for other forms of self-determination. The report of the KRG on the question of self-determination has been issued years before the invasion of Daesh of Christian and Yezidis territories, cities, and villages. The report bears the concept of a "political statement or declaration," declaring the political thesis of the KRG regarding the minorities<sup>41</sup>:

The KRG supports the principle of an autonomous region for minority nationalities, where they form a majority in an area. Article 35 of the Kurdistan constitution "guarantees the rights of national, cultural and administrative Turkmens, Arabs, Assyrians, Chaldeans, Syriac, Armenian, including self-rule where any of them form a majority of the population and regulated by law." The KRG believes that this principle should apply not only in the Kurdistan Region but also in the disputed territories in the Nineveh plains. However, the KRG has not and does not believe in imposing the idea on any group or nationality, who should decide for themselves by democratic means how they wish to be governed.<sup>42</sup>

The reconstruction of Christian cities and villages, and the financial aid to Christian families, with the involvement of international organizations, the United States and European countries is crucial in the return of displaced Christians and Yezidis to their homes with dignity and to ensure a promising life. The main burden of building trust falls on the KRG, as the bulk of Christian minorities and Yezidis are settled in Kurdistan or its peripheries. The Kurdistan Regional Government has experience in rebuilding the destroyed Kurdish and Christian villages following the Anfal campaign, with a reported reconstruction of 104 Christian villages.<sup>43</sup> Thousands of Christians returned to their ancestral villages in Kurdistan, especially in the Duhok province during the Al-Qaida campaign (2005–08) against Christians in Baghdad, Basra, and Mosul. The central govern-

---

<sup>41</sup> The status of Christians in the Kurdistan Region in Iraq. A short report by the Kurdistan Regional Government UK Representation, December 2009. [http://cabinet.gov.krd/uploads/documents/Status\\_Christians\\_Kurdistan\\_Region\\_Dec\\_09\\_2009\\_12\\_22\\_h16m26s16.pdf](http://cabinet.gov.krd/uploads/documents/Status_Christians_Kurdistan_Region_Dec_09_2009_12_22_h16m26s16.pdf)

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

ment has proven incapable of providing neither protection nor a secure future for minorities since 2005.

The Christians and other minorities span areas within Kurdistan proper and its peripheries, the Nineveh Plains. In both locations, the Christians have inhabited villages, many of which date back to early Christianity or even older.<sup>44</sup> Historically and demographically they are closely connected and related through language (neo-Aramaic), ethnicity and religion (Figure 1). The Assyrian tribes had strong partnership with the Kurdish tribes in the Hakari and the Kurdish emirates in the region. Sharaf Khan Al-Bidlisi, the oldest Kurdish historian, revealed that the Assyrians and the Kurds were two partners sharing the common emirate of Hakari and enjoying equal tribal rights. This state of affairs dates back to the late fifteenth century.<sup>45</sup>

Kurdistan leadership can play a major role in bringing all Christians together in a trust building process that, aside from the rebuilding of destroyed villages and repatriation of the Christians to their villages, should adopt a concrete, viable, and inclusive political program that allows the Christians in the Nineveh plains to choose freely to be a part of the new Kurdistan State in the form that they decide. Initiating this process will help curtail any possible conflicts and confrontations with the central government.

A starting point would be the Kurdish constitution, which in its 2009 draft version, ensured the fundamental rights of Christians and other minorities.

Article 35 of the Kurdistan constitution “guarantees the rights of national, cultural and administrative Turkmens, Arabs, Assyrians, Chaldeans, Syriac, Armenian, including self-rule where any of them form a majority of the population and regulated by law.” The KRG believes that this principle should apply not only in the Kurdistan Region but also in the disputed territories in the Nineveh plains.<sup>46</sup>

In a recent study by the Middle East Research Institute (MERI)<sup>47</sup> on protecting the minorities in Kurdistan, constitutional rights, genuine part-

<sup>44</sup> L'Abbé Albert Aboona (1973): *History of Church of the East*. Beyrouth: Dar Almhcriq.192p.

<sup>45</sup> Hermis Aboona (2008): *Assyrians, Kurds and Ottomans. Intercommunal relations on the periphery of the ottoman Empire*. Cambria Press, Amherst, New York. 325P.

<sup>46</sup> *The status of Christians in the Kurdistan Region in Iraq*. Opt.Cit.

<sup>47</sup> Middle East Research Institute (2015): *Protecting minorities' rights in The Kurdistan region. A tailor-made mode*. Erbil - Kurdistan Region - Iraq

nership in governorship, and representations in both parliament and government institutions are key steps to establish confidence. The rights might not have real value if not embodied within a legal body of laws that ensure access.

Kurdistan is on the crossroads of building a nation-state. It has a historical moment to carve a model of a viable democratic state that is based on citizenship, freedom, tolerance, prosperity, and modernity within a shared homeland.



## *Chapter 10*

# **The Role of Civil Society Organizations in Youth Development**

*AbdulSalam Medeni*

Modern societies are based on three pillars: government, private sector, and civil society. In order for society to maintain stability a balance has to be maintained between the three. Any attempt to weaken any of these pillars would negatively affect the stability of the entire society, especially if such attempt would come from one of the pillars. Youth are the backbone of any society and the hope for a better future, thus investing in youth today is a path to ensure the success and prosperity of society tomorrow. One of the ways is to actively include the youth in the civil society and voluntary community works.

Intellectual and political interests in civil society diminished during the Cold War era, and the 1980s were a period of stagnation in this regard. This is especially true in the Middle East, where democracy has had a difficult time flourishing. Nevertheless, civil society became active and influential again in the 1990s and reached a peak after the so-called “fourth democratic wave” (better known as the Arab Spring) in 2010 and continues until today.

Following an increase in the number of civil society organizations in the region, the Secretariat of the Arab Parliamentary Union issued a memorandum in July 2005 stating that the number of organizations increased from 70,000 in 1994 to 120,000 in 1998. In Egypt alone there were 15,320 civil society organizations in early 1990s, in Jordan 670 organizations were registered in 1996, while Lebanon recorded 5,000 organizations, and in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) the number reached 3,250 in 2017.

The civil society organizations have also become prominent partners in global development and assistance process. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) reports indicate that the annual contributions to community organizations by the civilian population reached about 11 to 12 billion dollars by late 1990s.

To build a modern civil society, it is necessary to have three essential elements:

- Voluntary association,
- Organized civil society and;
- A “Purpose” and “Role”

The fourth element is looking at the concept of civil society and its institutions as part of a wider conceptual system that includes concepts of individualism, citizenship, human rights, political participation and constitutional legitimacy. The mentioned values are part of an integrated structure representing the pillars of a democratic society. Robert Putnam, professor of public policy at the Harvard University and one of the most important theorists of social capitalism stated that “there is no democracy without civil society and no civil society without democracy.”

### **Civil Society in the Kurdistan Region**

In the KRI, the civil society began forming in the 1990s, following the Region’s liberation from the clutch of the Ba’ath regime and having established its own local government. In other parts of Iraq civil society formed even later, after the fall of the Ba’ath regime in April 2003. Therefore, we cannot find much written about civil society in Iraq or in the Kurdistan Region.

During the Saddam Hussein’s control, the Ba’ath party ruled the entire country, and civil society was limited to establishing unions and syndicates (i.e., students, youth, and women, among others, belonged to unions). In reality, the one-party political system established these institutions as a tool to further control the society and push for its own agenda rather than looking after the interest of the organizations and their members, let alone society as a whole. This period of governing was best described in a statement by the sociologist, Dr. Faleh Abdul-Jabbar, “everyone should read the socialist experiment because it includes things that we can never do.”<sup>1</sup>

It is worth mentioning that there is still no documented study of the history of the civil society in Kurdistan because of three reasons:

---

<sup>1</sup> Lecture at the Iraqi Institution for Democracy in 2002.

- The Kurdistan Region received a local administration only after 1991, which is when genuine civil society organizations and social movements began emerging.
- The scholars and academic researches failed to conduct studies and research on civil societies as they did not consider them organized enough to have a voice and make any significant changes in society.
- The KRI civil society activists failed to document their activities and did not have proper coordination and information sharing mechanisms, making it difficult to link changes to the groups.

Very few attempts were made to form civil society organizations in the mid-1980s, considering the Al-Anfal campaign, when the Ba'ath party killed around 182,000 Kurds. Any attempts made did not have a considerable impact on the ground. After 1991, the civil society organizations in the Kurdistan Region were viewed as the humanitarian and relief vehicle addressing the basic needs of the community. At the time, people were in desperate need of basic living items due to poor economic conditions and infrastructure, a lack of services, an inexperienced local government, and the double economic blockade imposed by the Ba'ath central government on Kurdistan, and the international community on Iraq as a whole.

International organizations led by the United Nations kept their focus on providing humanitarian relief and that was the only path through which the local organizations worked at the time, labelling the definition of civil society, first and foremost, as humanitarian and relief organizations. This misconception between the work of a civil society and the role of humanitarian organizations is still widely present in the Kurdistan Region today.

From 1996 to 2003, while the civil society efforts in the Kurdistan Region were of mostly humanitarian nature, the organizations began to grow, as representatives of the non-governmental sector contributed to infrastructure projects, the reconstruction of villages, water and sanitation projects as well as conducting health awareness campaigns, literacy courses, slowly expanding to raising awareness for causes such as women's rights and child protection.

However, the concepts of democracy and political participation were not on the agenda of the organizations until the collapse of the Ba'ath regime in April 2003. Soon after, Iraq and the Kurdistan Region experienced a boom in registered civil society organizations. The civil society began educating voters, monitoring elections, actively participating in drafting the new constitution, and so on. Civil society organizations began

to address ways to build bridges of communication between people and their representatives in the elected local and national councils. They also began raising awareness for the importance of education and became involved in skills development, capacity building strategies, and advocating for the rights of women, youth, and children.

Nevertheless, four main reasons obliged the organizations to steer again towards relief and humanitarian assistance:

- The fiscal crisis in the KRI, mainly because Baghdad suspended sending the share of Kurdistan Region's budget.<sup>2</sup>
- The ISIS attacks on Iraq, the KRI, and Syria, and the displacement of 1.8 million IDPs and refugees in search of a safe haven in Kurdistan.
- The fall in global oil prices which led to a huge deficit in the budget of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG).
- Mismanagement of resources and serious administrative weaknesses.

## **Kurdish Youth**

In August 2010, the UN Inter-Agency Information and Analysis Unit stated that "Iraq is one of the world's largest countries in terms of the number of youth as people under the age of 19 make approximately half of the total population."<sup>3</sup>

Youth is internationally recognized as being between the ages of 15 and 25. Due to conflicts and wars greatly depriving young people of a normal youth and development, the organizations in Iraq and the KRI regulated youth to be recognized until the age of 35. As the actual birth of civil society work was in 1991, this, more or less, coincides with the actual birth of the KRI's young generation. Those who were born before 1991 have a memory of civil society as being humanitarian and relief-orientated, while those born after 1991 view civil society as the key player focusing on political and development work. The younger generation therefore expects civil society to play a significant role in these processes.

The older generation knew little about the meaning of citizenship; their individual rights were limited. Such a striking difference offered the younger generation a great opportunity to effectively foster the establish-

---

<sup>2</sup> The KRI is constitutionally entitled to 17 percent of Iraq's annual budget revenues.

<sup>3</sup> From a pamphlet disseminated in a UNDP meeting in 2011 in Erbil.

ment of civil society organizations and to advocate for their rights and concerns as well as the concerns of the society as a whole. However, the majority of the youth opted to waiting for others—such as the government and the international and local organizations—to act on their behalf. The younger generation is forgetting that they are part of the challenges and hence they should be part of the solution as well.

## **Programs and Support for the Youth**

Organizations operating in the youth sector can be divided into two main types:

**1. *Youth and Student Associations Affiliated with Political Parties:*** Their interests are focused on political gain. These associations are representatives of their respective political parties and they receive all or most of their funds from their political parties.

These organizations seek to respond to the challenges of the young people by providing services and facilities to build their skills through free lectures, workshops, learning materials, school field trips, student halls, etc. However, as their ultimate goal is of political nature, they are limited in their outreach. No matter how broad their reach is, they never reach society as a whole.

**2. *Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs):*** They are interested primarily in the youth development sector. Some of the organizations are registered as non-governmental organizations targeting only young people and there are others who are working in different fields targeting various sectors, including the youth. Within this spectrum, there are also NGOs that are connected to certain parties or are carrying the ideologies of a certain political party. However, these NGOs are more independent. They are typically funded by international organizations. This segment of NGOs is what I would like to focus on in the following lines.

The international organizations are one of the largest supporters of civil society in Iraq and the KRI and have created various programs for local NGOs. The general trend of the post-2003 phase was to develop youth capacities in order to make them active segments in society. However, a lack of analysis of the situation on the ground and an unclear vision of how best to support the democratic development of Iraq in the post-2003 deteriorating security situation were the main reasons why many activities failed to address the problems adequately. Moreover, the international

organizations that were present were looking for grants from other larger organizations or funding bodies, which is why these projects were working on the surface of the issues without diving deeper into the issues.

The programs and projects focused on the following aspects:

- *Raising Awareness Programs*: Various issues related to democratic governing, including electoral education and civic participation, and rather specific issues related to the youth, such as the problem of unemployment and political engagement of the youth.
- *Empowerment and Capacity Building Programs*: Focused on how to transform information into action and how to motivate the young people to act based on what they learned. These programs further included election monitoring, training on how to facilitate dialogues of multiple topics, diverse leadership skills, and other community activities.
- *Peace Building Programs*: Many activities were launched to involve young people in the process of peace-building in order to spread the spirit of tolerance mainly among children and youth.
- *Advocacy Campaigns*: The campaigns focused on mobilizing the youth to advocate for youth concerns on multiple levels from the local and regional communities to the countrywide level.
- *Communication with Decision-Makers*: These are specific programs which have gained more attention recently. They are created to emphasize on the young people in decision-making at different levels and to establish communication between the youth and the decision-makers. The programs motivate young people to take initiatives to communicate with decision makers and convey their concerns and cooperate to find effective solutions.

## Some Achievements

Civil society in Iraq and in the Kurdistan Region is one of the best ways to build a healthy and stable and democratic society. Despite a lack of experience, the NGOs in Iraq and Kurdistan have made major achievements for the youth, some of which are presented below.

- *Reducing the Age of Parliamentary Entry*: A campaign advocated by a group of organizations in the KRI succeeded to reduce the age of the members of parliament from a minimum of 30 to 25 years of age. This is a clear incentive for increased youth activism.

- *Prevention of Smoking in Public Places:* Another campaign was started by youth groups and managed to attract several parliamentarians, mobilized public opinion, and collected signatures in support of smoking bans in public places. They attended, formed, and proposed a draft law and successfully convinced parliamentarians to pass the law of smoking bans in public places.
- *Organizing Demonstrations to Demand Rights:* Several organizations introduced a new and important cultural value: the right to organize peaceful demonstrations to defend the rights of young people, among others.
- *Building a Civilized Young Generation:* The organizations have also engaged in projects to train the youth on how to transform the acquired knowledge into skill development and capacity building. This issue is of great importance as the education curriculum in general focuses only on transferring of information without much training or practical skills.
- *Openness to Other Cultures:* After being completely cut off from the outside world during the Ba'ath party reign, the organizations took a strong lead in commencing communication and exposing the local youth to other cultures and societies. They provide many opportunities for youth to visit and learn about other communities and engage with them. This openness helped them to realize the importance of communication with people from other cultures, learn lessons, and be inspired by the experiences of others in building their own societies.
- *Activating Youth Political Participation:* One of the most important efforts of the organizations was to integrate their participation in community development especially in the elections and communication with the decision makers in response to youth aspirations. Organizations have implemented many projects in this regard and have been present in multiple forms to respond to this important need.
- *Pressure on the Government to Respond to Youth Reality:* The organizations are communicating with decision-makers to respond to the needs of the youth. One of the most important achievements is the government's decision to allocate funds for youth-care through supporting small projects to combat unemployment. The government has also allocated sufficient funds for small development projects to

be adopted by the young people. It also included providing advance loans for marriage or constructing houses.

## The Most Considerable Challenges

Despite the many critical improvements made, there are also a number of challenges. Below are some examples:

- *Short Term Programs:* The process of building human capacity that can successfully respond to the challenges at hand is a long-term process which requires multiple programs to create access to information for people, provide the required practical experience, and equip them with the necessary skills to enter the workforce. Unfortunately, the programs, especially in the models we have seen so far, are usually short term projects. The process of capacity building and capacity development requires much more time.
- *Lack of programs:* These programs are usually based on previous experiences from other countries. The local organizations submit the project, seeking funds on a continued basis, but they are forced to move to the next stage of the program without actually measuring the results. The programs lose their effectiveness if they are constructed according to predetermined plans, without studying the conditions of the people on the ground. This brings the risk of lacking credibility of the local organizations and failure in fulfilling their promises.
- *Investment in organizations and unqualified individuals:* The large amount of funding has created competition among the organizations. The weakness or absence of evaluations in the selection process and lack of measuring the impact on those who participated further affected various organizations' status and reputation. This led to wasting a lot of efforts and money without having a real impact.
- *Youth's lack of confidence in civil society:* Unfortunately, there have been many negative reactions from the youth about these organizations and their role. There are those who accuse the organizations of corruption and fraud.
- *The weakness of competence of organizations:* It is true that there are organizations that are interested in youth affairs, but the problem is that they focus not only on the youth, but also on the interests of their donors. Thus, although the organizations' mission statements

and internal bylaws suggest that they have clear vision and expertise, in practice this is not always the case. Such gaps were visible in projects mainly for orphan care, school development projects, and projects addressing the issue of clean water.

## **Recommendations**

Here, I would like to provide some recommendations on how to strengthen communication between young people and civil society organizations, and on how to make the role of organizations more effective in youth development.

- Programs should be designed based on the reality on the ground, not on some predetermined criteria. This could be done by increasing cooperation and coordination between the Ministry of Youth and Culture of the Kurdistan Regional Government and the international and local organizations interested in youth in order to design and implement programs responding to the youth's actual needs and concerns.
- More programs could be established on activating the role of youth in volunteer work in local communities.
- More programs are needed to prepare youth for the private sector, finding job opportunities, and entrepreneurship.
- Universities should become more focused on the real living concerns of society, teaching students business skills, capacity building, and providing internships in the private sector.
- Increase the number of programs focused on cross-cultural communication between the youth in Kurdistan Region and those of other countries—in the surrounding countries as well as in the greater global community—in order to benefit from each other's experiences, widen their horizons and strengthen communication with the outside world.
- Programs to develop young people's self-confidence and life skills.
- Open channels of dialogue and effective communication between young people and the community leaders including political, intellectual, cultural, literary, and education leaders.
- Programs to develop the national spirit and create a unified national identity for the youth.

- Involve young people in the process of community building and realize that they are part of the challenge and they must be part of the solution as well. This can be done by supporting research projects and studies for young people.

## Conclusion

Despite the political, social, cultural and economic challenges in the Kurdistan Region, civil society organizations still have an important opportunity to further develop the society. Civil society is an important pillar in building a stronger democracy as well.

But, this requires courageous and constant efforts by the NGOs to closely work with and understand the society in general and the youth in particular and involve them in the programs and projects. Moreover, necessary monitoring and evaluation should be done for the conducted projects in order to find the impact and design strategies and future programs accordingly (i.e., design the programs based on the needs not the other way around).

Additionally, more efforts should be made to shift the focus from merely humanitarian and relief aid to capacity-building, following the ancient saying, “*give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.*” This can only come through projects that include all members of society, mainly the youth, in order to become involved in community works, including volunteer work, and to feel that they are part of the solutions, not merely the problems.

In order to achieve the above and build a strong, stable, democratic and prosperous society, regular and effective communication and coordination is required not only among civil society NGOs, but also between the NGOs, the government, and the private sector, as they are the three pillars of society that complement each other and should go in harmony with one another.

## *Chapter 11*

# **Iraqi Kurdistan: Talking Story**

*Stafford Clarry*

Kurdistan is a researcher's paradise. In Iraqi Kurdistan, its openness and accessibility, the unhesitating friendly and hospitable nature of its people, its rapidly developing academic institutions, and the accelerated modernization of its infrastructure, including its airports and roads and telecommunications, are all factors that support the exploring, examining, and interpreting of Kurdistan's story. Of course, there is no one story. There are innumerable stories to be researched, told, known, understood, and appreciated.

In the hierarchy of human behavior, the next higher level would be to analyze the stories—to dissect and learn lessons in order to apply their learnings. What is it in some stories that propels them to be told and retold over many centuries? What are their timeless elements? Why do people tell the stories they do? Even more important would be to synthesize or create new stories, fictional as well as nonfiction. And the highest level would be to evaluate and judge the stories according to traditions and standards. This discussion is a means to take writers and readers deeper into their knowledge and understanding of their valued heritage. Every student at every level can contribute to telling Kurdistan's story. As soon as students can write, they can, under good guidance, do invaluable research. For example, imagine the youngest students, who are learning how to write, going home and asking questions of the oldest person in their extended families and writing the responses.

This is raw research based on original sources. Then, imagine higher level students examining that research and writing a larger story. And imagine reading those larger stories and learning more about a culture and its contribution to the human condition.

But this is less about the readers than it is about the students and faculty who produce the stories. It's more about what students learn and understand as they go through the process of deciding the questions to be asked, how to ask them, whom to ask, how to write the answers, how to record information in an organize way for other students to analyze and write other stories that contribute to telling the story of Kurdistan. This is where

Kurdistan's many universities can play a critical role in developing and promoting methodologies and the organization for stories to be told, to collect them in organized ways, and to process and manage them in the public interest.

With today's technologies, conceptually this is not difficult, though it may at times amount to substantial, painstaking work. To simplify, it means scanning, categorizing, and archiving stories, and making them readily accessible on the internet.

What's going on here? At the raw research level, students learn how to write while learning something that connects them to earlier generations and to their land. Their stories are not only writing lessons, but also lessons in history, and perhaps in sociology, cultural anthropology, environmental psychology, archaeology, perhaps in all the social sciences. By participating in this exercise, they learn the parameters and features of various disciplines while writing their story.

The underlying potential impact is that students learn about their cultural heritage and that it has value, about themselves that through their raw research they are valued, and that their families and communities are valued. This process of realizing their value is a process of empowerment through the development of pride in whom they are.

Why is this important? Because as Kurdistan proceeds into its future, students will face the effects of not only the decades of the recent past, but also many centuries of life that brought them to their present. It helps to inform the decades ahead of them. In other words, what has the struggle for self-realization and self-determination been really all about and where is that struggle going?

At a different level, there are stories tied to most any academic discipline that contributes to cultural heritage, including technical subjects. For example, let's look at higher-level stories in engineering.

What's the story of the engineering expertise applied in the construction of the canal that ran from Khennis, near Shekhan, all the way to Nineveh when it was the capital of the Assyrian Empire. The canal, completed around 700 BCE, includes the oldest aqueduct in the world, built during the reign of Assyrian King Sennacherib. In 1935, archaeologists at the University of Chicago Oriental Institute published a 140-page academic report on this aqueduct. An Oxford University researcher proposes the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient

World, were, actually, nowhere near Babylon in south-central Iraq, but in northern Nineveh where they were irrigated by the water from Sennacherib's canal. Her academic paper explains her thesis, which has been the subject of a television documentary. The story of this canal is an integral piece of Kurdistan's rich cultural heritage. And, what's the story of the engineering that brought water from many kilometers away near Bastora underground to the Erbil Citadel, which is claimed to be the oldest continuously inhabited human settlement in the world, perhaps 8,000 years old? How was it calculated? How was it constructed? Who were the people who did the underground excavation and what obstacles did they face, like fresh air?

Archaeologists from some of the world's leading universities, including Johns Hopkins, Harvard, and Cambridge Universities in recent years have been discovering more of Kurdistan's rich cultural heritage. To what extent are Kurdistan's students being educated and trained to participate in discovering and examining these important aspects of their heritage, to tell this part of their story?

As valuable as it may be, telling Kurdistan's story is not only about discovering and examining that which is ancient, it's also about discovering and examining the present. For example, imagine students going home and collecting jokes from their elders, which could be hilarious fun.

We all know local people for whom there is no end to the jokes they can tell. A student at the University of California at Berkeley wrote her master's thesis on Kurdish humor. Why do different people tell the kinds of jokes they do? She organized Kurdish jokes into ethnic, political, and social categories, and explained how people of Kurdistan observed and commented on their lives through jokes.

## **An Introduction to Iraqi Kurdistan's Rich Cultural Heritage in One Day**

When working on stories pertaining to ancient features of Kurdistan's rich cultural heritage, a good day-drive through a limited piece of Kurdistan would introduce students to a wide range of aspects that contribute to telling their story.

Start in Erbil, the regional capital of Iraqi Kurdistan, which is located roughly in the center of Iraqi Kurdistan. Drive through the Christian community of Ainkawa toward Ifraz on the Great Zab River and turn

right toward the new (unfinished) bridge to Rovia. What are the stories of the Christians of Kurdistan where their religion was established and has been functioning since the first or second centuries AD, and who speak a neoAramaic language that is a derivative of the language spoken by Jesus Christ. What are the different Christian communities of Kurdistan? What's their history and how do they differ?

At Rovia, turn toward the left and continue beyond Bardarash to the south side of Maqlub Mountain. Continue through a checkpoint and after a short distance, turn right and follow the road another nine kilometers to the door of Mar Matti (St. Matthew) Monastery, a very prominent, large structure high up on Maqlub Mountain.

This Christian Syriac Orthodox monastery began in the 4<sup>th</sup> century CE and continues to function today. Visitors are welcome. What is this monastery all about and what are its stories? Who were the first inhabitants and where did they come from? Why did they leave their previous location? Of all places, why did they come to Maqlub Mountain? It's said that at its peak there were seven thousand monks. How did they survive, what were their sources of water and food? How were they supported? How did they protect themselves from adverse elements, both natural and human? How did they relate to other communities in the area?

Drive back to the checkpoint on the main road. At the checkpoint, immediately turn left and follow the road along the north side of Maqlub Mountain to the last paved road on the right. Turn right and follow the road to Mehat/Mahad collective town, which is a large Yezidi community on the main road from Rovia to Duhok.

After departing Mar Matti Monastery and before reaching Mehat/Mahad there are two camps of displaced people. What are the stories of these camps? Who are the displaced people? What are their ethno-religious and socio-economic backgrounds? Where did they come from? Why and how did they come here? What are all the other questions that could be asked of them to tell their stories?

The area before reaching Mehat/Mahad is likely the site of the Battle of Gaugamela where Greek-Macedonian Alexander (The Great) defeated Persian King Darius III in 331 BCE. This battle occurred over 2,000 years ago and it is well documented in some detail. What are those details and how do they fit the actual situation on the ground? What do people currently living in the area know about the battle? Have they come across



Mar Matti (St. Matthew) Monastery on Maqlub Mountain



Inside the monastery

any artifacts like arrowheads and spearheads, or other weapons of war? Has any archaeological activity been conducted in the area?

At the highway near Mehat/Mahad, cross over to the other side and turn left toward the Shekhan junction. After a short distance, opposite Mehat/Mahad, before going up to Betnaur village at the top of the hill, there is a dirt road to the right that goes to the oldest aqueduct in the world, only about ten minutes from the main road.

This aqueduct was a large, two-million stone block structure, a bridge that carried canal water across a shallow valley. Water coming down the valley flowed in a stream underneath the aqueduct. The 140-page academic report published in 1935 by the University of Chicago Oriental Institute presents substantial, very interesting information about its construction and significance.

On the side of this aqueduct is cuneiform writing, a system of writing that began to emerge about 6,000 years ago. The cuneiform writing on this aqueduct is about 2,700 years old. What does it say? There are archaeologists and other researchers specializing in Assyriology who can read it. If archaeologists from foreign institutions of higher education are coming to examine and read these ancient writings, to what extent are faculty and students at Kurdistan's universities developing such expertise?

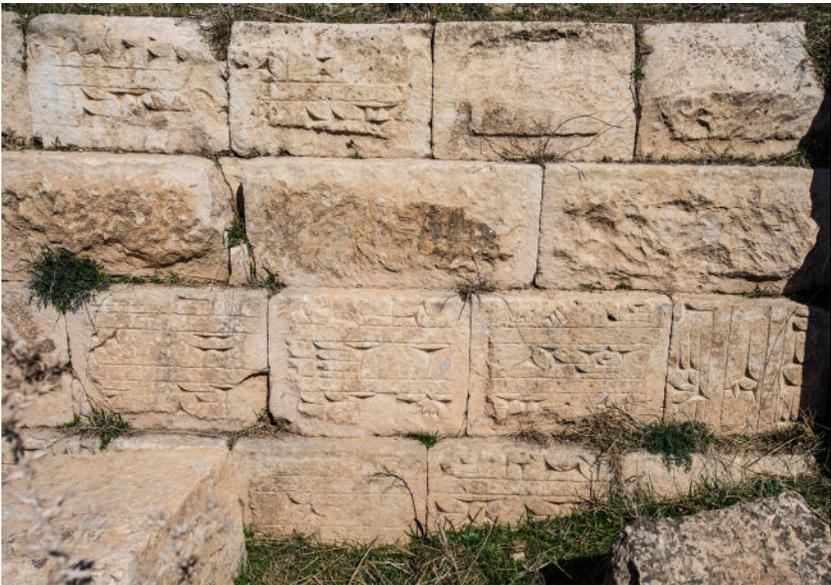
What's the story of this aqueduct in the lives of people who live nearby? What do they know about it? Where did the huge stone blocks used in construction of the aqueduct come from? Such stone is nowhere to be seen in the area. How were the stone blocks transported to the aqueduct site? Many stone blocks are missing. Where did they go and what was done with them?

After visiting this aqueduct, next is the headwaters of the canal at Khennis where there are prominent Assyrian rock sculptures (bas reliefs). Go back to the main road and turn right, passing Betnaur village on the highway at the top of the hill and continue to the junction to Shekhan (Ain Sifni) Town. Turn right to Shekhan and continue through and beyond the town, and turn right onto the first good paved road, maybe 15 minutes beyond Shekhan.

After turning right, it's about another 20 minutes to Khennis on a small river from where the canal to Nineveh begins. At Khennis are elaborate bas reliefs (rock sculptures) of Assyrian nobles and other images and structures with stories to tell.



Sennecherib's Aqueduct at Jerwan



Cuneiform writing on Sennecherib's Aqueduct

What's the ancient story of Khennis? What does it tell us? Who did it, why? How does it figure into the lives of nearby inhabitants during modern times? How is the area valued today and what measures are being taken to preserve and protect it? What do visitors today know and think about it?

Return on the road back toward Shekhan. At the junction, left goes to Shekhan, right to Lalish and Atrush. Turn right to Lalish, the paramount Yezidi religious site. After a short distance, the road to Lalish is on the left. Very soon after turning left, on the left side of the road is a very interesting, very old caravanserai, a place for travelers and their animals to rest.

This caravanserai is usually overlooked because the roof level is below the road level. To see the inside, take a very short walk down the hillside and enter from the side. The interior is very old, original, and fascinating.

What's the story of this caravanserai? When was it built? By whom? Who were the travelers who stayed here? Where did they come from? Where did they go? How did the caravanserai function – how was it supported? What is being done to preserve its heritage value, and protect it from damage and destruction?

Ahead up the same road is the Lalish complex of Yezidi temples and many other structures of worship and places for Yezidis to stay and spend their time during their pilgrimages. Visitors are welcome. When entering sacred places, no shoes are to be worn and door thresholds are to be stepped over, not stepped upon. There are various sections including the crypt of Sheikh Adi and room of classic jars of olive oil for the 365 oil lamps that are lit every evening around the temple complex.

There is much to learn about the Yezidis, many questions to ask. What's the history of their religion? What and where are its origins? How has the religion evolved down through the ages? Where are the Yezidis today, how many are there, and what is their society all about? How do they conduct their religious affairs, what are their rituals and practices? What is the social setup of its followers and how do they relate and interact with people of other religions?

What is the situation at Lalish and how do they conduct their affairs throughout the year? What are their major festivals and significant religious days and when do they occur, and what is their significance? These are few of many questions to ask about Yezidis and their religion.



Assyrian bas reliefs at Khennis



Caravanserai on the road to Lalish



Lalish, paramount Yezidi religious site

After leaving Lalish, head toward Atrush, then to Mareba and Qasrok. Along the way there are a few Christian villages among many Muslim villages. Beyond Qasrok, after crossing the bridge over the Khasir River, drive a little ahead up to the main road. At the T-junction, turn left toward Akre. In Akre, continue up into the old city with its very interesting view of houses covering a steep mountainside.

Coming from Lalish and the Yezidis, Akre is a city where the old part was the home of Muslims, Christians, and Jews. Nearby in a valley is a Sufi shrine.

Newroz, celebrated as Kurdish New Year's Day, occurs on the spring equinox, March 21<sup>st</sup>. Akre is the site of a major Newroz celebration with fireworks and a torch parade down a mountain where there are ancient Zoroastrian ruins on the summit. For Zoroastrians, fire is a sacred element.

Thus, within about an hour's drive, are the stories of five religions and their adherents living together in close proximity with each other. There is much to learn about the history of each of these religious communities and their interconnectedness down through the centuries, and their presence and status today.

Kurdistan was largely an area of numerous villages that were not fortresses for protection from those who differed by religion. The environmental psychology of the story of how this situation naturally evolved is important to understand today's Iraqi Kurdistan and what it means for its future in an increasingly globalized and interconnected world.

Departing Akre toward Erbil, about 15 minutes beyond Akre, turn left through the scenic gorge of Gali Zanta to the once Jewish town of Dinarta. What's the story of ancient travels through this gorge? Who were the original settlers of Dinarta? Where did they come from, when? West of Dinarta is Nahle Valley with its Christian villages. What's their story?

Continue beyond Dinarta up and over Pires Mountain into the valley of the Great Zab River, crossing the bridge at Ble. North up the mountain goes to Barzan Town on Shireen Mountain and the route west to Amedi and Duhok. But at Ble turn right along the river towards Rezan where the Rukuchuk River and Great Zab River join. This is a good place to pause for a fish meal.

Ahead along the Great Zab River the road continues to the junction at Spilik and onward to Shaqlawa and back to Erbil. But about 15 minutes from Rezan, instead of proceeding to directly to Spilik and back to Erbil,



Old Akre Town



Akre on Newroz



Akre, Zoroastrian ruins



Road through the gorge of Gali Zanta



From Pires Mountain into the valley of the Great Zab River at Ble



At Rezan, where the Rukuchuk River joins the Great Zab River

turn left up toward Shanidar Cave, perhaps the oldest archaeological site in all of Asia.

During the 1950s and early 1960s an archaeology team from the Smithsonian Institution in Washington and Columbia University in New York discovered skeletons of Neanderthals that lived in this area about 60,000 years ago. More recently, archaeologists from foreign institutions are continuing to examine Shanidar Cave. To what extent are faculty and students of Kurdistan's universities participating in this and other similar explorations and examinations?

Are there any local people still alive today who participated with the Smithsonian-Columbia team back in the 1950s and 1960s? What is their story and what do they have to say about their experience? Back then, this area must have been quite remote. Were there motorable tracks or roads? How was Shanidar Cave selected for examination? Were other places in the area also examined?

From Shanidar Cave, continue up through the scenic gorge to Goratu and turn right to Mergasur and Diana-Soran, to the junction of the Hamilton Road. At the junction, left goes to Soran and up through the highest mountains in Iraqi Kurdistan to the border crossing to Iran near the small town of Haj Omran. But turn right, down through the gorge of Gali Ali Baig and the deepest canyons in the Middle East, then to Spilik, Shaqlawa, and back to Erbil.

The story of the construction of the Hamilton Road is well told in the book 'Road Through Kurdistan' by A.M. Hamilton, the British (New Zealand) engineer who was responsible for building a motorable road through Iraq from Erbil to Iran. He completed his work from 1928 to 1932, after the first World War and the breakup of the Ottoman Empire, to link the British and Persian Empires through overland travel by rail and road that would take about 11 days. His book talks about the challenges he faced.

Of course, there is always more to the story. What was the impact on the lives of local people who participated in building the Hamilton Road? And what was the impact of the road on the communities and lives of the people in the area? If there are no people alive today who worked on the road, are there stories told their children and grandchildren by those who were associated with Engineer Hamilton?



Shanidar Cave, once a place of Neanderthals



The Hamilton Road through Gali Ali Baig

Continuing down the Hamilton Road to Erbil it's worth pausing at the Swedish Village Stars Restaurant, arriving before dark, to review and debrief this extended journey. This is a one-day, all-day introductory excursion. It offers a rapid exposure to broad aspects of Iraqi Kurdistan for students and faculty to select for later, closer, and more time-consuming examination.

Let's look at where we've been: Erbil-Ainkawa-Rovia-Mar Matti Monastery-Gaugamela Battlefield-Mehat/Mahad Yezidi community-Sennecherib's aqueduct-Khennis Assyrian rock sculptures-Lalish Yezidi complex including the caravanserai-Christian villages-Akre with its Muslim, Christian, Jewish, Sufi, and Zoroastrian features-Gali Zanta-Dinarta-Pires Mountain-Great Zab River-Ble-Rezan-Shanidar Cave-Goratu-Mergasur-Soran-Gali Ali Baig-Spilik-Shaqlawa-Erbil.

This is only one of numerous day trips very possible to do. As impossible as this may appear, this one-day all-day introductory excursion is doable. It's tried and tested, it's been done a few times. And there are many options and variations to consider based on the length of daylight available. Of course, there are also many shorter versions to consider, plan, and travel.

The point being made is that Iraqi Kurdistan offers students and faculty unlimited accessibility and important opportunity to connect with their land and its people to research and share their stories.

In addition to learning about their land and heritage, a potential practical benefit of extensive travel throughout Iraqi Kurdistan is the knowledge, understanding, and experience to share with visitors. With an increasing number of tourists and travelers visiting Iraqi Kurdistan there is a strong need for students and faculty to provide professional guide services.

This requires local people who are well versed in their land and heritage with the communication skills to share their understanding. It means being very fluent in the languages of visitors, with a sensitive understanding of their perspectives and behaviors, and with capacities to engage visitors in ways that attract, broaden, and deepen their interest.

It means being inquisitive and well-read with extensive field experience, with knowledge and understanding to respond intelligently to questions and concerns. It also means possessing an important level of organization and logistics capabilities to facilitate a smooth, engaging, safe, and secure travel experience. This calls for well-trained experts.

While no well-trained expert can specialize in the whole of Iraqi Kurdistan, the area could be broken down into smaller units for sharper, in-depth focus. Iraqi Kurdistan is already broken down into about 30 administrative districts. Perhaps students and faculty could focus on only one or a few districts.

For example, Soran District is particularly attractive in many respects. It stretches from Balisan Valley, Warte, and Zargali in the south up all the way north to where Iraq, Turkey, and Iran join. It includes Soran City with the nearby Christian communities of Diana and Hawdian, a major portion of the Hamilton Road, the erstwhile Bekhme Dam construction site, the historical town of Rawanduz, Korek Mountain Resort, the deepest canyons in the Middle East of Gali Ali Baig, a major tourism site at the gushing spring of Baikhal, high mountain lakes, and many other distinguishing mountainous and historical features such as Hassan Beg and Berserin.

Soran District is composed of more than 400 settlements - cities, towns, villages, and hamlets. Overwhelmingly, most are small rural communities. Each community has its stories to tell, beginning with its origins. When was the village first inhabited, who were the first settlers and where did they come from? Why did they leave their previous settlement and how did they decide to resettle where they did? What was life like down through the years since the community began? How did the community feed itself and what did it produce? Was the village destroyed and, if so, where did the inhabitants go, and how did they survive? When did they return and how did they go about reconstructing and resettling their community? What is their life and livelihood all about today?

Mastering Soran District is about researching and studying a wide variety of aspects in detail. It's about mastering the natural environment, its geology and flora and fauna. It's about mastering the sociology, cultural anthropology, history, and environmental psychology of every community. It's about the work of geographers, including cartographers to produce updated detailed maps and other products that show spatial relationships and movement information. It's about producing academic papers, theses, and dissertations.

To begin to offer expansive knowledge that would help to deepen understanding, possible product of regularly updatable information about each community might be an online district gazetteer, a geographical dictionary or directory with maps showing physical features and social statistics, including demographic and historical information.

While researching the district as a whole might be an ultimate goal, perhaps the district could be examined and mastered subdistrict by sub-district. There are many ways of going about learning about communities and sharing the learnings for the purpose of deepening interest in the land and its people and strengthening commitment towards addressing the future of culture and community.

It's up to universities to think it through, to set the goals and patterns, to design the process, detail methodologies and test them, plan, evaluate, and replan, motivate and train participants, organize and archive, broadly share Kurdistan heritage electronically, build and maintain momentum to keep it going. It's a never-ending process, but one that needs to begin with thoughtful vigor.

What kind of Kurdistan do students and faculty want themselves, their children and grandchildren to experience 10, 20, 50 years from now? How to describe the features of a wishful future? How to describe the past that brought them to the present? What are the stories?

*Part IV*

**Economic Prosperity in Kurdistan**



## *Chapter 12*

# **Economic Diversification and Reconstruction**

*Ali Sindi*

Based on consultations between KRG ministries, international agencies, and development professionals, in 2013, the KRG announced a regional strategic development vision titled “Kurdistan Region of Iraq 2020: A Vision for the Future.” Overall, the strategic vision aimed at putting people first, building the region’s infrastructure, creating an economically prosperous region, and making the government work for the people, rather than vice versa.<sup>1</sup> Despite many great achievements, the economic and humanitarian crises affected the implementation of this vision and led to slow-down, sometimes even freeze, of these activities.

Following the Syrian conflict in 2012, the KRG implemented an open-door policy for Syrian refugees to enter the KRI as a haven of safety and protection. Despite there being a large number of internally displaced persons (IDPs), the KRI is now hosting more than 240,000 Syrian refugees inside and outside camps in three governorates: Erbil, Sulaimania, and Duhok. Around 62 percent of these Syrian refugees, which equals to 150,000 individuals, are living in urban and rural locations. The rest are living inside nine camps (Darashakran, Kawergosk, Qushtapa, Domiz-1, Domiz-2, Gawilan, Akre, Basirma and Arbat). In the Middle East, five countries—Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey and Egypt—are currently hosting Syrian refugees. Close to 97 percent of all Syrian refugees that entered Iraq are living in the KRI.<sup>2</sup>

In June 2014, when the Islamic State in Iraq and Al-Sham (ISIS) captured Mosul (the second-largest city in Iraq), a huge wave of IDPs fled from the horrors of this terrorist group towards the KRI. This created a humanitarian crisis, falling on the shoulders of the KRG. The Kurdistan Region is a region within Iraq, and thus the IDPs should be under the responsibility and the protection of the government of Iraq (GoI). How-

---

<sup>1</sup> Ministry of Planning, KRG. *Kurdistan Region of Iraq 2020: A Vision for the Future*. 2013.

<sup>2</sup> UNHCR. *Syria Refugee Regional Response*. July 31, 2017. Accessed August 10, 2017. <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/country.php?id=103>

ever, Baghdad has shown that the Iraqi government does not care about these IDPs.

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHR) has estimated that because of the inflow of refugees and IDPs, the population in urban areas throughout the KRI has increased by around 25–26 percent, and the population of the Erbil, Duhok and Sulaimania governorates' by around 15 percent.<sup>3,4,5</sup> Moreover, the displaced population in some places like the Shaqlawa, Khabat, Bahrka districts in Erbil, the Sumel, Shekhan and Bardarash districts in Duhok, and the Kifri district in Sulaimania equals half of the host community. In addition to the IDPs and Syrian refugees, religious minorities like Yezidis and Christians are living side-by-side the Iraqi and Syrian sectarian communities (Sunni Arabs and Kurds) in peace and harmony.

By definition, IDPs and refugees are different from each other. Nonetheless, they all require the same services from the government (of the host community). Essentially, refugees have a legal framework as mentioned in the Geneva Convention of 1949, but IDPs' responsibility is the state itself, as clearly illustrated in many UN general assembly resolutions, as well as contributions from UN agencies. Taking care of IDPs requires several steps. During their first year of displacement, IDPs need food, WASH (Water, Sanitation and Hygiene) and shelter. In their second year, these IDPs need health service facilities and they need to have their children enrolled in educational programs. In the last step, the IDPs are seeking job opportunities.

As there was no entity in place to deal with the humanitarian crisis, the Council of Ministers of the KRG quickly put in place a High Committee for Humanitarian Needs Assessment, the first step in countering the humanitarian shock that hit the region. In direct cooperation with the UN and with the participation of NGOs, the KRG succeeded to prepare an Immediate Response Plan (IRP) for the duration of September 15–November 15, 2014, and the second phase of this plan, which was called

---

<sup>3</sup> UNHCR. Displacement as Challenge and Opportunity, Urban Profile: Refugees, Internally Displaced Persons and Host Community, Erbil Governorate. 2016, p. 11.

<sup>4</sup> UNHCR. Displacement as Challenge and Opportunity, Urban Profile: Refugees, Internally Displaced Persons and Host Community, Duhok Governorate. Erbil: Karwan Printing. 2016, p. 5-6.

<sup>5</sup> UNHCR. Displacement as Challenge and Opportunity, Urban Profile: Refugees, Internally Displaced Persons and Host Community, Sulyamaniyah Governorate and Garmian Administration. 2016, p. 15.



## Fiscal Austerity and the Iraqi Budget Share

Out of the 16.6 billion dollars of the KRG budget share of 2014, Baghdad only transferred 1.9 billion dollars (or 11.4 percent). In December 2014, after negotiations took place between the KRG delegation and the central government in Baghdad, an agreement was signed. According to this budget sharing agreement, KRG should handover 550,000 bpd from KRI and Kirkuk fields to Iraq's State Oil Marketing Organization (SOMO) for the purpose of receiving 17% of the federal budget. However, in 2015, Baghdad transferred only 300 million dollars (out of the agreed 1 billion dollars) per month on average for the first six months. In June 2015, following a decisive decision among KRI political leaders, the KRG averred that its oil should be exported independently to Turkey's Ceyhan harbor through a pipeline it shares with Turkey, and without handing it over to SOMO. Aside from the aforementioned amount in 2014 and 2015, there has been no extra transferred money from Baghdad so far. There are also other aspects of the federal budget law, which deals with Peshmerga forces in the Kurdistan Region. Between 2007-2015, all federal budget laws released by the House of Representatives of Iraq have stated that Baghdad should transfer 9.5 billion dollars to the KRG for payroll, armament, and military equipment for Peshmerga forces. Unfortunately, this never took place.

To address the fiscal shock, the KRG introduced short-term austerity measures. This included 42 decrees issued by the KRG Council of Ministers regarding fiscal consolidation, accountability, social reforms and structural reforms. By implementing these reforms, the KRG saved more than 1.7 billion dollars from its original expenditures.<sup>9</sup>

KRG are also deprived from grants and loans of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank Group and other international organizations. On July 7, 2016, the IMF executive board approved a 5.34 billion dollars-worth Stand-By Arrangement (SBA) for Iraq.<sup>10</sup> It seemed a good idea to financially rebalance Iraq following the several internal and external shocks. However, Iraq did not distribute this money equally among all Iraqis. Unfortunately, the KRI did not receive anything of this SBA. On

<sup>9</sup> World Bank Group. *KRG Economic Reform Implementation Progress*. 2017. p. ix.

<sup>10</sup> IMF. "IMF Executive Board Approves 5.34 billion dollars-worth Stand-By Arrangement for Iraq." IMF, July 7, 2016. Accessed July 20, 2017. <https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2016/07/07/19/55/PR16321-Iraq-IMF-Executive-Board-Approves-US5-34-billion-Stand-By-Arrangement>.

May 22, 2003, the United Nations Security Council issued Resolution 1483 for the establishment of a Development Fund for Iraq (DFI).<sup>11</sup> aiming to collect Iraqi oil revenues. Iraq had to pay back the debts acquired by Saddam Hussein's regime, including a Kuwaiti Compensation Fund, Paris Club, and other debts. The KRI, as part of Iraq, also contributed to paying back these debts. The KRG budget share will be calculated after sovereign expenses (clearing debt is part of this) and governance expenses within the Iraqi budget law. The new debts for Iraq, which do not apply for Kurdistan Region, will be part of general Iraqi debts that Kurdistan Region should contribute to pay back this money in the future.

Moreover, the sharp fall in global oil prices also affected the Kurdistan Region negatively, as its economy is dependent on oil production and exportation. In June 2015, when the KRG began to export oil independently, the oil price was around 60 dollars per barrel. The price declined drastically in January-February 2016 and reached around 30 dollars per barrel,<sup>12</sup> which in turn overwhelmingly affected the entire fiscal and macro-economic realm.

The goal of these reforms was for the KRG to diversify its economy away from its reliance on oil. The focus was on three sectors: agriculture, tourism, and trade. Agriculture is one of the most important sectors that contribute to national income and employment generation. The World Bank has suggested an economic reform roadmap<sup>13</sup> with policies on agriculture and trade, support for farmers, and a regulatory framework. In addition, it is necessary for the KRG to invest more in water supply, a sanitation system, and irrigation to increase efficiency and recover costs as well. Meanwhile, the tourism sector is gaining more revenues, and also leads to more job opportunity, developing the region, extending relationships with other countries and introducing the Region's culture to those who visit. Regarding trade and industry, the World Bank is said to start a program to assist the KRG Ministry of Trade and Industry to implement some of these projects to grow this sector effectively, especially projects for improving trademarks, intellectual property, industrial zones, State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs) and related issues.

---

<sup>11</sup> Security Council, UN. *UN Security Council: Resolution 1483 (2003)*. 2003. Accessed July 20, 2017. <https://www.iaea.org/sites/default/files/unsc1483.pdf>.

<sup>12</sup> Macrotrends. "Crude Oil Prices- 70 Year Historical Chart". Macrotrends. NA. Accessed July 20, 2017. <http://www.macrotrends.net/1369/crude-oil-price-history-chart>.

<sup>13</sup> World Bank Group. *Kurdistan Region of Iraq: Reforming the Economy for Shared Prosperity and Protecting the Vulnerable*. 2016.

Due to the large public sector, private sector development should also be subject to focus. In 2014, 53 percent of the total labor force was under the public-sector umbrella.<sup>14</sup> This fact alone shows that the KRG should take further steps towards establishing a vibrant private sector. The largest problem is the mismatch between available skills and private sector needs. The KRG can provide services such as training, seminars and opening new faculties in universities in order to fill these gaps in the future.

According to a joint report prepared and published by the KRG and the World Bank Group titled “Assessing the Economic and Social Impact of the Syrian Conflict and ISIS” in 2015, the stabilization cost for the KRG in regards to IDPs and Syrian refugees equals 1.4 billion dollars for the baseline scenario (IDPs number 1,003,300 individuals and Syrian refugees number 225,000 individuals), 1.8 billion dollars for the low-case scenario (250,000 more IDPs and 30,000 more refugees) and 2.5 billion dollars for the high-case scenario (500,000 more IDPs and 100,000 more refugees). The study analyzed both the macroeconomic and sectoral approaches. The stabilization assessment covers two main pillars: human development and infrastructure. The first pillar includes health, education, food security and agriculture, poverty and shelter sectors. The second pillar is comprised of electricity, transport, solid waste management, and water sectors.

Preliminary estimates show that these crises have direct impacts on all types of investment. Despite declining foreign direct investment (FDI), the vast majority of investment projects in this region were hit hard by the economic crises. These infrastructure projects, which reach 4,000 projects, are no longer funded by the KRG due to the fiscal deficit. The process of non-funding led to high debts towards contractors and investors. This, in turn, led to lost jobs at the same time when poverty was increasing amongst the people of the Kurdistan Region. According to the latest data from the Kurdistan Region Statistics Office (KRSO) the poverty rate had risen to 14 percent from 3.8 percent before the humanitarian crises.

To counter the economic crisis in this part of the world, many steps have been taken. The reforms were announced by the Kurdistan Region Presidency (KRP) on February 10, 2016. This laid the first stone to begin implementing steps gradually, which cut a long way towards a stable financial status. Joint efforts between the KRG Ministry of Planning, the World

---

<sup>14</sup> World Bank Group. *Kurdistan Region of Iraq: Reforming the Economy for Shared Prosperity and Protecting the Vulnerable*. 2016. p. 7.

Bank and the United Nations (UN) resulted in the launching of an economic reform roadmap on May 30, 2016. The plan focused on fiscal consolidation, structural reforms to strengthen private sector sustainability and inclusiveness, mitigation on the impacts and social sector reforms, accountability, and judicial oversight.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, this roadmap was scheduled for an implementation period of three years. It is also important to mention many other projects produced under the implementation process, including the new procurement regulation Social Protection Strategic Framework (SPSF), Funding Facility for Economic Roadmap (FFER), oil revenue via external audit companies (conducted by Deloitte, and Ernest and Young), biometric system for KRG's payroll, electricity reform plan, Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), among others.

In the light of the reform plan KRG announced, Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) also play an important role for the new public procurements regulation. PPP refers to a contractual arrangement between two parties, government and private sector so as to provide public assets, public services and infrastructure.

## **Conclusion**

The inflow of IDPs and refugees, the unanticipated budget cuts by Baghdad, Peshmerga fighting against the most dangerous terrorist group in the world, and a global drop in oil prices persuaded the KRG to borrow 1.5 billion dollars from International Oil Companies (IOCs) and another 1.5 billion dollars from internal private sector companies. The KRG began to cut wages and salaries in January 2016, but at the same time, the government promised to pay back unpaid wage bills of public employees.<sup>16</sup>

By improving its budgetary process through economic diversification while also carrying out austerity measures, the KRG can once again grow its economy. This can be achieved through implementing the KRG Vision 2020 roadmap and suggestions proposed by the World Bank Group. The KRI is rich in natural resources, has many agricultural lands, consists of a young population, is along an important trade route, and offers a secure environment. If the Kurdistan Region finally gains its long-deserved right to self-determination, the new state could easily overcome the current fiscal issues. Furthermore, independence would allow it to sell oil at the

---

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

global oil price, issue a new currency, control its monetary policy, issue bonds and trade on international markets, receive loans from international agencies, and accept more from donor countries for its care of IDPs and refugees. KRI's right to independence has been long overdue; it is time, now more than ever, for the KRI to become an independent state.

## Chapter 13

# Oil, Iraq, and the Creation of Nation-State: The Kurdistan Region at a Crossroads

*Kamal Y. Kolo*

This chapter examines the role of oil in creating the Iraqi state in the years 1920–32 following World War I (WWI) and the fall and subsequent disintegration of the Ottoman Empire. The article also sheds light on the creation of a nation-state in Iraqi Kurdistan, with an economy based on oil, the war against ISIS, and its aftermath. We argue that the discovery of oil in the then-Ottoman controlled region was a major driving force behind the creation of a sovereign state of Iraq. Iraq, bound by its current geography is only a reflection of its oil reserves rather than a nation-state<sup>1,2</sup> with causal factors inherent to its original creation where Kurdistan stands out as an ethnic-historical-geographical anomaly against the more homogenous ethnic-history and geography Arab Iraq; instead, it is an artificial state bound by the wealth-interests of international powers. Thus, Iraqi natural resources have been a curse rather than a blessing to this country. Iraq stands as an example of a rentier state in its worst form. Therefore, the current Iraq is only a *de jure* state; its territorial sovereignty relies heavily on the interests of internal political factions (sectarian, tribal and ethnic), its neighbors, and the international community. Most importantly, the central government, has lost its *de facto* power to govern since 2003. Iraq, by all norms, is a quasi-failed state; it is a state downgraded to its original elements of tribe-religion structure. The territorial disintegra-

---

<sup>1</sup> Iraq creation as a state is so artificial that it neither fits the nation-state *sensu* Ernest Renan, 1882: “What is a nation?” (In: Ernest Renan, *Qu'est-ce qu'une nation*), Epub, Éditions Mille et une nuits, 1997. Paris. p. 62., Nor Benedict Anderson model in *Imagined Communities* (Benedict Anderson, 1983: *Imagined Communities, Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Verso, Revised Edit (2006), p. 240)

<sup>2</sup> Iraq might represent a unique modern case of a state where it more represented at time of its formation a “*micro-empire*” ruled by a King composed of Arabs, Kurds, Turkmens, Yezidis, Armenians and Chaldo-Assyrians in a Sunnite-Shiite, Christians (Roman-Catholics, Orthodox, Jacobites, Nestorians, Protestants) Yezidis, Baha'is, and Zoroastrians, a miniature replica of the Ottoman Empire. The choice of an “Arab King” (King Faisal I<sup>st</sup>) even though a stranger to Iraqis, satisfied the spiritual-soul criterion of Renan (1882) for a Nation State. It also bound the “Micro-Empire” together. However, with the 1958 coup d'état and formation of a republic, the “micro-empire” started the path of disintegration towards its elemental composition, in spite of being held together by brutal force.

tion is real and factual. In contrast, the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) portrays a different image from Iraq because it did not experience a top-down nation-building process. Instead, it has demanded its sovereignty more than a century ago, at the San Remo and Cairo conferences 1920 and 1921, respectively. Nevertheless, Iraqi Kurdistan can learn a lesson from Iraq: oil should only serve as a tool for economic development, not as a means to uphold the state. The recent drastic decline in oil prices brought severe economic consequences in an oil-dependent country, Iraq as whole and Kurdistan. The modern history Iraq 1920–2017, stands a witness of economic under development and a war-ridden society where in lack of adequate versatile economy set the country back to poverty. Kurdistan could enormously benefit from Iraq worst mistakes and best economic successes of countries that were not “lured” into the “Dutch Disease”<sup>3</sup> syndrome.

## The Creation of the Iraqi State

The two defining moments in Iraqi history are: 1) The creation of the Iraqi state in 1920–1932 by the British Empire, and 2) the disentanglement of that very state following the U.S.-led invasion in 2003. Under the influence of the 14 principles of self-determination declared by U.S. President Woodrow Wilson and the recreation of the Westphalian sovereignty principle,<sup>4</sup> Great Britain accepted the League of Nations award of a mandate for Iraq, Palestine, Transjordan, and Kurdistan. France did the same for Syria and Lebanon.<sup>5</sup> The two colonialist powers, through that international mandate have indeed fulfilled the Sykes-Picot agreement, which they

---

<sup>3</sup> See for complete analysis: W. Max Corden and J. Peter Neary (1982) Booming Sector and De-Industrialisation in a Small Open Economy *The Economic Journal* Vol. 92, No. 368 (Dec., 1982), pp. 825–848

<sup>4</sup> In reference to the 1648 Peace treaties of Münster and Osnabrück cities in Westphalia to end the Thirty Years War (1618–1648) between the Holy Roman Empire (future state of Germany) on one side and France and Sweden on the other (see: Derek Croxton, 2013: *Westphalia, The Last Christian Peace*. Palgrave MacMillan, US, 2013, p. 452) As a consequence to the peace, a new conception of international law based on the principle that all states had an equal right to self-determination which was embodied in U.S. president Woodrow Wilson fourteen points (see below).

<sup>5</sup> The Mandate System was established according to article 22 of the Covenant (1919) of the League of Nations (1920) by the victorious allied countries in the aftermath of WWI. The system entrusted the “tutelage” of the people of the “conquered” territories to the advanced nations (see para. 2/article 22 of the Covenant) en lieu of colonial annexation or direct governance such that the people of those territories will eventually, under the mandatory powers, establish their own independent “nation-states.” According to Article 22 of the

signed in 1916 regarding the division and control of the non-Turkish Ottoman territories (fig. X Sykes-picot map). By accepting the mandate, as a form of governance and administration of conquered territories by a colonialist power, with this unprecedented action, Britain departed from its imperialistic policy of annexing conquered territories.

The modern nation-state system found its mature expression at the end of the First World War in U.S. President Woodrow Wilson's famous 'Fourteen Points' based on the principle of national self-determination. But his assumption that all forms of national identity should be given their territorial expression in a sovereign 'nation-state' proved to be extremely difficult to enforce in practice.<sup>6</sup>

Iraqi political elites, tribal Sheikhs, clergy, and the general populace, though divided, all considered the mandate very offensive. The wording of mandate (article 22 of the covenant) and its Arabic translation (or mis-translation) conveyed the meaning of "guardianship" that inflamed the Iraqi society against the mandate and the British presence as mandatory authority.<sup>7,8</sup> Growing nationalism amongst the urban populations of Iraq became the major influence driving British policy after 1920. The organization of mass protest against the Mandate in Iraq, and the resentment of the term itself by the urban educated classes, meant that from 1923 onwards the British had to further redefine their policy,<sup>9</sup> which eventually led to the replacement of the mandate system by a treaty of alliance in

---

Covenant and the different mandate agreements the previous non-Turkish Ottoman territories: "Iraq "Mesopotamia", Palestine, Transjordan, and Kurdistan" on one part and "Syria and Lebanon" on the other were classified as A mandates (article 22 paras. 4-6) and came under the British and French mandatory powers respectively. The A, B, C Mandate classification referred to different stages of cultural, political and economic development of the dependent territories. (See e.g. Nele Matz, 1995, *Civilization and the Mandate System under the League of Nations as Origin of Trusteeship*. In A. Bogdandy and R. Wolfrum: *Max Planck Yearbook of United Nations Law*, vol. 9, January 2005, pp. 47-95; Pitman B. Potter (1922). *Origin of the System of Mandates under the League of Nations*. *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 16, No. 4 (Nov., 1922), pp. 563-583 Published by: American Political Science Association: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1943638>. Accessed: June 8, 2017.).

<sup>6</sup> Manfred B. Steger (2003) *Globalization: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press, p. 147.

<sup>7</sup> Sir Percy Cox: *Historical Summaries* pp. 502-41: In Gertrude Bell (1927) *The Letters of Gertrude Bell*. Ninth impression, February 1928. Ernest Benn Limited, London, p. 791.

<sup>8</sup> Ali Al-Wardi, 1976. *Lamahat Ijtimayya min Tarikh al Iraq Al Hadith*. Hawla Thawrat Al-Ishrin, pp. 101-102.

<sup>9</sup> Toby Dodge (2003). *Inventing Iraq. The Failure of Nation Building and a History Denied*. Columbia University Press, New York, p. 260.

1922–23<sup>10</sup>. The treaty itself (article VI) paved the way to Iraq independence and admission to the League of Nations in 1932.

The widely spread military insurrection in July 1920 against the British authorities engulfed most of the rural and urban parts of Iraqi. The armed rebellion (named “The Great Iraqi Revolution” by Iraqi historians) that lasted until December 1921 was only put down at a very high human and material cost to the British.

Despite the tumultuous Iraqi-British relations, especially during the state formation years (1920–32)<sup>11</sup>, Still the British succeeded in creating the Kingdom of Iraq (1921–58) out of an ethnically and religiously heterogeneous society that comprised Arabs, Kurds, Turkmen, Assyrians and Armenians within a variety of religions: Muslims (Shiites and Sunnites), Christians, Jews, Sabaeens and Yezidis. This region, ever since the establishment of the Abbasid Caliphate in Baghdad in 762 AC, was plagued by internal and external wars. The internal Arab and Kurdish tribal wars, Ottoman-Persian wars,<sup>12</sup> which were at their core Sunnites-Shiites sectarian wars, and the many major Iraqi wars<sup>13</sup> of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, have contributed to the shaping of the Iraqi society based on sectarian and ethnic divides.<sup>14</sup> Those wars of the last four centuries of its modern history, Ottoman and Iraqi, are only a reflection of that heterogeneity.<sup>15,16</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Signed in 1922, but only formally ratified by the Iraqi Constituent Assembly in 1924. In 1923 Abdul-Muhsin al Saadon, the then Iraqi Prime Minister added a protocole that shortened the 20-year treaty to four years.

<sup>11</sup> The British occupation administration in Iraq faced a very tribal, multi-ethnic and sectarian heterogeneous society plagued by internal tribal wars during the last four centuries of its modern history. Wars that were exacerbated by shiite-sunnite divides, former Ottoman-Persian wars, Arab-Kurdish divide, Kurdish aspirations, Turkish claims on Mosul province, and the strong rise of the Iraqi Nationalism against the British occupation and mandate for the first time after the 1920 rebellion.

<sup>12</sup> The ancient Iraq under the Ottoman Empire rule (1534-1920) was the war zone between the Ottomans and the Iranians ruling dynasties (1501-1722) for nearly three centuries (1514-1743).

<sup>13</sup> In reference to the Iraqi-Kurdish war (1975), the Iraqi-Iranian war (1980-198), the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait (1990), the Iraqi- Coalition war (1991), the Invasion of Iraq (2003), the Al-Qaida war (2005-2009), and the ongoing ISIS war (2014-). The list is even longer if we add the many internal wars.

<sup>14</sup> The Shiite-Sunni divide is vividly relived every year since the killing of “Al-Hussein ibn Ali Ibn Abi Talib,” the grandson of prophet Mohammad, at the hands of the Sunnite (Umayyad) army in 680 A.C in the battle of Karbala, Iraq.

<sup>15</sup> See Stephen H. Longrigg (1925) *Four Centuries of Modern Iraq*. Reprinted by Garnet Pub., Reading, UK (2002).

<sup>16</sup> See Ali Al-Wardi (1969-1975), *Lamabat Ijtimaya min tarikh al Iraq al hadith* (vol. 1-7). Reprinted by Kuffan Pub., London (1999).

In this context, many political and historic schools of thought consider modern Iraq an “artificial state,”<sup>17</sup> Great Britain’s creation in 1920 from a vastly heterogeneous group of people (thus, the principle of nation-state simply does not hold). The modern map of Iraq is artificially drawn according to the Sykes-Picot agreement<sup>18</sup> and generally the map of 1916 (figures 1 and 2). A similar mindset was revisited following the 2003 invasion of Iraq, namely, by reducing the Iraqi state into three basic elements: Shiites, Sunnites and Kurds. In 2014, Goldberg<sup>19</sup> published a map of the new fragmented Middle East, stating, “I don’t think it is worth American money, or certainly American lives, to keep Iraq a unitary state [...] Westphalian obsessiveness—Iraq must stay together because it must stay together—just does not seem wise.”

In similar fashion, though more cautiously, George Friedman and Jacob L. Shapiro (2017) also published a redrawn map of the present Middle East, stating, “this map is explicitly not trying to make a political statement. Rather, it is an attempt to show who holds power over what geography in the Middle East. From this point of view, Syria, Iraq, Yemen, and Libya do not exist anymore. In their places are smaller warring statelets based on ethnic, national, and sectarian identities.”<sup>20</sup> The prediction is that the next phase in Middle Eastern geopolitical development is the emergence of real Westphalian-Weberian states, creating established, recognized, and demarcated borders.<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup> Such ideas especially appeared after 1991, following the war of liberation of Kuwait, enforcement of 32°-parallel non-fly zone south of Iraqi Kurdistan, but strongly became established and accepted after the fall of the baathist regime in 2003. See e.g. Guiditta Fontana (2010) *Creating Nations, Establishing States: Ethno-Religious Heterogeneity and the British Creation of Iraq in 1919–23*, *Middle Eastern Studies*, 46:1, 1–16, DOI: 10.1080/00263200902760535; and Sara Pursley (2015) ‘Lines Drawn on an Empty Map’: Iraq’s Borders and the Legend of the Artificial State (part 1 and 2); Jeffrey Goldberg (2008), *After Iraq*. *The Atlantic*, January/February 2008 issue; and David Fromkin (1989) *A Peace to End All Peace: The Fall of the Ottoman Empire and the Creation of the Modern Middle East*, Henry Holt and Company, LLC, New York, p. 672.

<sup>18</sup> For text of the agreement see: [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th\\_century/sykes.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/sykes.asp). For a review and analysis see Marina, Ottaway, 2015, *Learning from Sykes-Picot*. Wilson Center, Middle East Program, Occasional Paper Series. Fall 2015, pp. 2–11.

<sup>19</sup> Jeffrey Goldberg (2014): *The new Map of the Middle East*. <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2014/06/the-new-map-of-the-middle-east/373080/>

<sup>20</sup> George Friedman and Jacob L. Shapiro (2017): retrieved: <http://www.mauldin-economics.com/this-week-in-geopolitics/the-geopolitics-of-2017-in-4-maps>

<sup>21</sup> William Zartman (2017) *States, boundaries and sovereignty in the Middle East: unsteady but unchanging*. *International Affairs* 93: 4 (2017) 937–948; doi: 10.1093/ia/iix118. Retrieved: [https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/files/chathamhouse/publications/ia/INTA93\\_4\\_10\\_Zartman.pdf](https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/files/chathamhouse/publications/ia/INTA93_4_10_Zartman.pdf)

The modern history of Arab countries, beginning with the independence from colonial powers (Great Britain and France), shows a strong tendency by the Arab-Muslim majority to oppress ethnic and religious minorities, particularly in North Africa and the eastern Arab countries (Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan). This stems from the idea that Arab nationalism and Islam are being challenged by non-Arab or non-Muslim minorities, and that Arabism and Arab language are elevated in comparison.

The Arab Nationalist movement created at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Syria and Lebanon, as a response to Ottoman occupation of those lands and as opposition to the Young Turks<sup>22</sup> was predominately the work of Christian thinkers in both countries. The Christian intellectuals considered Arabism and the Arab language a pan-Arab ideology that could bind both Christians and Muslims together against the Ottoman occupier. In fact, the Christians thinkers considered themselves belong to a majority through their ethnicity, and not a minority because of their religion.<sup>23,24,25</sup>

Thus, Arab nationalism brought the ideology of a society dominated by Arabs and the Arabic language. This ideology developed a statehood mechanism that manifested itself through popular revolutions (Egypt, 1919, Iraq 1920), sequenced *coup d'états* in Syria, Iraq, and Egypt, and Libya; these were the countries where this nationalist ideology was most-

<sup>22</sup> A socio-political opposition movement and its organization “Jamiyyat al-Itihad wa-Terakki (Committee of Union and Progress, CUP), during sultan AbdulHamid II reign (1876-1909) that played major role in the late 19th and early 20th centuries political events in the Ottoman Empire from 1889-1918, that led to the establishment of a constitutional government in Istanbul; military Revolution in 1908 and the restoration of the constitution of 1876. In 1914, CUP leaders Talat Pasa, Jemal Pasa and Enver Pasa pushed the Ottoman Empire into its final demise by entering WWI. The CUP leadership, though started with ideology in 1902 with “Freedom, Fraternity, Equality” as a slogan of its first conference in Paris, as a reformist, progressive and liberal movement for all ottoman subjects, it drastically shifted during the war towards committing genocidal war crimes against Armenians and Assyrians in Eastern Anatolia. (see Hasan Kayali, 1997 *Arabs and Young Turks: Ottomanism, Arabism, and Islamism in the Ottoman Empire, 1908–1910*. University of California Press; Hasan Kayali. 22 Jun 2012, *The Young Turks And the Committee of Union and Progress from: The Routledge Handbook Of Modern Turkey*. Routledge. Accessed on: 10 Aug 2017)

<sup>23</sup> See Arabic nationalism pioneers such as George Antonius (1939): *The Arabs awakening*. J.B Lippincott Company. Philadelphia. 471p.; Sati’ Al-Husri (1880-1968) works on Arab nationalism (in Arabic); and Constantin Zureiq (1909-2000) works e.g. *Nahnu w-al Tarikh (We and History, 1959)*.

<sup>24</sup> Cleveland, William L.: *The making of an Arab nationalist. Ottomanism and Arabism in the life and thought of Sati’ al-Husri*. Princeton, N.J. 1971.

<sup>25</sup> On the question of Arab Nationalism as presented by Al-Husri, see: Kenny, L.M., (1963): Sati’ Al-Husri’s Views on Arab Nationalism. *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 17, No. 3, p. 231-256

deeply rooted, and power was held by nationalist military leadership.<sup>26</sup> Ethnic and religious minorities (Mostly Christians, but also Jews in Iraq,<sup>27</sup> Egypt and Syria) that faced political, religious, social and cultural marginalization and persecution during the Ottoman period which also continued during the state formation in the Arab countries had no option but to adopt Arabic and Arabism as substitute to their acceptance in new pan-Arabic nationalism.

The vacuum following the British and French failure of creating a Westphalian—or rather Pseudo-Westphalian model, was filled by the Arab nationalist ideology and military dictatorships that created political systems under the umbrella of Arabism. Actually, the very formation of Arab League Organization in 1945<sup>28</sup> is a reflection of that ideology. The non-Arabs and non-Muslims had practically no civil or political rights under that ideology.<sup>29,30</sup> In fact, the existence of racist attitudes within some Arab countries is often denied, resulting in scandalous displays of prejudice against certain ethnic groups such as the Alawites, Armenians, Assyrians, Baha'is, Berbers, Chaldeans, Copts, Druzes, Ibadis, Ismailis, Jews, Kurds, Maronites, Sahrawis, Tuareq, Turkmen, Yazidis and Zaidis. This made a serious discussion on ethnic and religious diversity and its place in society a long-standing taboo.<sup>31</sup>

However, the nationalistic pan-Arabic unity project failed drastically. Both the ideology and its proponents became obsolete and their credibility with young Arab generations is no longer viable. The fall of Arabism, ide-

---

<sup>26</sup> The case of Iraq, 1942, 1958, 1963, 1964, 1968; Egypt 1920, 1952; Syria 1949, 1954, 1961, 1963, 1966, 1970.

<sup>27</sup> See e.g. Ghunaimah, Yusuf Rizq Allah, 1924, *Nuzbat Al Musbtaq Fi Tarikh Yabud Al Iraq* (History of the Jews of Iraq), Al-Furat Press, Baghdad, p.224. Also, the works of the prolific Iraqi Jewish writer Mir Basri (1911-2006).

<sup>28</sup> The Arab League Organisation (in arabic: Jami'at a-dawal al Arabiyya), was established in Cairo (1945) initially from six arab states : Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Yemen to seek and coordinate political, economic and cultural integration of the Arab member states in the Middle East. The organisation currently holds the membership of 22 arab countries. Though the Arab League has played a major role in the politics Arab-Israeli conflict in the past, it is now quasi-paralysed due to deep fractures between most arab countries.

<sup>29</sup> Rayyan al-Shawaf (2006) *The Foolishness of imposing Oppressive Arab Nationalism on Non-Arabs*. Retrieved: <https://web.archive.org/web/20110703075400/http://www.christiansofiraq.com/ArabismMar236.html>

<sup>30</sup> Fares, Walid: *The Arab Christians*. Retrieved <http://www.arabicbible.com/for-christians/christians/1396-arab-christians-introduction.html>

<sup>31</sup> Whitaker Brian (2006) The Race Taboo. *The Guardian*, September 8, 2006. Retrieved <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2006/sep/08/racisminthemiddleeast>

ology and its major advocates as a political instrument and ideology in Syria, Egypt, Libya, Iraq, Yemen and Jordan, led to the collapse of the whole Arabic National Project.<sup>32</sup> Islamic ideology and Islamists, crossing over borders, nations and ethnicities, filled the void. The Arab unity which the Arab nationality proponents could not achieve, the Islamists, based on the school of thought of the Muslim Brotherhood, proposed new solutions to the Muslim countries' problems, with the main idea of Islam being the solution. The Salafis, Wahabis, and Sofis (i.e., the traditional Islamists from all the four main Sunni sects in Islam), in addition to the Shiites, found themselves leading and orchestrating the fate of Muslim countries under the banner of Islam.

The minorities found themselves trapped, because contrary to Arabism, which can be implemented by simply adopting the language and culture—Islamism requires religious minorities to convert to Islam. Unsurprisingly, a great suppression of religions, mainly against Christians and Yezidis. The disintegration of the pan-Arab project and Arabism, which started with the triumph of the Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979 as a substitute to the nationalist/secular ideologies in Iran as well as in other Arab countries, and rise of Islamic jihad in Afghanistan against the Soviets, received its major blow with the invasion of Kuwait 1990 by Saddam Hussein, and the consequent war of liberation by a U.S.-led coalition. The Iraqi dictatorship, a major proponent of Arabism, realized the consequences and in order to adapt, a programmed campaign of societal Islamization was started, encompassing the media, education, and political rhetoric. The social upheaval in Iraq following the invasion in 2003 was manifested through sectarian wars, persecution of minorities, and above all, the beginning of organized terrorism, led by Al-Qaida. This drastic social change, with the Islamic component of it, was the result of 13 years of state-sponsored religious indoctrination between 1990–2003.

Islamic political-Jihadist groups, the Muslim Brotherhood (“Islam Is the Solution” slogan) and ISIS (the Muslim Caliphate) failed, similarly to Arabism ideologies, to cross borders and ethnicities in order to create a new unified Muslim world in the Middle East. Their major downfall was

---

<sup>32</sup> The fall of Pan-Arab nationalist regimes: Iraq (2003), Syria (2000), Libya (2011), Yemen (2011) and Egypt (1970) and/or death of the Arab nationalism leaders: Jamal Abdul Nasir (Egypt), Saddam Hussain (Iraq), Al-Aqddafi (Libya), Hafid Al-Assad (syria) led to the gradual corrosion of arabs people belief in Arab Nationalism and in the political parties holding pan-arab nationalism ideologies. The disintegration of the project is vividly seen in the current arab-arab military conflicts, internally and regionally.

in Egypt (2015) and Iraq (2017). The Arab Spring (2010–12) gave Islamic political movements a strong platform to promote their socio-political agendas, with some political successes in Egypt (Mohammad Mursi: Muslim Brotherhood president 2012–13), Tunisia (Al-Nahdha Islamic Party), and military jihadists militias insurgencies in Syria, Libya, Yemen and Iraq.<sup>33</sup> The socially, politically and geographically fragmented Middle East, plagued by internal wars, is nothing but a product of combined failures of nationalist ideologies.

### **Iraqi Kurdistan after Arab Nationalism and Islamism**

The fall of the Ba'athist regime in Iraq in 2003 also brought the formal end of the pan-Arab project led by the Arab Nationalists since Iraq's independence in 1932 with the goal to Arabize Iraqi people, in terms of language, culture, history and geography<sup>34</sup> enhancing the ethnical diversity of Iraq. Thus, the Kurds in Kurdistan, Assyrians-Chaldeans, Turkmen, Yezidis in Kurdistan and all over Iraq found a new voice that asserted their ethnicity, culture and roots to geography and history in the new political system in Iraq.

The Islamic project in Iraq was polarized around the Arabs Shiites and the Sunnites. The Shiites from the Iranian pan-Shiite unity, and the Salafi-Wahabi Muslim Brotherhood, mainly led by Saudi Arabia, in the Sunni Arabs regions. The sectarian clash between the two factions from 2003 up to the present day produced a geographic sectarian divide that separated Shiites regions, cities, quarters, and neighborhoods from each other. Today, Baghdad is stark example of these neighborhood divisions. However, the sectarian war between the Shiite and Sunnis was unable to infiltrate the Kurdistan political system or society. Thus, even though the majority of the population in Kurdistan is Sunni, the KRI remained immune to sectarian conflict. Because of this, the Kurdistan Region was able to achieve remarkable stability with its social and ethnic structure remaining intact.

---

<sup>33</sup> For causes of political and Jihadist Islam failure see Ashraf El-Sharif (2011) *Islamism after the Arab Spring*. *Current History*, 2011; *Ashraf El-Sharif (2014): The Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood's Failures*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace; Shadi Hamid, William McCants and Rashid Dar (2017) *Islamism After the Arab Spring: Between The Islamic State and the Nation-State*, Center for Middle East Policy at Brookings, 2017.

<sup>34</sup> Ironically, the Ba'ath regime initiated a project of re-writing the history of Iraq since the 1970s. The project was led by Iraqi historian Ahmad Susa who tried to historicize the pre-Islamic history of Iraq as an Arabic history and culture. See e.g., Ahmad Susa (1986) *The Civilization of Mesopotamia* (in Arabic), Al-Huriyya printing House, Baghdad 1986. p. 420.

In June 2014, ISIS launched a surprise attack on Iraq, overrunning its second major city, Mosul and expanded rapidly by occupying other Christian, Yezidi, and Kurdish villages, in addition to Sunni Arab cities and territories. The banner under which ISIS declared its military expansion was the creation of an Islamic Caliphate. ISIS opened a front against the Kurdistan Region by rerouting its southwest campaign towards attacking its capital, Erbil.

Opening a front against Kurdistan, although inexplicable on military and political grounds, is intelligible under different criteria. The only reason that stands out among the prevailing turmoil in the region is the Kurdish leadership's call for a referendum on independence and the establishment of the first nation-state of Kurdistan. A strong, diverse yet stable state of Kurdistan would be anathema to IS—an inimical foil to their vision of a metastasizing, totalitarian caliphate. When the pieces of this jumbled jigsaw of conflict are placed together, the picture that emerges will reveal that the objective of this assault on Kurdistan is to draw Kurdistan into a war of attrition, to drain its capabilities and divert its pursuit of independence. The history of the Middle East offers many examples of such wars of attrition that have destroyed economies and halted development.<sup>35</sup>

After the territorial expansion of ISIS in Iraq, Syria and Libya, and now with its visible defeat, the question of why ISIS attacked Kurdistan must be asked again. The answer lies in an extreme Islamic ideology, based on a mixture of Wahabi and Muslim Brotherhood beliefs, which in turn are the source of Al-Qaida ideology, following a strict interpretation of the teachings of Ibn Taymyyah.<sup>36</sup> Both Al-Qaida and the Muslim Brotherhood thought are deeply entrenched in the belief of a re-creation of an Islamic Caliphate. In essence, they did not depart from ISIS in that ultimate goal. Al-Qaida and the Muslim Brotherhood have[C1] a vast network of clergies, religious schools, and mosques to spread their beliefs and to recruit followers. Terrorism was a way to destabilize countries and to overthrow political systems. ISIS kept the idea of having social-religious networks,

<sup>35</sup> Kamal Kolo, Muslih Mustafa and Tyler Fisher (2014) Islamic State has united Kurds in a national war of survival. *The Conversation* December, 2014.

<sup>36</sup> Ibn Taymyya (1263-1328) a Muslim theologian whose interpretations of Quran and Sunna had greatly influenced and directed religious thought in contemporary Islamic thought through religious movements of Wahabism, Jihadism and Salafism. All three have formed the basis of Al-Qaida, Muslim Brotherhood and ISIS ideology.

but in they were also able to gain territory by attacking cities and people, thus achieving physical instruments of a “Caliphate State.” This Caliphate is inclusive of all Muslim territories; hence, the KRI, with its majority Muslim population is an Islamic territory and was to be attached to the Caliphate. By attacking the Kurds, an ethnically homogenous nation but with a different race, and historically and culturally vastly different from Arabs, ISIS made its worst mistake that brought it to its downfall.

## **Oil, Iraq and an Independent KRI**

Iraq, as a whole, contains enormous oil reserves, with estimates ranging from 149 billion barrels<sup>37</sup> to up to 200 billion barrels.<sup>38</sup> The different estimates reflect uncertainties originating from large unexplored areas, considering that the oil industry largely took off after 2003. The Kurdistan Region quickly developed an exploration, production and service infrastructure for the emerging industry. Major international oil companies, such as Exxon Mobil, Gulf Keystone, DNO, Genel Energy, KAR Group and TAQA and others, invested heavily in the construction. The total projected oil production from KRI oil fields (at the end of 2016) was 712,100 b/d<sup>39</sup> and up to 20 bcm/y of gas in 2020.<sup>40</sup> The Kurdistan Region is emerging as an important oil and gas player in the region and is currently a supplier to neighboring Turkey and Iran through pipelines that extend through Turkey and Baghdad and possibly to Iran.<sup>41,42</sup>

Iraqi decision makers in the central government, irrespective of the political regime, always made the strategic connection between oil and natural resources wealth and the possible secession of Kurdistan from Iraq in case natural resources were discovered in Kurdistan region. Mosul, the oil rich province, and with it major parts of Kurdistan, became part of the

---

<sup>37</sup> OPEC annual Statistical Bulletin (2017). Proven crude oil reserves by country, p. 26.

<sup>38</sup> Gal Luft (2003) How Much Oil Does Iraq Have? Brookings Report retrieved: <https://www.brookings.edu/research/how-much-oil-does-iraq-have/>

<sup>39</sup> Patrick Osgood, New Investment revives modest hopes for KRG oil sector,” *Iraqi Oil Report*, May 18, 2016.

<sup>40</sup> John Roberts (2016) *Iraqi Kurdistan Oil and Gas Outlook*. Atlantic Council, Global Energy Center and Dinu Patriciu Eurasia Center

<sup>41</sup> <http://mnr.krg.org/index.php/en/media-center/publications/9-maps-and-data/232-pipeline-infrastructure>

<sup>42</sup> John Roberts (2016) *Iraqi Kurdistan Oil and Gas Outlook*. Atlantic Council, Global Energy Center and Dinu Patriciu Eurasia Center

new Iraq after the French government relinquished it to Iraq under British mandate of 1920.

During WWI, no progress could be made due to French's position. However, later on the French were ready to cooperate and negotiate. This was in the time when Iraqi oil were formulated and French were convinced that Mosul would not fall (as had been contemplated since 1916) to her mandated share of the Middle East, and at San Remo in 1920 a one-quarter share (that of the Deutsche Bank) was allotted to France. The 'Iraq/Turkish frontier question which left open by the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923 was fixed in the end by the League of Nations in 1926. The Mosul Vilayet was allotted to 'Iraq. However, Turkey was promised to receive, for 25 years, 10 percent of such royalties as might accrue to 'Iraq from oil within the Baghdad and Mosul Vilayets.<sup>43</sup>

By 1928, Iraqi oil was controlled by a consortium of companies, I.P.C (formerly Turkish Oil Company T.P.C), Francaise des Petroles, the Anglo-Saxon Petroleum Company and the D'Arcy Exploration Company, Standard Oil Company (New Jersey), Socony-Vacuum and Private investor Mr. C. S. Gulbenkian.

With well-established British and international strategic interests in the new Iraq, especially with the crucial role of oil for military needs during WWI, Iraq's fate was sealed as a zone of turmoil.

## Oil Politics Were Always There

The larger Kurdish nation was awarded self-determination by the Treaty of Sevres in 1920, and later neglected the promise in the treaty of Lausanne in 1923, but promised an autonomous status only in Iraqi Kurdistan.<sup>44</sup> Kurdistan was now included in its concession area of the old Bagdad Wilayat. The Mosul Wilayat, with parts of KRI earlier promised to France in the original Sykes\_Picot (see figure 1) agreement between Britain and France, became a part of the newly established State of Iraq. The "King-

<sup>43</sup> Handbook of the territories, which form the theatre of operations of the Iraqi Petroleum Company Limited and its associated companies. 1<sup>st</sup> edition, London, 1948. p.154.

<sup>44</sup> Guiditta Fontana (2010) Creating Nations, Establishing States: Ethno-Religious Heterogeneity and the British Creation of Iraq in 1919–23, *Middle Eastern Studies*, 46:1, 1-16, DOI: 10.1080/00263200902760535

**Figure 1. Map displaying the boundaries of territories allotted to France (Zone A) and Britain (Zone B) in the famous Sykes-Picot agreement (1916) between Britain and France. On the map appear also the signatures of Sir Mark Sykes and the French diplomat Francois George-Picot.<sup>45</sup>**



dom” of Iraq confirms the dictum that wars make states (Tilly, 1990).<sup>40,41</sup> The modern Iraq is a reflection of its oil wealth rather than a true nation-state. In addition, Iraq may fit into the argument made by Charles Tilly.

<sup>45</sup> [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:MPK1426\\_Sykes\\_Picot\\_Agreement\\_Map\\_signed\\_8May\\_1916.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:MPK1426_Sykes_Picot_Agreement_Map_signed_8May_1916.jpg)

<sup>46</sup> Tilly, Charles (1985) ‘War Making and State Making as Organized Crime’, In Peter Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer.

<sup>47</sup> Tilly, Charles (1990) *Coercion, Capital and European States, AD 990–1992*, Cambridge MA and Oxford UK: Blackwell.

Tilly wrote a book<sup>48</sup> focused entirely on coercion, capital and European States: AD 990–1990 and war making and state making as organized crime. Iraq, then a new post-war state, was solely formed on the basis of its oil wealth. Hence, the three *Wilayat* concessions (Baghdad, Basrah and Mosul) quickly showed signs of disintegration and political instability, typical of a rentier state. Therefore, causal factors inherent to its original creation as an “artificial state” (Even the monarch was brought in from outside Iraq) bound by greed and wealth interests rather than by nation binding factors resulted in a series of conflicts (in 1936, 1942, 1948, 1958, 1963, 1967, 1968, 1979–88, and 1990–2003). The famous dictum that “war makes states” revived in recent years with the experience of state collapse and state failure in many parts of the world.<sup>49,50</sup> Contemplating the previous ideas by Jeffrey Sachs and Andrew Warner,<sup>51</sup> the inevitable conclusion that, “It seems to be conventional wisdom that natural resources in general are a curse rather than a blessing.”<sup>52,53</sup> The current literature on the “resource curse” and the “paradox of plenty” has been linking resource abundance and dependence authoritarianism, economic decline, and civil war.<sup>54,55</sup>

## The Rentier State and Rentier Economy

H. Mahdavi (1970), H. Beblawi (1987, 1990) Luciani, (1987, 1990) argue that the main function of the state in rentier economies is to distribute rent (rather than extract revenues from the economy). Instead of

<sup>48</sup> Charles Tilly (1993): *Coercion, Capital and European States: AD 990–1992*. Wiley, p. 288.

<sup>49</sup> Tilly, Charles (1985) ‘War Making Op.Cit.

<sup>50</sup> Rolf Sewartz (2004) State Formation Processes in Rentier States: The Middle Eastern Case. Retrieved: <http://www.columbia.edu/itc/journalism/stille/Politics%20Fall%202007/Readings%20-%20Weeks%201-5/The%20Rentier%20State%20in%20the%20Middle%20East.pdf>

<sup>51</sup> Jeffrey, Sachs and Andrew, Warner (2001): Natural Resources and Economic Development The curse of natural resources. *European Economic Review* 45 (2001), pp. 827–838, Elsevier.

<sup>52</sup> Matthias Basedau and Wolfram Lacher (2006): A Paradox of Plenty? Rent Distribution and Political Stability in Oil States ([http://edoc.vifapol.de/opus/volltexte/2009/1582/pdf/wp21\\_basedau\\_lacher.pdf](http://edoc.vifapol.de/opus/volltexte/2009/1582/pdf/wp21_basedau_lacher.pdf)).

<sup>53</sup> Matthias Basedau and Jann Lay (2009): Resource Curse or Rentier Peace? The Ambiguous Effects of Oil Wealth and Oil Dependence on Violent Conflict. *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol 46, Issue 6, 2009. Pp. 757–776. Sage Publ.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid

<sup>55</sup> Karl, T.R (1999): The Perils of a Petro state: Reflections on the Paradox of Plenty.

providing capital for industrial development, Mahdavy (1970) argues that oil revenues produce “socio-political stagnation,” inequality in living standards, and weak political accountability. Essential reliance on rent may progressively downgrade state-structure quality, economic growth and democracy. Rent also provides ruling elites with vital resources through which to offset the indirect effects on stability (Beblawi, 1987; Karl, 1997). In rentier states then, various mechanisms interplay, through either motive and/or opportunity.<sup>56</sup>

The United Nations annual report on the Iraqi economy showed in 2013 that the Iraqi economy is dominated by the oil industry which contributes to over 70 percent of GDP, 99 percent of exports, and over 95 percent of government revenue. This domination of oil will increase in the future, as oil production and exports are set to rise.<sup>57</sup> In 2017, the World Bank draws a grim picture of oil-dependent Iraq:

The Iraqi economy is facing severe challenges. The decline in oil prices in 2015 and 2016 and the ISIS insurgency have contributed to a sharp deterioration of economic activity and has rapidly increased the fiscal and current account deficits. Macroeconomic risks remain elevated due to Iraq’s exposure to a volatile oil market [...] The double shock has severely dented growth, diverted resources away from productive investment, and increased poverty, vulnerability and unemployment. Private consumption and investment remain subdued due to an unstable security and political situation, and a poor business environment.<sup>58</sup>

This characterization of the Iraqi economy can be applied to many periods of its modern history, where a series of civil-regional wars combined with a rentier economy have led to setbacks similar to a sine function, always returning back to point zero.

---

<sup>56</sup> Karl, T.R (1999): *The Perils of a Petro state: Reflections on the Paradox of Plenty*. p. 2

<sup>57</sup> Joint analysis and policy unit (Japu): (2013) *Iraq Oil and Gas Outlook*. United Nations Iraq.

<sup>58</sup> World Bank (2017): *Overview, Iraq*. Retrieved <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/iraq/overview#1>

## Rentierism In Iraq vs. Political System

Except for the short period between 1920–50, where the economy was still agricultural and commerce dependent, Iraq's political system and economy after 1950 became heavily dependent on rents generated by oil. The establishment of Majlis Al-Imar al-Aala<sup>59</sup> in 1950 for infrastructure construction projects underlined this shift, and oil revenues became a centric part in the government budget for economic development. Ironically, the major economic projects in Iraq, which formed the present infrastructure were either realized during the 1950s or planned at that time.

The direct consequences of the newly formed rentier state, still not a complete rentier economy, were the degradation of the political representation and of the fragile democracy that existed during the monarchy. This post-1950 period was the continuation of the political instability and turmoil during the mid-1930s and 1940s that culminated in the 1958 *coup d'état*, signaling a drastic change in the Iraqi political system from the monarchy into a republic by military force. The main driving forces for the instability were the Arabic nationalist-socialist ideology and its economic manifestation of a petro-wealth in the rentier state.

## Iraq: The Rentier State Developed Variably Throughout The 20<sup>th</sup> Century

The Iraqi state showed cyclic political turmoil and instability that are characteristic of a rentier state, continuously returning to point zero. Thus, the political history of Iraq, since its independence in 1932, oscillated between war and relative peace; wars when the rentier state felt strong, and relative peace when the rentier state was weak. The second-to-last cycle was 1973–88 (1973 Arab-Israeli war, 1975 Iraqi-Kurdish war, and the 1980–88 Iraqi-Iranian war) during which Iraq felt strong enough to wage wars. The last cycle (1990–2003), led to state de-formation and disintegration, which continues up to the present.

## The Oil That Will Make a Viable Nation-State

Ironically, it is the same oil that prevented the formation of the autonomous Kurdistan Region a century ago that will help play a major role in the creation of the new Kurdish state. Kurdish oil reserves were

---

<sup>59</sup> The Supreme Council for Development

continuously exploited by the international community and by successive Iraqi governments: the total number of drilled wells in the KRI was around 28, but since 2005 climbed to over 100.<sup>60</sup>

Dunnington, H.V., a well-known geologist, published a highly celebrated article in 1958 in AAPG entitled, “Generation, migration, accumulation, and dissipation of oil in Northern Iraq, in Habitat of Oil.”<sup>61</sup> The article’s main conclusion is that oil generated in the KRI has actually dissipated and disappeared. Standing witness to this conclusion, the numerous breached reservoirs outcropping in the KRI and the general absence of a “Seal” of lower Fars Formation. The complex tectonics add much to this view and is considered the region high-risk area. However, maybe there is more to petroleum exploration in Kurdistan that goes beyond the geological boundaries, since the huge reserves discovered in deep Kurdistan discredit the theory of dissipated hydrocarbons. It is believed here that the main factors behind the annexation of the southern KRI into Iraq and the revocation of the Sykes picot agreement are all based on oil-discovery. The marginal development of oil exploration in the KRI was in fact all meant to hinder economic development and consequently to prevent creating reasons for possible economic and political autonomy and future independence. Iraq’s fear of Kurdish independence was so strong that it drove successive Iraqi governments to avoid exploration in the KRI, even during periods of peace and well-being.

Currently, “Kurds hope to find some 30–60 billion bbl; excluding the Kirkuk field, which remains a disputed territory, they currently have some 12 billion bbl of oil and 22 Tcf of gas. Amongst the largest fields so far is the Shaikan field, with potential for 3.3 billion bbl of oil reserves, Bardarash with 1.2 billion bbl, and Khor Mor and Chemchemical with some 10 Tcf of gas between them. The most advanced in development are DNO’s Tawke field (771 million bbl in reserves), Taq Taq (647 million bbl) held by the Turkish company Genel, and Khor Mor which is supplying gas to local power stations.”<sup>62</sup>

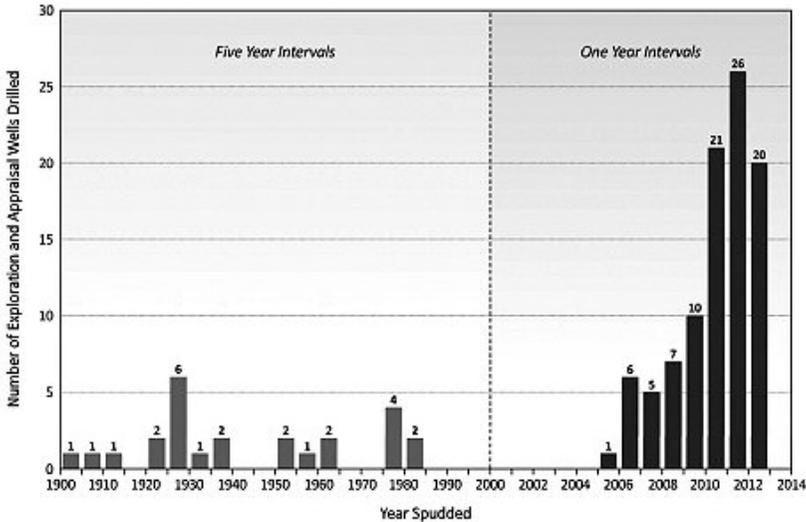
---

<sup>60</sup> David Mackertich and Adnan Samarrai (2004). The history of hydrocarbon exploration in Iraqi-Kurdistan: 1901 To 2012. Retrieved 2014 At [http://www.petroceltic.com/~media/Files/P/Petroceltic\\_V2/pdf/Mackertich—Samarrai—\\_2013—\\_Geol—\\_Soc—\\_Zagros-conference—\\_presentation.pdf](http://www.petroceltic.com/~media/Files/P/Petroceltic_V2/pdf/Mackertich—Samarrai—_2013—_Geol—_Soc—_Zagros-conference—_presentation.pdf)

<sup>61</sup> Dunnington, H.V., 1958, Generation, migration, accumulation, and dissipation of oil in northern Iraq, in L.G. Weeks (editor) AAPG Habitat of oil: A Symposium: AAPG Special Publication 18, pp. 1194–1251.

<sup>62</sup> Robin M. Mill Northern Iraq’s Oil Chessboard: Energy, Politics and Power, Insight Turkey. Vol, 15, No.1. 2013, pp. 51–62.

**Figure 2. Number of drilled oil wells in the Kurdistan Region by the oil companies and Iraqi government since the early oil discoveries in Iraq starting from 1900 compared to ones drilled after 2003.**



The disparity and discrepancy reflects the avoidance of the oil companies and Iraqi government to explore the natural resources of Kurdistan for fear of creating an economic basis for claiming secession from Iraq or a larger share in revenues

## **An Oil Driven Economy: Lessons Learned and Policy Recommendations**

The current school of thought emphasizes Kurdish nationalism within the boundaries restricted by existent states without dismissing totally trans-nationalism. Nevertheless, when state formation/building is in sight, some authors like Denise Natalie<sup>63</sup>, 2012, argue “Iraqi Kurds are likely to continue their drive for greater autonomy, aiming to turn their status as a dependent quasi-state in Iraq or economic vassal state of Turkey into their own self-sufficient independent entity.” Romano (2006)<sup>64</sup> reaches a

<sup>63</sup> Denise, Natali, 2012, The persistent Boundaries of Kurdish Nationalism. World Politics Review, May, 2012.

<sup>64</sup> Romano, David, 2006, The Kurdish Nationalist Movement: Opportunity, Mobilization and Identity, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

similar conclusion “On pragmatic grounds, Kurdish leaders could avoid maximalist approaches; but, if there is increasing instability in Iraq, they might also tell international partners that they deserve to be released from a failed state (Romano, 2006).” Clearly, such authors see through the present *status quo* that Kurdistan will eventually emerge as an independent state. Yet, others (e.g., Hiltermann, 2012)<sup>65</sup> find that asymmetric models of federalism are the right mechanisms for power sharing. These analyses and conclusions within the strange, unpredicted, chaotic upheaval and complexities of the Arab Spring, specifically in Syria, and the emergence and demise of ISIS in Kurdistan and in Iraq, are in reality undoing what the Sykes-Picot agreement had knitted.

Iraq is a rentier economy; it is a quasi-failed state. The lesson for the KRI is that oil should only serve as a tool to economic development (i.e., industrialization, agriculture, tourism, education). The current financial crisis in Iraqi Kurdistan could be resolved through oil-driven economic development, but economic diversification is necessary for a sustainable future.

---

<sup>65</sup> Hiltermann, Joost, 2012, Iraq’s Federalism Quandary, *The National Interest*, February 28, 2017.



## Chapter 14

# From a Curse to Blessing: Kurdistan's Oil and Natural Resources

*Ashti Hawrami*

“The large revenue that Iraq gets from the oil-fields might be used to help us instead of being spent on waging wars in these mountains and making the Kurds bitter and hostile. Remember the oil fields are in Kurdistan, so we have some right to ask for benefits from the revenue they earn. Yet all we seem to derive from our oil are bullets and bombs.”<sup>1</sup> So said Ismael Beg, the governor of Rawanduz, during a conversation with the New Zealand-born engineer A. M. Hamilton, who recorded it in his classic book *The Road Through Kurdistan*.

Their discussion took place around 1930, but Ismael Beg's sentiments and remarkably prophetic thoughts about the Kurds and oil are still relevant today. Anyone trying to unravel the complexities of the oil industry in post-Saddam Iraq would do well to consider this historical context.

Ever since oil was discovered in the huge Kirkuk oil fields in 1927, the Kurds have been marginalized as successive governments in Baghdad systematically excluded them from either the production of oil or its proceeds. It was no coincidence that the waves of “Arabization” campaigns conducted by the Ba'ath party, which resulted in the forced displacement of Kurds (as well as Turkmens and Christian minorities) from their villages and towns across northern Iraq, were at their most ruthless around the oil fields of Kirkuk. It helps explain why Kurds often mutter that the black gold beneath their feet has been more of a curse than a blessing. It also provides the backdrop as to why since the removal of the Ba'athist regime in 2003, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) has insisted on its rights—in the face of significant pressure to back down from federal authorities in Baghdad, and unfortunately, a few senior U.S. diplomats serving in Iraq—to develop an oil industry of its own.

It is not just about economics and the distribution of wealth. The dispute over who controls and manages the natural resources in the Kurdistan

---

<sup>1</sup> Beg, Ismael. *The Road Through Kurdistan*. Faber and Faber Limited, 1937.

Region of Iraq (KRI) goes right to the very heart of Iraq's chances of survival as a democratic, federal state. The Kurds are determined that they will never return to the days when Baghdad governments used oil revenues to buy tanks and helicopters to destroy their villages.

Oil can either be a reason for Iraq breaking up, or the glue that binds it together. Equally important to Kurdish authorities is their view of the KRI's oil and gas reserves—both potential and proven—as the primary spur not just of economic growth and diversification, but also of the internationalization of Kurdistan's underdeveloped economy.

### **Major Legal Landmarks**

In late 2005, Iraq's Kurdish, Shia, and Sunni political leaders agreed to clauses in Iraq's historic permanent constitution that essentially gave the Kurdistan Region decision making powers over oil and gas exploration and production in the areas under its control and required that all oil revenue be fairly and transparently shared across Iraq. For the Kurds, this was a test case for honoring constitutional agreements on regional autonomy, one that many believe the federal authorities have since failed.

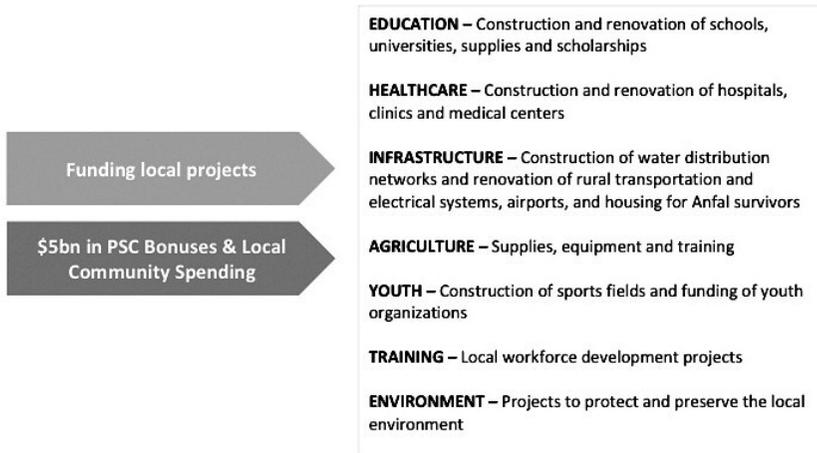
Another important milestone occurred in 2007 when, in the absence of an Iraq-wide hydrocarbons law (which the Kurds fought hard to achieve), the Kurdistan Region's parliament debated and passed its own oil and gas law. The law was designed to comply in both letter and spirit with Iraq's federal constitution.

### **Production Sharing Contracts**

The KRG's great success in attracting foreign investment is the Production Sharing Contracts (PSCs) that go hand-in-hand with the oil and gas law. The PSCs are risk-reward type contracts that are ideal for the KRG's situation because they incentivize companies to take the risk of efficiently and rapidly developing unknown fields. In drawing up a model PSC for the KRI, the KRG looked at many other countries' PSCs and the best practices around the world. As with the oil and gas law, the KRG published the model PSC for public comment and held two consultation seminars, so that important feedback was incorporated.

In a first for Iraq, the state was reduced to a largely regulatory role.

**Figure 1. Projects in the Kurdistan Region funded from PSC Bonuses and Local Community Spending by IOCs.**



Another unique feature of the Region’s PSC model was the capacity-building bonuses provided by the IOCs on the signing of each exploration contract. This money helped the KRG to develop its infrastructure, with some 4.7 billion dollars allocated to Anfal victims’ housing, roads, water resources, electricity, airports, hospitals, schools and universities, even before any oil was found and produced. In addition, the IOCs contributed around 300 million dollars in local community spending (or Corporate Social Responsibility—CSR).

***The First Fifty Exploration Blocks***

In 2007, the KRG invited bids for 50 blocks covering the Kurdistan Region. With limited surface geological data available, companies could still see the potential and in little more than five years, the KRI became one of the foremost exploration destinations in the world. Early upstream pioneers included companies such as Petoil, Genel Energy, Western Zagros and DNO ASA, and by 2009, the KRG had attracted more than 35 companies from Canada, Russia, Turkey, Korea, US, Austria, the U.K., and other countries. More recently, oil majors such as ExxonMobil, Chevron, Rosneft, and Gazprom have been active in the KRI.

Another milestone occurred on June 1, 2009 when the KRG oversaw the launch of the first Kurdish oil exports through Iraq’s northern pipeline

to Turkey. At a ceremony in Erbil, KRG President Massoud Barzani and then-Iraqi president Jalal Talabani together opened a symbolic valve allowing crude to flow from the first newly developed oilfields to come online from Iraq in three decades.

The export-ready oil came from two fields: one at Tawke on the Turkish border, which was explored and developed by DNO ASA, a Norwegian outfit. The other was at Taq-Taq, (near Koisanjaq) the product of a joint venture led by Genel Energy of Turkey.

### *The Start of Crude Export via the Kurdistan Pipeline*

The KRG's first crude export occurred via the Iraqi state oil marketing organization, but flows were intermittent due to non-payment by the central government in Baghdad and deliberate interruptions to the pipeline in areas outside of KRG control. In May 2014, the KRG began independent export through its own newly constructed pipeline.

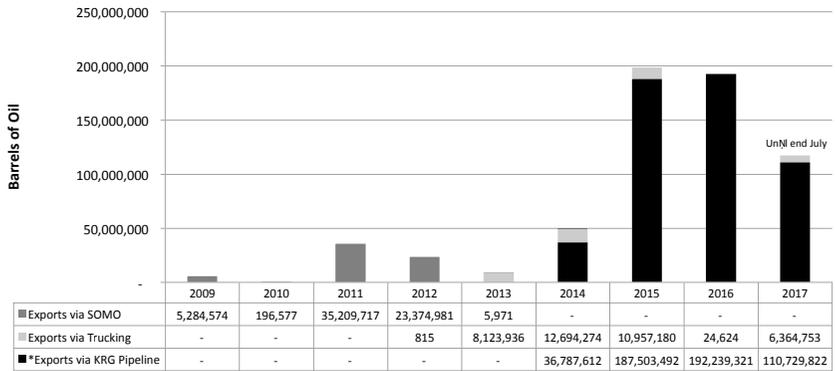
The speed of the exploration and development and subsequent export of Kurdistan's oil resources took many observers by surprise and the development of the oil sector as a key pillar of the economy is one of the KRG's major achievements.

In only a decade since the passing of the KRG oil and gas law in the Kurdistan Region's parliament in 2007, the KRI's oil and gas industry has grown swiftly, achieving significant levels of oil production, export and refining, and providing fuel for power generation. With vision and determination, and hand-in-hand with its investment partners, the KRG has developed an industry that contributes to economic wealth, provides employment for the people and creates a launching pad for future economic diversification.

### *Oil and Gas Key to Strategic Relationship with Turkey*

The KRI's oil and gas resources are an important part of the KRG's strategic relationship with Turkey. Twenty-five years ago, in the previous political climate, an oil pipeline from the KRI to Turkey was unimaginable. Thanks to improved relations and Turkey's goal of becoming a regional energy hub, the KRG built that pipeline to gain access to the Turkish port of Ceyhan for loading to cargo ships. It began independent crude oil sales to international buyers in early 2014. The pipeline's throughput capacity is currently 650,000 barrels per day (bpd), with plans to increase it to 1 million bpd.

**Figure 2. The KRI's Oil Exports**



The KRG hopes that once its significant gas fields have been developed and its domestic gas needs met, a gas pipeline will position the KRI for a prominent role in international gas markets and cement its economic relationship with Turkey. The Kurdistan Region holds significant volumes of natural gas reserves to satisfy local consumption needs and with surplus to export to Turkey and beyond.

***Mining and Downstream Investment***

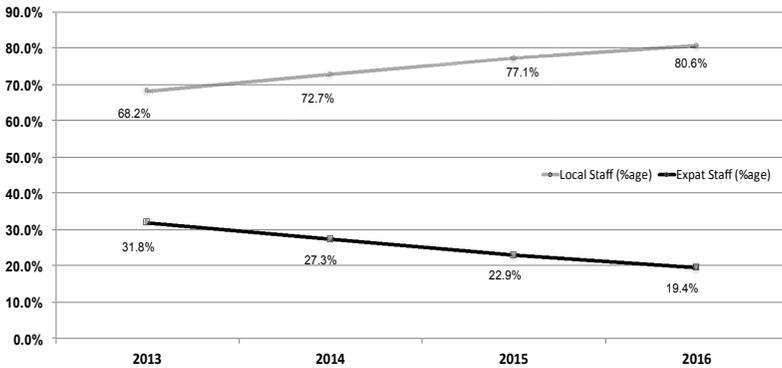
The Ministry of Natural Resources has also announced plans to regulate mining activity in the KRI and have offered up several blocks for prospective investors. Experts predict that the chief interest lies in a belt approximately 15–25 kilometers wide that runs along the KRI’s border with Iran and Turkey. The area is considered to offer “high potential” for mineral deposits such as iron, chrome, nickel, platinum, gold, copper, barite, and zinc.

Meanwhile, the KRG is planning to seek private sector investment in downstream industries such as petrochemicals. Urea production for fertilizer is seen as one major area for development.

***Working with Industry to Develop the Local Workforce***

From the outset, the KRG has emphasized the creation of jobs for local workers in both exploration and services companies. Now, the percentage of local staff in the international oil companies is over 80 percent, (See

**Figure 3. Localization Progress of Operators since 2013.**



**Figure 4. Status of Major Operators.**

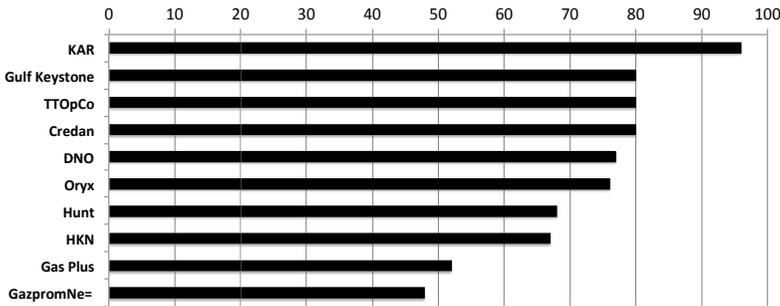


Figure 3 below) having grown from 68 percent in 2013, and in the service sector the ratio is even higher. (See Figure 4 below for top ten operators).

Today, the KRG obliges the international oil companies and larger services companies to provide local workforce development plans and report their progress in recruiting (and developing the competency of) local workers, to demonstrate their ongoing commitment to regional development.

The remaining challenge is to increase the percentage of local workers in highly skilled roles, which takes time. We are working with the industry to ensure that citizens of the Kurdistan Region gain the expertise to work in the most senior positions.

### ***Transparency and Accountability***

Of course, improving transparency in oil revenue and spending sends an important message to our citizens and the international community that the KRG is taking positive steps towards good governance. In this respect, the KRG is making admirable progress. The Regional Oil and Gas Council (comprising the KRG Prime Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister, in addition to the ministers of planning, finance, and natural resources) has commissioned international auditors Deloitte and E&Y to conduct independent, forensic audits of the KRG's oil and gas production and revenue. The results of the audit will be presented in summary in a series of quarterly public reports. The unprecedented scope of the audits demonstrates that the KRG has committed to a robust regime of transparency and accountability in its oil and gas sector.

### ***Building Refining and Power Generation from Ground Zero***

A long-held goal of the KRG has been to improve the supply of electricity and fuel, as the people of the Kurdistan Region have suffered considerably from shortages of both for many years. During 2008–2010, a new 75,000 barrel-per-day capacity refinery was built in Erbil, taking crude oil from the Khurmala field to produce the needed diesel, benzene, and kerosene. At the same time, another refinery in Bazian was installed to refine 40,000 barrels of oil per day. Today, the total installed refining capacity of the Region is 200,000 bpd and, if fully utilized, can help meet the needs of the liberated areas of Mosul and beyond.

To increase power generation, five new power stations that are fed by natural gas and diesel were built by private sector operators. Presently, Kurdistan's actual electricity generation 2,800 Mega Watts compared with 480 Mega Watts in 2007. The installed power generation capacity is now over 5,500 Mega Watts.

To underpin the fuel needs for power generation plans, in 2007 the KRG also started the development of some of its natural gas fields, which gradually resulted in the partial supply of natural gas to power plants, which currently stands at 300–330 mmscf/day.

The Kurdistan Region's power plants are now 85 percent fueled by natural gas and 15 percent by diesel/heavy fuel oil. The KRI's excess generating capacity has enabled the KRG to supply neighboring Kirkuk with 200 to 220 Mega Watts since November 2011. In addition, the KRG has coordinated with the federal Ministry of Electricity in Baghdad to provide sur-

plus power to help reconstruct Mosul and other areas newly liberated from ISIS. The current supply to Mosul is around 225 Mega Watts, which is set to increase to more than 600 Mega Watts in the coming months.

### *Electricity Sector Reform*

In addition to developing natural gas reserves to fuel power generation, the KRG is also prioritizing urgent reform of the electricity transmission and distribution system. Some 30 percent of electricity produced is lost either through inefficiencies in the outdated transmission system or because of theft (people tapping into power lines illegally). There are also problems with tariff collection. Provision of electricity costs the KRG around 2 billion dollars in diesel costs, yet it collects only around 250 million dollars in tariffs.

Compounding the problems is that current electricity consumption per household in the Kurdistan Region is more than in most major industrialized countries in the West. To improve revenue performance in the electricity sector, the KRG intends to introduce smart metering and robust billing and collection.

The medium-term reform plan, drawn up with the assistance of the World Bank, aims to improve and sustain the quality of service for all electricity consumers through a transition to a modern institutional and regulatory framework.

This will have three main goals:

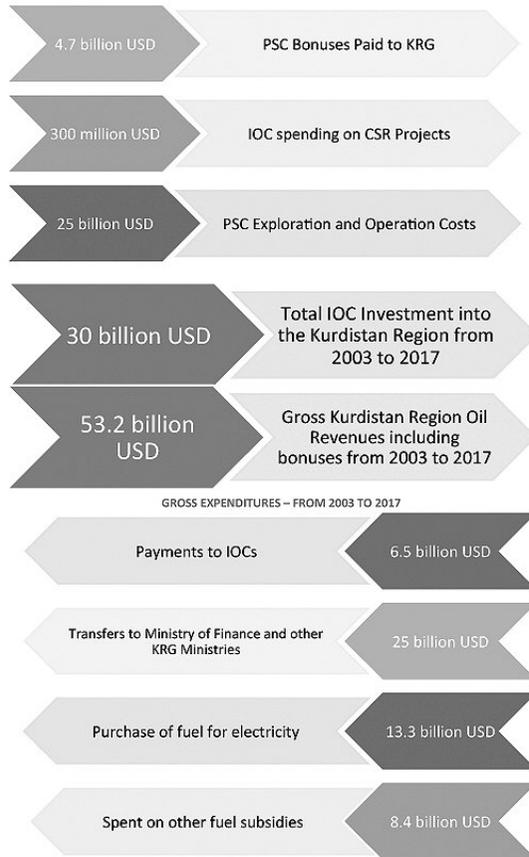
- to separate generation from transmission and distribution;
- to strengthen financial discipline and energy accountability;
- to promote private sector participation in the whole grid and investment in downstream activities.

This transition will encompass a shift to fully cost-reflective tariffs that protect vulnerable groups in line with international practice. The KRG's ultimate goal is to ensure consumers are provided with better electricity service without recourse to costly and unsustainable subsidies.

### *Holding Fast in the Face of Multiple Shocks*

The Kurdistan Region has faced multiple shocks since early 2014; namely the cut of the KRI's budget by Baghdad in January 2014, the collapse of the world oil price, and the war with ISIS that also resulted in an

**Figure 5. Investment, Revenues and Expenditures 2003–17.**



influx of almost 2 million IDPs and refugees. Continuing Kurdistan’s direct oil export sales was vital to mitigate the effects of the large budget deficit left by Baghdad’s unlawful cutting of the KRG’s budget, to pay public and Peshmerga salaries, to fight the war against ISIS, and to provide help to IDPs and refugees.

The collapse of the oil price from 2014—and the Kurdistan Region was no exception. In the face of the downturn, many of the oil companies in Kurdistan were unable to allocate essential funds for further exploration and production. Despite the enormous financial pressures, the KRG has continued the regular and some of the arrears payments to the producing IOCs so that they can reinvest in their blocks and increase production.

In 2009, Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani said that the KRG “is determined to use our natural resources in a constructive manner for the benefit of all Iraqi citizens, and to create a better future for ourselves and our neighbors, as well as for future generations.”<sup>2</sup> The KRG will continue to develop its hydrocarbons resources with this vision in mind, so that oil and gas provide greater prosperity for the people of the Kurdistan Region and Iraq, and can help to strengthen regional cooperation with its neighbors.

---

<sup>2</sup> “Prime Minister’s speech at launch of KRG Strategy on Good Governance and Transparency.” July 12, 2009. <http://cabinet.gov.krd/a/d.aspx?s=02040100&l=12&r=268&a=30495&cs=010000>.

## *Chapter 15*

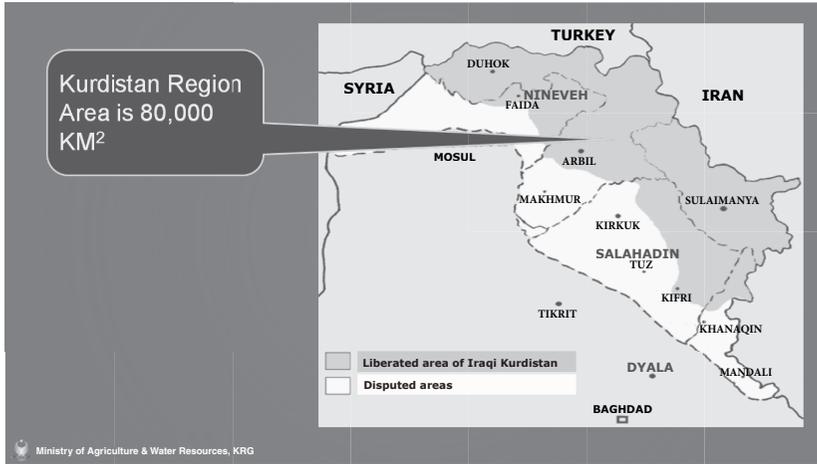
# **Agriculture and Water Resources in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq**

*Abdulsattar Majeed Qader*

The Kurdistan Region was the birthplace of humanity and civilization, where the earliest people fled to for the mountains and wildlife. The village Charmo in the Chamchamal district is evidence of this fact, and it is considered the first agricultural village in the world and the most ancient agricultural habitation in the new Stone Age. Between 1948–1955, professor Brid Wood from the East Institute of SAM languages and Arts at Chicago University found between 25 and 30 mud houses and stone homes created with the remnants of the bones of animals, goats, pig, deer, and other animals. He also found grains, like wheat and barley, in those houses and especially in the graves. The history of the village dates back to around 10,000 years BC, showing that the peoples living in this area worked on agriculture, but later settled in other places.

After the 1950s, several Iraqi regimes were responsible for the demolition of 4,500 villages (of the total 5,131) villages in the KRI, the confiscation of the villagers' lands, the burning of forests and orchards, leading to a significant decrease in agricultural workers. This was an important reason leading to the collapse of the agricultural sector in the KRI, which ultimately led to a decline in self-sufficiency, instead relying on agricultural imports.

As a countering measure, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) started to create a strategy in 2006 to begin implementing a five-year plan in 2009 with the participation of other sectors, such as water resource, trade, and food industries. With only 9.2 percent of the budget secured, the government was unable to implement all its goals. However, certain products, such as wheat and potatoes, now cover more than 100 percent of the KRI's need, while others agricultural products (e.g., tomatoes, cucumbers, eggs, among others) cover more than 54 percent, while others barely reach 40 percent of the population's needs. However, the average supply for these products has increased by around 15 percent and now covers between 30–45 percent local consumption. The KRG Ministry of Agriculture and Water Resources (MOAWR) suggested a new five-year plan for 2015–2019, which unfortunately was not implemented due to budgetary

**Figure 1. Kurdistan Region Map**

Source: (Web) /Resolution unknown

reasons. The financial crisis following the war against ISIS, the global fall in oil prices, and the Iraqi central government's cut off of the KRI's budget share, prevented the implementation of the plan. In fact, the financial crisis gravely affected the agricultural sector, especially in terms of farmer subsidies. In this regard, the ministry of agriculture and water resources took this opportunity to take advantage of the financial crisis to help offset the hardship of those who lost their source of income with agricultural activities; many of those who lost their jobs moved to the countryside to work in the agriculture sector, increasing agricultural employment from 16 percent to 20 percent<sup>1</sup> and also led to the increase in product supply.

## The Current Reality of the Agriculture Sector and Water Resources

The diverse geography and climate of the Kurdistan Region make it extremely suitable for agriculture. The KRI consists of wide plains (stretching for about 924,000 hectares) and mountains, and its climate is suitable for multiple agricultural products, with a mixture of tropical, mild and cool climates with plenty of rainfall.

<sup>1</sup> Reports of agricultural sub-offices in the KRI.

**Figure 2. The KRI's Agricultural Land Size in Hectares**

Cultivable Land	Rain-fed	1,208,366
	Irrigated	327,428
Forrest	Handmade	14,436
	Natural	1,249,853
Horticulture	Vegetable Irrigated	297,029
	orchard Rain fed	35,082
	orchard Irrigated	30,399
Rangeland		1,734,443
Total		4,569,608

Around 99 percent of agricultural land is owned by the Ministry of Finance and Economy, and 1 percent is privately owned.

The 99 percent that is government-owned is distributed as follows:

- Around 21 percent has been giving to farmers and the farmer hold all legal rights.
- Around 44 percent is given to farmers through renting contracts. In 2008, the law of ownership was enacted in parliament and the process is still ongoing (the right of ownership will be given to contractors).
- Around 35 percent is still not settled. In 2007, the law on land was enacted in parliament (Determination of the title to agricultural land) will be given to their owners.

### **Categories of Agricultural lands and producing capacity**

There are eight categories of agricultural lands in Kurdistan Region<sup>2</sup>:

- Category (1): considered the finest type of land, suitable for planting all types of crops: grains, vegetables, and fruit. Around 0.6 percent of the land (which equals 1.6 percent of the agricultural land) falls under this type.
- Category (2): considered fine land, suitable for planting most types of field crops.
- Category (3) considered medium arable land, suitable for planting grains. It comprises about 20 percent of the land (which equals 58.4 percent of the agricultural land) falls under this type.

<sup>2</sup> Reports and data of general directorate of agricultural lands in Kurdistan region.

- Category (4): this land has a limited use for agriculture; around 13 percent of the land (which equals 40 percent of the agricultural land) falls under this category.
- Category (5-6-7): not suitable for agriculture, only suitable for rangeland and forestry (e.g., planting olive trees and other forest trees). Around 55 percent of the KRI's land falls under this category.
- Category (8): rocky land, municipal places, villages, roads, industrial, and commercial lands. This category considers public interest areas and covers about 10 percent of land.

### **Principles of Managing the Agricultural land policy**

In spite of Management of Agricultural land needs to be organized by a special law, it also needs a clear and comprehensive law in order to avoid loss and not underestimate its capabilities as:

- a. The categories (1, 2, 3 and 4) have their own special importance for agriculture and food safety and it may not be used for the purpose of construction or institutions, or for other non-agricultural purposes, except in cases of extreme necessity.
- b. Prevent the fragmentation of agricultural land, and implementing the text of Article (4) of the law No. (1) in 2008 which regulates the right of ownership of agricultural properties that determined the economic feasibility.
- c. Try to find large units and large agricultural fields to protect the land from partition.
- d. Taking the environment into consideration within the programs and plans of protection and management of agricultural land such as the management of soil erosion and floods, groundwater protection, dams, etc.
- e. Revival of Finance strategy so as to prevent the use of agricultural land for other purposes.
- f. Activating programs and policies for the protection of agricultural lands and implementing them in the best performance with technical and financial support by the government for the purpose of obtaining the best results.

**Table 1. Poultry projects**

Governorate	Erbil	Sulaimaniya	Dohuk	Gariman	Total
Meat Poultry	426	445	220	104	1,195
Table/ unfertilized Eggs	7	1	1	1	10
Laying Hens	11	3	--	--	14
NAZHAD?	1	--	--	--	1
Hens for meat and laying hens	19	7	5	1	32
Slaughterhouse	4	2	1	--	7
Fodder production companies	13	3	2	2	20
Total	481	461	229	108	1,279

**Table 2. Number of Sheep, Goats, Cows and Buffalo**

Governorate	Sheep	Goat	Cow	Buffalo	Total
Erbil	793,000	507,000	65,000	0	1,365,000
Sulaimaniya	1,054,412	354,805	138,008	620	1,547,845
Dohuk	776,323	273,223	47,863	0	1,097,409
Garmian	489,141	88,921	6,128	2,500	586,690
Total	3,112,876	1,223,949	256,999	3,120	4,596,944

**Table 3. Animal meat**

Governorate	Dairy Cow Project	Sheep and Goat Project	Raising Calf Projects	Raising Lamb Project	Total
Erbil	29	19	22	--	70
Sulaimaniya	15	5	8	--	28
Dohuk	13	40	5	4	62
Garmian	1	--	1	1	3
Total	58	64	36	5	163

**Table 4. Fish**

Governorate	Fish Nursery, Breeding Fish	Fish Farms, Meat Production
Erbil	1	189
Sulaimaniya	1	109
Dohuk	1	43
Garmian	1	56
Total	4	397

**Table 5. Level of plant and animal production in 2016 ;**

Food type	Capacity in 2016/ ton	IKR requirement in 2019/ton	Rate of self sufficiency
Wheat	1,686,784	931,453	181%
Poultry meat	99,738	148,411	67%
Table eggs	15,400	48,000	32%
Red meat	76,500	89,419	80%
Milk	260,000	509,194	51%
Vegetables	637,177	745,162	85%
Fruits	54,316	310,484	17%
Fish meat	4,730	18,008	26%

Source: Annual report of ministry of agriculture and water resources in Kurdistan region, 2016.

**Table 6. Investment under ministry's law (2007–15)**

Projects	Notes	Unit	Capacity	Numbers
Dairy project	For farmers	Head	7,022	58
fattening Calves	For farmers	Head	6,395	40
Breeding Sheep and goat	For farmers	Head	17,257	69
Lamb fattening	For farmers	Head	2,560	6
Orchards	For farmers	Hectare	3750	1250
Olive for oil	For farmers	Hectare	1500	800
Irrigation Systems for planting wheat	For farmers	Hectare	18750	2198
Green houses for veg.	For farmers	Green house	9696	650
Total				5071

**Table 7. Other Investments under Investment law (2007–15) in numbers :**

Projects type	Numbers	Notes
Dairy project	7	1 competed & operating
Poultry & Eggs projects	7	Four operating
Wood project	1	Not started
Olive for oil	4	1 completed
Green houses for veg.	6	1 project completed & operating
Mushroom	3	1 completed
Agro fair	1	Completed
Ostrich	1	Completed
Total	30	10 competed & operating

## **Agriculture and Water Sector Roadmap (2015–19)**

The mission of the Ministry of Agriculture and Water Resources for the next five-year plan (2015–19) is food and water sufficiency for the KRI. All projects and objectives are designed to serve this goal according to the available human and financial resources for each objective. An annual population growth rate of 3 per cent is estimated, with this estimation the population of the KRI will increase from 5,356,531 to 6,209,688 by 2019. The projected food and water needs are based on the estimated population of the KRI in 2019 and take into consideration the daily prescribed intake of calories, between 2,800–3,200 calories.

The food and water reserves in 2014 serve as the baseline for these projections; in addition, we conducted an analysis for the agriculture and water reality in KRI, and the risks that these two sectors might face.

The policy plans for the next phase of the agriculture and water sectors have been outlined in the roadmap. These goals include proper rules and regulations, under the guidance of the MOAWR.

The goal is to 1) increase local production by 20 percent, 2) increase water storage capacity by 3.9 percent, 3) increase irrigated lands by 4.1 percent, 4) increase green spaces by 0.5 percent, 5) decrease diseases and infectious diseases by 80 percent and 30 percent respectively, 6) apply modern marketing systems, decrease override on agricultural lands by 80 percent, and increasing agricultural investment by 3 percent.

To ensure the success of this plan, teams for the follow-up and evaluation of staff performance and projects are to be formed on the KRI level as well as within each province.

## **Obstacles and Risks**

The following issues should be addressed in order to apply the right solution at the right time:

### ***Obstacles and Barriers***

1. Insufficient financial resources allocated to the agriculture and water sector, which needs 10 percent of the KRI's budget for the reconstruction phase. The current budget allocates a mere 4 percent to these sectors

**Table 8. Individual needs from foods**

Food Type	Unit	Amount needed per capita	KRI requirement in 2019/ton	Standards
Wheat	Kg/Yr.	150	931,453	73.7
Chicken meat	Kg/Yr.	23.9	148,411	
65				
Red meat	Kg/Yr.	14.4	89,419	
Fish	Kg/Yr.	2.9	18,008	
Lentil and Chickpeas	Kg/Yr.	12	74,516	
Vegetables	Kg/Yr.	120	745,162	106
Fruits	Kg/Yr.	50	310,484	65
Eggs	Eggs/Yr.	150	931,45 Million	180
Cooking Oil	L/Yr.	15	93,145	15.4
Milk	L/Yr.	82	509,194	176
Honey (Beekeeping)	L/Yr.	0.24	1,490	---

**Table 9. Individual and sectors demand from water**

Purpose	Per capita needs	The KRI's needs in 2019/ million m <sup>3</sup>	Source
Drinking water and daily use	200 L/Individual/Day*	453.3	The Ministry of Municipalities and Tourism
Agriculture irrigation 1,556,000 Donums	1 L/Hectare/Second* one season	6139.0	UNAMI: Water Resource Management 2010
Water usage for livestock	8 L/small animals/day	16	The Ministry of Agriculture and Water sector
	30 L/big animals/Day	5.1	
	0.2 L/Poultry/Day		
	1 Donum/Fish Farm/ Fish* 2500 m3 * 3 times annually	4.95	
Water usage by industries	4,600 L/ Factory/day * 5000 Factories* 280 working days per year	6.44	The Ministry of Trade and Industry
Others, parks, tourist sites, construction	Average	400	---
The KRI's total requirements for 1 year		7024.79	

2. The KRG does not consider agriculture and water to be priorities; rather, it focuses on oil and gas
3. The lack of legislation regulating water management and maintenance is one of the main reasons behind the misuse of water, water contamination, and trespassing of water resources, irrigation projects, and river shores
4. Lack of robust cooperation with universities, common in developed countries

### ***Risks***

1. Leaving Iraqi borders wide open for illegitimate and illegal imports has had a negative impact on KRI's agricultural products  
Digging deep wells for underground water extraction in large numbers has dropped the level of underground water by more than 30 meters
2. The overtaking of agricultural lands by the municipalities. So far, 1,651,199 of the best agricultural lands have been retaken, and attached by various municipalities, who have replaced the lands with concrete buildings. The continuation of this situation will eventually lead to the total destruction of agriculture in the KRI, and puts a massive burden on the KRG when it comes to the provision of services for these vast areas—services such as water, electricity, roads, schools, police stations, and so on
3. Production requirements are imported, such as fodder, manure/fertilizers, seeds, medicines, vaccines, and so on.
4. Lack of a scientific system for marketing farmers' products and application of old methods.
5. Rangelands are on the verge of annihilation due to unplanned grazing and drought.
6. Wildlife is under threat of extinction. Their protection is not planned and scattered among different ministries and authorities.
7. Due to an increase in investment projects, forests have come under threat

### **Objectives and Strategic Goals**

The five-year plan is comprised of eight objectives, further subcategorized with strategic goals.

***1) Increase and reform agricultural products, vegetables, and meat production***

1. Produce 1,220,000 tons of wheat annually
2. Produce 345,000 tons of barley and 33,950 tons of corn annually
3. Produce 17,195 tons of chickpeas, 6,700 tons of lentil and 5,495 tons of sunflower seeds annually
4. Produce 664,300 tons of various vegetables annually
5. Produce 245,287 tons of various fruit annually
6. Produce 140,000 tons of chicken meat annually
7. Produce 93,500 tons of red meat annually
8. Produce 4,204 tons of fish annually
9. Produce 1,750 million eggs annually
10. Produce 494,000 tons of milk annually
11. Produce 1,094.5 tons of honey annually

***2) Ensure a water storage capacity of 10,500 billion m<sup>3</sup> and irrigation of 390,440 acres of agricultural land.***

1. Increase storage capacity to 10.5 billion m<sup>3</sup>.
2. Irrigate cultivated lands reaching 390,440 acres.

***3) Supporting Research and Development; upgrade the scientific level and vocational skills of employees, and strengthening research centers***

1. Develop and achieving new types of products in regards to the productivity and resistance to diseases and drought
3. Increase and improve animal and poultry products
4. Research on agricultural diseases and pesticides
5. Strengthening capacity building, capability of science, experience of extension's and ministry's staff.
6. Reduce the use of pesticides and applying IPM, i.e. Integrated Pest Management.

***4) Increasing and Developing Forests and Rangelands***

**Table 10. The situation of agricultural researches and extension centers**

Topic	Number on KRI level	Notes
Research Centers	4	
extension centers	43	

**Table 11. Technical Staff of the MOAWR**

Degree	Number on KRI level	Notes
Ph. D	9	
Master's Degree	194	
Bachelor's degree in agriculture	1,375	
Bachelor's degree in Engineering and Geology	544	
Bachelor's degree in Administration, Accounting, and Statistics	77	
Bachelor's degree in Veterinary	520	
Association's degree from Technical institutions	1,625	
Total	4,344	

### 5) Reforms in agricultural services and agricultural banking

Goal No. 1: providing sufficient services to the farmers via modern technology, accredited true seeds, and supporting marketing

Goal No. 2: Connecting weather forecast networks to production and predicting agricultural diseases. Processing data on weather, rain, winds, and temperature to obtain information and provide access to farmers with this information online.

Goal No. 3: Selecting the proper seeds and plants for the KRI's soil and weather, including working on the production map and directing support toward investing the right products in the right soil.

Goal No. 4: Connecting support to productive farmers with productive economic criteria and providing encouragement and support to farmers in order to establish associations and cooperation among themselves as well as with small- and medium-sized farm owners, with the purpose of unifying all capacities.

Goal No. 5: Expanding agricultural banking services to include all production and marketing processes, raising the limit of loans to one billion

dinars, continuing to keep banks open for farmers throughout the year, and easing the terms and conditions of lending to the farmers.

**6) *Protecting animals' health in order to provide healthy food to citizens***

1. Controlling and preventing the spread of cross-border diseases and transmittable diseases
2. Conducting needed tests on livestock, poultry, and fish
3. Upgrading the performance of the Central Veterinary Diagnostic Lab (CVDL)

**7) *Reforms in agricultural products' marketing system***

1. Provision of support for the establishment of marketing associations and companies
2. Proposing laws and instructions on marketing for regulating relations between farmers with traders, buyers and consumers under the oversee of the MOAWR, and proposing a special law on encouraging the export of agricultural products
3. Establishing marketing information systems
4. Supporting the establishment of associations for producers of red meat, chicken meat, fish and dairy products

**8) *Sustainable management of agricultural land***

1. Revision of governing laws
2. Providing a well-trained staff for departments of real estate and properties
3. Acknowledging agricultural land as a national resource, and removing obstacles ahead of agricultural lands
4. Proper lands allocation for investment in agriculture

## **Conclusion**

The Kurdistan Region is home to the finest agricultural land and also owns necessary water resources to implement the plans of the Ministry. By providing the necessary budget to support the farmers, and by developing the capabilities and the application of the modern marketing system,

**Table 12. Projects by Province**

Projects	Erbil	Sulaymania	Duhok	Garmyan	Halabja	Raparin	Total
Egg Production				1			1
Fish Farming	3	2	1	1	2	1	10
Producing Pitmos	1	1	2	1	1		6
Producing seedling for fruits and forest	2	2	2	1	1	1	9
Dairy projects	1	1	1	1			4
Olive orchard for Olive Oil	2	1	1	2			6
Tree plantation for wood industry	1	1	1	1	1		5
Building up Basee 2 dam			1				1
Building up of Bakerman and khlikan dams			1				1
Building up of Bardasor dam				1			1
Building up of taqtaq dam	1						1
Building up of Rawanduz dam	1						1
Apple molasses production and packaging industry			1				1
Pomegranate vinegar production industry		1	1		1		3
Grape Juice industry			1				1
Tomato Paste Production industry in Erbil	1						1
Building up mill for Flour	1	1	1	1	1		5
Building up mill for burgle	1	1	1	1	1		5
Total	15	11	15	11	8	2	62

the Kurdistan Region can reach self-sufficiency in agricultural products and ensure food security and the implementation of irrigation projects and dams. Through the implementation of a water law we can assure water security in the Kurdistan Region.



*Part V*

**Case Studies**



## *Chapter 16*

# **The Status of Christians in the Kurdistan Region**

*Basbar M. Warda*

A commentary of the status of Christians in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) must begin with a recognition that much of the historical Christian lands of Northern Iraq continue to exist in a disputed status, the sovereignty of which remains as yet undetermined between the central government of Iraq in Baghdad, and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in Erbil. In particular, the Christian towns and lands of the Nineveh Plain remain in an uncertain and highly problematic state. The ongoing lack of resolution on this matter colors all discussion for the Christians in Northern Iraq and the Kurdistan Region, and the many areas of concern stemming from it cannot be minimized. Overall, the issue of security, especially in the Nineveh Plain, remains a fundamental concern for Christians.

Nevertheless, certain conclusions can be drawn from the recent experience of the Christians living in the undisputed areas of the Kurdistan Region, primarily in the greater Erbil region. This population at present includes not only the indigenous (pre-2014) population, but also the internally displaced (IDP) Christians of Nineveh who fled to the safety of the Kurdistan Region after the ISIS attacks of 2014. Altogether, this represents well in excess of 150,000 Christians, making it the single largest center of Christianity remaining in greater Iraq.

Important to note here is the willingness of the KRG leadership to consistently engage in acts of public solidarity with the Christian population. These examples of tolerance and respect are of significant importance. Moreover, especially in the aftermath of the ISIS war, continued vigilance and leadership must be shown at all levels of government to ensure that hateful ideologies are not allowed any space to take root. The Christians of the Kurdistan Region will continue to look closely for unwavering support in this area.

Fundamentally, the future of Christians in the Kurdistan Region rests in the freedom to practice their faith. Here, we must acknowledge that the KRG has protected the freedom for communities to practice and live

their faith openly. During the time of the crisis since 2014, new churches, schools and health clinics have opened, and a new university was established, the Catholic University in Erbil. At the same time, the KRG allowed the Christians to administer and manage the humanitarian needs of their displaced families in various sites throughout the greater Erbil region and provided land and security to support the efforts of the Church. In all these cases, the KRG has allowed for the building and operating to take place in a manner which respected and supported Christian traditions and beliefs.

This ability to act out one's faith in real terms is of critical importance if Christianity is to have a meaningful future in the Kurdistan Region and in greater Iraq. In stating this we refer to the historical role of Christians as peace builders, especially in the field of education and health care. These roles are fundamental to Christian identity worldwide, and nowhere more so than in Kurdistan and Iraq. The value of these Christian roles to the greater community, including all other faiths, is well established.

However, the ability to provide this critical role, as peace-builders, educators and health care professionals, is for Christians, ultimately based upon the ability to live out their faith. For it is from their faith that their service-based view of the world originates. Thus, where there is no freedom to practice their faith, Christians are essentially denied the ability to live out their lives of service to others.

Assuming that the greater community of the Kurdistan Region values these contributions, as we hope and believe they do, what then can we look to in order to gauge the potential future for the Christians now living there?

Key to the ongoing viability of any community is economic stability. Can people find jobs? Can they support their families? In this it is important to understand that the Christian communities of the greater Erbil region have been accepting IDPs not merely since 2014, but for much of the prior decade, as many Christians were forced to leave the persecution that had become so widespread in southern Iraq. Indeed, as of 2010 there were already over 3,000 displaced Christian families in Erbil that had been forced to flee violence elsewhere in Iraq.

Since 2014, the number of Christian IDP families in Erbil has increased by more than 10,000 additional families. As we look to the coming year, these numbers remain fluid, with many seeking to return to their former homes in the Nineveh Plain. Yet a significant number of these families

may choose to stay in the greater Erbil region for the foreseeable future. Whether they ultimately choose to stay in the Kurdistan Region or enter into the diaspora of Iraqi Christians across the world will depend in large part upon the economic prospects in the KRI. This in turn will depend upon the leadership shown by both the public and private sector in providing opportunity and access for all segments of the population, including Christians.

Another key factor in determining the future of Christians in the Kurdistan Region will be the quality of education that can be provided to the young generations. In this we hope that the Christians will play an important role in the reforms that must take place in the field of higher education if the Kurdistan Region and Iraq are to legitimately take their proper places in the modern world. The holdover paradigms from the centrally controlled educational system of former governments must be substantially removed and replaced by a new era of flexibility and internationally competitive excellence in education. While this is a matter of great concern for Christians, it no doubt speaks to the concerns of all others in the Kurdistan Region as well.

In closing, we remind the world that the Christians of Northern Iraq have lived there for nearly two thousand years. These are an ancient people, with a unique and important culture, who pray that they will be able to stay in their historic homeland, recover from a long history of persecution, and live in peace with their neighbors. But following this painful and violent history, the future for Christians in Iraq today rests not so much with actions that they themselves might take, but with those controlling the power of government in Baghdad and Erbil, and also with those powers outside Iraq and the Kurdistan Region whose foreign policy decisions have so often ignored the impact upon the Christians and other threatened minorities. In these times, Christians stand ready to participate as full citizens with equal rights in a proper sovereign government, legitimately chosen by the people, in which true and valid measures of local autonomy exist sufficient to ensure that historical demography and cultures of the region are protected.



## Chapter 17

# Yezidis: The Pursuit of Justice and a Brighter Future

*Pari Ibrahim*

In the early hours of August 3, 2014, I woke up from a great deal of commotion in the house. Members of my family were on the phone with friends and relatives in Shingal and in Duhok, relaying messages of horror and fear. ISIS terrorists had entered Shingal—the Yezidi population was under attack.<sup>1</sup> In Europe, we had a feeling of helplessness and shock.

Days later, I created the Free Yezidi Foundation<sup>2</sup> from my home in the Netherlands. Initially, I hoped to literally help free Yezidis dying of heat and hunger on Mount Shingal. I created the #StopYezidiGenocide hashtag and we began protests in The Hague and Brussels calling for emergency assistance, both military and humanitarian, to save innocent civilians. At most, I hoped to raise enough money to provide humanitarian aid to survivors who reached safe areas. As the airstrikes allowed many Yezidis to flee,<sup>3</sup> our goals were transformed from emergency appeals to long-term goals including recovery and trauma treatment, providing assistance and education in Yezidi IDP camps, and the pursuit of justice.

## Justice

The first step on the road to justice was to achieve international recognition that the ISIS attacks against the Yezidis constituted genocide. This was not a military campaign—this was genocide. Analysis conducted by

---

<sup>1</sup> Chulov, Martin. “40,000 Iraqis stranded on mountain as Isis jihadists threaten death.” *The Guardian*, August 6, 2014. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/aug/07/40000-iraqis-stranded-mountain-isis-death-threat>.

<sup>2</sup> Free Yezidi Foundation. [www.freeyezidi.org](http://www.freeyezidi.org).

<sup>3</sup> Cooper, Helene, Mark Landler, and Alissa J. Rubin. “Obama Allows Limited Airstrikes on ISIS.” *New York Times*, August 7, 2014. <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/08/world/middleeast/obama-weighs-military-strikes-to-aid-trapped-iraqis-officials-say.html>.

the U.S. Holocaust Museum<sup>4</sup> resulted in recognition from the United States,<sup>5</sup> the European Parliament,<sup>6</sup> and others.<sup>7</sup>

Initially, we hoped that the International Criminal Court would take up this case, and we met the ICC Chief Prosecutor in The Hague, co-submitting official communication on ISIS foreign fighters.<sup>8</sup> As the ICC was unwilling to even commence a preliminary examination, Yezidi activists tried to pressure the UN Security Council<sup>9</sup> to refer the case to the ICC, thus far to no avail.

In many judicial systems, including throughout Europe,<sup>10</sup> Iraq,<sup>11</sup> and the Kurdistan Region,<sup>12</sup> ISIS perpetrators are indicted and in many cases convicted. But the charge is invariably related to terrorism. These perpetrators are most certainly terrorists. But the crimes against Yezidis are much more than that. The mass murders, torture, rape, enslavement, and

<sup>4</sup> Kikoler, Naomi. "Our Generation is Gone" The Islamic State's Targeting of Iraqi Minorities in Ninewa." United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Simon Skjodt Center for the Prevention of Genocide, September 2015. <https://www.ushmm.org/m/pdfs/Iraq-Bearing-Witness-Report-111215.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Morello, Carol, and William Branigin. "Kerry declares Islamic State has committed genocide." *Washington Post*, March 17, 2016. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/kerry-declares-islamic-state-has-committed-genocide/2016/03/17/35ea5e6-ec3e-11e5-a6f3-21ccd5f74e\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.daee833a9ca8](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/kerry-declares-islamic-state-has-committed-genocide/2016/03/17/35ea5e6-ec3e-11e5-a6f3-21ccd5f74e_story.html?utm_term=.daee833a9ca8).

<sup>6</sup> Moore, Jack. "European Parliament Recognizes ISIS Killing of Religious Minorities as Genocide." *Newsweek*, February 4, 2016. <http://www.newsweek.com/european-parliament-recognizes-isis-killing-religious-minorities-genocide-423008>.

<sup>7</sup> "UN Commission of Inquiry on Syria: ISIS is committing genocide against the Yazidis." UN OHCHR, June 16, 2016. <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=20113>

<sup>8</sup> "ISIL: Nationals of ICC states parties committing genocide and other crimes against the Yazidis." Yazda and the Free Yezidi Foundation, September 2015. <http://www.freeyezidi.org/wp-content/uploads/Corr-RED-ISIL-committing-genocide-ag-the-Yazidis.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> A speech made by the author at the UN Security Council is available here. <https://www.freeyezidi.org/blog/speech-of-pari-ibrahim-at-un-security-council-2/>. A speech by Nadia Murad Basee Taha (ISIS victim) is available here. <http://webtv.un.org/watch/nadia-murad-basee-taha-isis-victim-on-trafficking-of-persons-in-situations-of-conflict-security-council-7585th-meeting/4665835954001>

<sup>10</sup> "Islamic State Changing Terror Tactics to Maintain Threat in Europe." Europol, December 2, 2016. Press Release. <https://www.europol.europa.eu/newsroom/news/islamic-state-changing-terror-tactics-to-maintain-threat-in-europe>

<sup>11</sup> Damon, Arwa, and Hamdi Alkshali. "CNN exclusive: Detained ISIS members speak from Iraqi jail." CNN, March 30, 2015. <http://www.cnn.com/2015/03/30/middleeast/isis-behind-bars-exclusive/index.html>.

<sup>12</sup> Georgy, Michael. "Captive Islamic State militant says mass rapes were 'normal'." *Reuters*, February 17, 2017. <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-mosul-prisoners-idUSKBN15W1N0>.

abuse constitute crimes against humanity and genocide.<sup>13</sup> Every single ISIS perpetrator who has abused a Yezidi woman, has participated in the capture or imprisonment of Yezidi victims, or has been involved in the execution of Yezidis is guilty of participating in the genocide.

While we do hope for an international mechanism to comprehensively address these crimes, we are meanwhile focusing on national jurisdictions. We know the KRG and Iraqi authorities are holding a significant number of ISIS perpetrators in prison,<sup>14</sup> and it is important to understand which perpetrators committed atrocities and hold them accountable. This is an enormous effort for any government, and that is why an international mechanism with funding and judicial expertise is optimal. However, until that happens, we want to see the KRG take the matter of justice seriously and be sure that Yezidi survivors can face ISIS perpetrators in court and the supremacy of justice and the rule of law prevail.

### **The Referendum, Path to Independence, and Impact on Yezidis**

In this publication, it is important to reflect the Yezidi perspective regarding the referendum and the prospect of the KRG achieving independence. There are three primary considerations regarding the Yezidi people, including both Shingalis and those who are residents of the Duhok area: security requirements, political needs, and economic opportunity.

Security is a pre-requisite in order to rebuild a Yezidi society after the genocidal attack. This refers to the prevention of an ISIS-style attack, but also to daily life. Yezidis must feel comfortable to live in freedom and peace, without discrimination, hate crimes, or threat of attack. If the KRG moves toward independence, it is important that protection of the Yezidi minority in terms of general security and daily life is fully implemented and respected in a new state. It is the view of many Yezidis that including Yezidi forces in the security architecture is absolutely necessary, so that our people are empowered to protect their own communities. This is especially true after the ISIS genocide against our civilians.

---

<sup>13</sup> “UN Commission of Inquiry on Syria: ISIS is committing genocide against the Yazidis.” UN OHCHR.

<sup>14</sup> “Kurdish security chief: We hold hundreds of ISIS prisoners caught in battle, sleeper cells.” *Rudaw*, January 3, 2017. <http://www.rudaw.net/english/kurdistan/030120172>.

It is common knowledge that Shingal, as a disputed territory, is a flash-point for possible conflict and a location suffering from the presence of competing military groups.<sup>15</sup> All will agree that this has had a tangible effect on the civilian population that lived in the area and seeks to return.<sup>16</sup> Fair treatment of civilians living in Shingal area, with full respect for human rights, and this sort of local security is important to our people.

The KRG has long been a vocal advocate for federalism and the devolution of power to the regional or local levels.<sup>17</sup> I believe this can be an important political principle for Shingal and Yezidi-majority communities, especially if KRG moves toward independence. Local autonomy and administration will go a long way to ensure that minority communities like ours have a voice in our affairs and local administration.

But equally important is Yezidi representation at higher levels. In the current Kurdistan Region Parliament, there are special seat allocations for minorities. Christians have five dedicated seats, as do Turkmens, while Armenians have one seat.<sup>18</sup> The Yezidi population is quite large in Kurdistan, and the Free Yezidi Foundation is adamant that Yezidis should also have a special seat allocation in the parliament. This is true now, and it will be even more crucial in the event of a new state with its capital in Erbil. Yezidis have suffered immensely, and political representation matters. I believe Yezidis should also have five seats in the parliament in Erbil.

Many Yezidis have often felt neglected by governments both in Baghdad and Erbil. Shingal, as a disputed area, was already in a state of disrepair.<sup>19</sup> With the destruction left behind by ISIS terrorists, Yezidis now urgently need training, education, and most importantly, access to economic opportunities. We look to the KRG to pay special attention to our population and ensure that our civilians, especially our survivors, are given every opportunity to begin rebuilding their lives.

---

<sup>15</sup> Bozarlsan, Mahmut. "Who's fighting whom in Iraq's Sinjar?" *Al-Monitor*, January 9, 2017. <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/ru/contents/articles/originals/2017/01/turkey-iraq-kurdistan-who-is-fighting-for-shengal.html>.

<sup>16</sup> Stoter, Brenda. "For many of Iraq's Yazidis, going home is not an option." *Al-Monitor*, June 14, 2017. <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/en/originals/2017/06/yazidis-iraq-minorities-sinjar-kkp-pmu.html>.

<sup>17</sup> "PM's speech to Iraqi governors and ministers at economic conference." KRG. August 21, 2008. <http://cabinet.gov.krd/a/d.aspx?s=010000&l=12&a=25271>.

<sup>18</sup> For more information on the parliament, see: <http://cabinet.gov.krd/p/p.aspx?l=12&p=229>

<sup>19</sup> "Sinjar after ISIS: returning to disputed territory." Pax For Peace. June 20, 2017. Press Release. <https://www.paxforpeace.nl/stay-informed/press/press-release-sinjar-after-isis-returning-to-disputed-territory>

## *Chapter 18*

# **The Future of the Yezidis in Kurdistan**

*Luqman Sulaiman Mahmood*

Currently, Yezidis number about 550,000 people in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), with about 400,000 of them spread across 16 camps inside the KRI. They lost everything: their land and their entire livelihood. For three years, the Yezidis have been displaced, and they account for the largest number of Internally Displaced persons (IDPs) in the Kurdistan Region. Not only have they been displaced, but they have also been punished and continuously discriminated against because of their religious background. ISIS has killed and captivated many Yezidi women and children, destroying most of the Yezidi cities and villages across the region. As if this is not enough, the poor economic situation of most Yezidi families has added gravely to their burden. Their displacement and the loss of their land has resulted in a loss of culture as well, as their lives had been dependent on agriculture, nature, water springs, and holy sites.

## **The Yezidi Women Still in the Hands of ISIS**

To quote Nadia Murad,<sup>1</sup> “there are still around 3,400 Yezidi women in the hands of ISIS.”<sup>2</sup> Their future is uncertain and nobody knows if they will ever return. The hideous crimes committed against them cannot be described. The same practices, with the mentality of “everything you conquer belongs to you,” used by armies during the Islamic conquest 1,400 years ago, have also been used by ISIS. It is the same pattern of killing and looting women and children and the destruction of holy sites.

---

<sup>1</sup> Yezidi human rights activist, and the first Goodwill Ambassador for the Dignity of Survivors of Human Trafficking of the United Nations.

<sup>2</sup> Murad, Nadia, *The Independent*: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/nadia-murad-yazidi-survivor-kept-as-isis-sex-slave-describes-moment-her-family-were-massacred-a6875346.html>

## What Yezidi Leaders are Doing to Rescue Them from ISIS

The Yezidis are attempting to rescue all those that were abducted by ISIS. The head of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), Nechirvan Barzani, has facilitated these efforts, providing financial support for the paying of ransoms and smugglers in order to return those who were taken. There is an office in Duhok with a large number of people working on rescuing the kidnapped women and girls. More than 3,400 Yezidi girls, children and women have been freed from the hands of the terrorist organization. We need to ensure that the provincial government pays all expenses, and that the work and coordination between several parties continue to this day in order to free all the abducted.

## The Role of Yezidis' Leadership

The spiritual leadership of Yezidi community has responded to the atrocities of the Yezidi women with care and caution. For the first time in the history of the Yezidis, the leadership ordered pardon for those who were kidnaped forcibly by ISIS. The reason for this forgiveness is the fact that the Yezidi women were taken by force, not by choice. Any Yezidi woman who has managed to escape from ISIS has been welcomed back into her religion and culture.<sup>3</sup>

Following the invasion of the Yezidi land in Shangal, and the call for the killing of Yezidis and the kidnapping of women and children by ISIS, Prince Tahsin Said, the Amir of the Yezidis, and His Eminence Sheikh Baba Sheikh (the spiritual leader of all Yezidis in the world) issued a historic and important decision to receive survivors with respect and appreciation. The decision to welcome back the female survivors was taken by Yezidi leadership and was appreciated by the entire Yezidi community, because abducting the Yezidi women and using them as sex slaves by ISIS was an organized, well-thought operation, committed by ISIS against the Yezidis.

The Yezidi culture is built upon respect and equal partnership among other ethnic and religious backgrounds in Kurdistan and the entire Iraqi society. However, since ISIS attacked the Yezidis, and the crimes were committed especially against women and children, the Yezidis have become increasingly open to the outside world. Yezidi leaders and society as a

---

<sup>3</sup> The Guardian: <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2017/jul/01/i-was-sold-seven-times-yazidi-women-welcomed-back-into-the-faith>

whole have sincere respect for our victims and survivors, and they are working on reintegrating them into their social order and helping them take care of their wounds, both physical and psychological. The survivors are set to receive special religious decrees held at the Lalish Temple Din al-Yazidi and be re-baptized in the “*Kanya Spî* (White Spring-Water)” in the presence of Baba Sheikh, the Amir and a member from the House of Amir Yezidis. Symbolically, this has a very deep meaning as it is done in the presence of the highest religious Yezidi authorities.<sup>4</sup>

### **What the Future Holds for Yezidis in Iraq**

The KRI has been the homeland of Yezidi-Kurds for 10,000 years, and this represents their sole homeland. The future of Yezidis in Kurdistan is linked to the future of the Kurdistan Region as well. The Yezidis will be safer within the boundaries of Kurdistan region. As long as the KRI continues to be a state based on secular, non-Islamic rules and customs, the Yezidi minority can continue to live and progress. The future of Yezidism is linked to the future of secular parties and government institutions that take a step away from extremism and tribalism.

### **How Will Yezidis Vote on the Referendum in September?**

The Yezidis have paid a heavy price for their homeland, suffered 74 genocides,<sup>5</sup> and have been forced to abandon their religion and culture. However, they have managed to preserve their Kurdish language and identity, culture, literature, and religious philosophy, which dates back to more than 10,000 years. Lalish is the most important holy place in the Yezidi culture and religion, but it has also been a safe haven for thousands of people, whenever they faced genocide. Wherever the Yezidis are, they always face towards Lalish when they pray. In 2014, when ISIS began committing atrocities, Lalish was once again a safe haven for the Yezidis. Their homeland is Kurdistan, even if they all migrated to other countries, they may physically survive, but not spiritually and mentally.

---

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Schwartz, Stephen. <http://www.meforum.org/5313/yezidi-genocide>

## **What the Prospect of Yezidis is in the Kurdistan Region, Unity of Kurdish Society**

Yezidis are Kurds by nationality and ethnicity but their religion is different. The original religion of Kurds is Yezidism; during the Islamic conquest around sixth century, most Kurds converted into Islam by force. Those who maintained their original religion had to leave their homes or hide. Yet, those people preserved their faith until today. These people are now known as the Yezidis, and their future depends on the future of the Kurds.

Two positive aspects of post-ISIS should be mentioned here: first, is the welcoming back of the kidnapped girls who were raped by ISIS jihadists; second, the increased integration with other communities. Previously, any Yezidi who married a non-Yezidi, willingly or forcibly, was regarded as an outsider and no longer a Yezidi. Now, with the pardon by the Yezidi spiritual leader and council of Yezidi leadership, the women who were forcibly taken away by ISIS can come back and reclaim their faith. In relation to integration, there used to be less incorporation between the Muslim communities and the Yezidis. However, in the face of adversity, there is much more cooperation between the various communities in the KRI. There is much less fear of each other now and there is a lot of respect for people with different faiths and ethnicities.

## Chapter 19

# Humanitarian Work in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq: Historical Development and New Challenges

*Dilshad H. Khidbir*

*Contributors: Mariette Hägglund and Awat Mustafa*

While for the most part of history, the Kurds have been portrayed as “objects of history,”<sup>1</sup> post-2003 Iraq has boosted their chance to become active subjects instead. The relatively stable situation of the Kurdistan Region compared to the rest of Iraq, has earned the country labels such as “safe haven,” “beacon of democracy,” “the other Iraq”<sup>2</sup> and so on. A more recent label has been “safe sanctuary for refugees and displaced people” that can be found in media discourse of KRI-based outlets as well as foreign media.<sup>3</sup> It goes without saying that the region deserves this description; as following the intensification of sectarian conflict in other parts of Iraq, the region has welcomed waves of displaced people (starting with Christians) from southern and central parts of Iraq since as early as 2006. As it will be explained in the coming sections, as the conflict intensified in other parts of Iraq, the region had to house the increased number of displaced people until it reached a peak as the result of the major military operations to retake the city of Mosul in October 2016 that forced hun-

---

<sup>1</sup> Andreas, Wimmer, “From subject to object of history: the Kurdish movement in Iraq since 1991.” *Kurdish Studies* 2, no. 1 (2002): pp. 115-129.

<sup>2</sup> Anna Fifield, “Kurdistan: the other Iraq,” *Financial Times*, November 11, 2008, accessed August 07, 2017, <https://www.ft.com/content/42830d96-b016-11dd-a795-0000779fd18c>; Mark Mackinnon, “Iraqi quagmire spurs independence movement in Kurdistan,” *The Globe and Mail*, July 3, 2014, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/world/iraqi-quagmire-spurs-independence-movement-in-kurdistan/article19459212/?page=all>; accessed July 07, 2017, Daniel Schorn, “Kurdistan: the other Iraq,” *CBC News*, February 16, 2007, accessed July 1, 2017, <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/kurdistan-the-other-iraq/>;

<sup>3</sup> Florian Neuhof, “Flight to safety: Sunnis flee Baghdad for sanctuary in Iraqi Kurdistan,” *The National*, June 15, 2015, accessed July 7, 2017, <https://www.thenational.ae/world/mena/flight-to-safety-sunnis-flee-baghdad-for-sanctuary-in-iraqi-kurdistan/>; Mohammed Aber, “Kurdish Sanctuary for Christian Refugees,” *Institute for War & Peace Reporting*, December 3, 2009, accessed July 7, 2017, <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/kurdish-sanctuary-christian-refugees>.

dreds of thousands more civilians to flee their homes and seek safety in the Kurdistan Region.

This chapter is dedicated to the humanitarian situation of the KRI from 2011 up to the present time. The chapter will start with a historical overview of the humanitarian narrative in the region that dates back to the 1990s, when the region was hugely dependent on humanitarian assistance provided by external humanitarian organizations, foreign governmental- and inter-governmental agencies. There has been a departure from the previous phase to a new and substantially different phase where the region turned into a safe haven for refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) from neighboring Syria and other parts of Iraq. The ISIS assault on Iraq that started in 2013 and culminated in 2014 with the invasion of major cities such as al-Anbar, Tikrit, and Mosul, represents a significant period in the humanitarian history of the KRI as the region had to open its doors for large numbers of displaced families from conflict-ridden areas.

Perhaps, the military operations to liberate Mosul represent the most volatile period in the history of the KRI, which resulted in the arrival of hundreds of thousands of families to shelter camps near major cities and urban areas in the region. For this, the period deserves special attention. As the Barzani Charity Foundation (BCF) has been a major humanitarian player responding to the unprecedented humanitarian needs of the post-Mosul operation, the foundation will be given due attention and taken as an example for home-grown charitable organizations.

Therefore, this chapter is a narrative of the humanitarian situation in the KRI focusing on the period right before and following the ISIS assault on Iraq and the KRI. The data used in this chapter is drawn from secondary sources, BCF field observations, and data collected through records from other active NGOs in the KRI and a number of personal interviews with a selected number of humanitarians.

## **Historical Background of Humanitarian Work in KRI**

After the events of 1991 that triggered the March uprising, which is considered the starting point for the current KRI as an administrative and political entity, the Kurdistan Region experienced intensive humanitarian action to assist the returned population of the region that had fled to the mountains fearing the Ba’ath regime’s retaliation following its recapture

of Peshmerga liberated areas of Iraqi Kurdistan. Major UN agencies and other international humanitarian organizations, both governmental and non-governmental, were involved in large-scale humanitarian efforts of the 1990s.<sup>4</sup>

After the region established its first democratically elected self-government called the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), it faced a double embargo from the Iraqi central government and the UN,<sup>5</sup> which left it with few choices to survive economically. As it has been argued, external aid<sup>6</sup> was a vital life-line for the people in KRI up until the late 1990s when the Oil for Food Program (OFFO) was activated<sup>7</sup> through which the region received 13 percent of revenues from the program.<sup>8</sup> The humanitarian assistance began immediately after the mass exodus of more than 1,800,000 civilians who found their way to the mountainous borders of Turkey and Iran and continued after the return of Kurdish refugees to their homes under the UN resolution 688.<sup>9</sup> The external aid proved so important in the history of the KRI that Denise Natali considered it the main factor behind the creation and maintenance of the KRI as a “quasi-state” political-jurisdiction.<sup>10</sup>

Following the end of the era of the Kurdish fratricide (i.e., the domestic armed conflict) that lasted between 1994 and 1998 and culminated with the unification of the two separate KRGs in 2006, the socio-economic situation of the KRI was gradually improving. The 2003 Iraq war provided an opportunity for the Kurds to become active subjects of history after long years of inactive existence on the international political scene. While the military contribution of the Kurds to the U.S.-led regime change in Baghdad was a significant aspect of the post-2003 conditions of the international arena at the time, the new political arrangements following the

---

<sup>4</sup> Michel Leezenberg, “Humanitarian Aid in Iraqi Kurdistan,” *Cahiers d'études sur la Méditerranée orientale et le monde turco-iranien*, 29 | 2000, 31-48, accessed July 6, 2017, <http://cemoti.revues.org/613?lang=en>

<sup>5</sup> The United Nations imposed a range of economic sanctions on Iraq following the Iraqi government's invasion of the state of Kuwait on August 2, 1990. The sanctions were imposed through the UN Resolution 661 on August 4, 1990. (Joy, 2010, pp. 20-21)

<sup>6</sup> Denise Natali, *The Kurdish Quasi-State: Development and Dependency in Post-Gulf War Iraq* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2010), XIV

<sup>7</sup> The program was activated in 1996.

<sup>8</sup> UN, “Oil For Food, About the Program,” United Nations, November 04, 2003, accessed July 5, 2017, <http://www.un.org/Depts/oip/background/>.

<sup>9</sup> Leezenberg, *Humanitarian Aid*

<sup>10</sup> Natali, *The Kurdish Quasi-State*, xxii

war that granted the KRI a new status assisted in the development of a more stable, more democratic and more prosperous Kurdistan Region within the whole of Iraq.

### **Post-2011 Syrian Refugee Influx**

Following the unrest and military conflict that started in 2011 and were triggered by the Arab Spring, large numbers of Syrians fled their homes and sought refuge in neighboring countries. While the majority of Syrian refugees took refuge in neighboring Jordan and Turkey, comparably significant numbers found their way to Iraq, most of who arrived in the major urban areas of the KRI. The influx of Syrian refugees, mostly from the Kurdish northern areas of Syria, reached a staggering 234,262 individuals at the end of June 2017, a proportion of whom are sheltered at nine camps in the three major KRI cities of Erbil, Duhok, and Sulaymanya in addition to camps in Kirkuk and Germyan.<sup>11,12</sup> While most Syrian refugees are sheltered in large refugee camps, a small number of them managed to accommodate themselves in urban areas inside cities and towns of the KRI. The increased assault by the ISIS against Kurdish-populated areas in Syria resulted in growing numbers seeking safety in the KRI. Events such as the ISIS assault on Kobane back in 2014 meant that more Syrian refugees will find their way to the KRI seeking safety and shelter.

### **ISIS Assault and IDP Crisis**

The ISIS assault on major cities in southern and central parts of Iraq has forced hundreds of thousands of civilians to leave their homes and seek safety elsewhere. As a relatively safer zone, the KRI was an ideal sanctuary for the many civilians who affected by the war with ISIS and consequent military operations. The capturing of such cities, towns and villages (Falluja, Ramadi, Mosul, Tikrit, Tala'afar, Sinjar, and other Nineveh areas) resulted in new waves of displacement, most of whom arrived at the gates

---

<sup>11</sup> UNHCR, "Iraq Situation Response, Funding Update as of 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2017", <http://reliefweb.int/report/iraq/unhcr-iraq-situation-response-2017-funding-update-3-july-2017>," Relief Web, July 3, 2017, accessed July 7, 2017, <http://reliefweb.int/report/iraq/unhcr-iraq-situation-response-2017-funding-update-3-july-2017>.

<sup>12</sup> According to the UNHCR data sources, 38 percent of Syrian refugees are sheltered at camps while the remaining 62 percent live in urban areas inside major cities, town and rural areas. UNHCR, Iraq Situation Update.

of KRI where they were received by fighting Peshmerga forces and dispatched to shelter camps, sites and residential areas inside major KRI cities and towns.

### *Mosul Liberation*

The large majority of IDPs arrived in KRI following intensive and long-lasting military operations to retake the city of Mosul and other towns and villages within the Nineveh province. While the actual Mosul military operation started on October 17, 2016, the operation preceded by earlier operations to retake a number of towns and villages belonging to the Nineveh province (such as Makhmour, Gwer, and a number of villages surrounding the area). Huge numbers of IDPs were sheltered in four camps set up in Dibaga near Erbil, which by the end of September 2016 were accommodating more than 42,000 individuals.<sup>13</sup>

In a report titled “Mosul Flash Appeal” which was released on July 20, 2016 by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA),<sup>14</sup> the UN agency warned that the then-anticipated Mosul operation would result in the displacement of more than one million civilians. To prepare for the unprecedented influx of IDPs from Mosul, major humanitarian stakeholders began intensive emergency preparedness’ efforts. The first wave of displaced families from areas near the city of Mosul arrived at the BCF-run Khazir M1 camp<sup>15</sup> that had been set up prior to the start of the military operations. As the military operation intensified, the number of displaced families fleeing their homes in Mosul towards safe areas in the KRI increased significantly, as by the end of December 2016 there were a staggering 116,490 IDPs.<sup>16</sup> Additional shelter sites had to be set to accommodate the growing number of IDPs from Mosul and surrounding areas. At the time of the writing of this chapter (July 2017), the fighting is still ongoing inside the city of Mosul, and there are five shelter sites constructed to receive Mosul IDPs, all on the borders

---

<sup>13</sup> BCF, Internal Report, September 2016, raw data, KRI, Erbil.

<sup>14</sup> UNHCR, “Iraq: Mosul Flash Appeal [EN/KU/AR],” ReliefWeb, July 20, 2016, accessed July 6, 2017, <http://reliefweb.int/report/iraq/iraq-mosul-flash-appeal-enkuar>.

<sup>15</sup> Rudaw, “Families are reunited as IDPs flee Mosul,” *Rudaw*, December 25, 2016, accessed July 4, 2017, <http://www.rudaw.net/english/kurdistan/251020169>.

<sup>16</sup> UNHCR, “Iraq Situation: UNHCR Flash Update - 26 December 2016,” Relief Web, December 26, 2016, accessed July 6, 2017, <http://reliefweb.int/report/iraq/iraq-situation-unhcr-flash-update-26-december-2016>.

between the cities of Erbil and Mosul. The total number of individuals sheltered at these camps now reaches a staggering 70,622 individuals.<sup>17</sup>

The KRG's policy was to accommodate all new IDPs in the major shelter camps, in order to limit their entry into urban areas. The decision is understandable, for, as mentioned earlier, cities, towns and villages were already overwhelmed when the actual Mosul liberation operation began. According to a report issued in April 2016 by the UNHCR, KRG and other humanitarian stakeholders, the total number of IDPs and refugees arrived to KRI in just two years equaled to 30 percent of the entire KRI population.<sup>18</sup> As expected, public infrastructure and services were under immense pressure, deteriorated because of the economic crisis facing the KRG, which partly resulted from the central Iraqi government's decision to withhold all fiscal transfers that KRI was entitled to from the Iraqi federal budget.

## **BCF As a Home-Grown NGO**

Perhaps one of the most active humanitarian organizations during the war with ISIS has been the BCF. While prior to the start of the Mosul military operation in October 2016, the Duhok governorate hosted the largest number of refugees and IDPs with the most amount of shelter camps, the Mosul operation led to a dramatic increase in the number of IDP camps from March 2016 to the present day. Most IDP camps within the Erbil governorate were managed by the BCF in 2016 and until 2017, when besides the old and new IDP camps; the Foundation also took on the responsibility of managing all refugee camps within Erbil.<sup>19</sup>

### *Historical Background*

BCF was founded in Erbil in August 2005, with Masrour Barzani as the Chairman of the Board of Founders. As a legal organization endorsed by both the Iraqi government and the KRG, the BCF faced numerous humanitarian challenges ever since its foundation. The 2003 Iraq liberation war

<sup>17</sup> According to the BCF Data Management Unit, July 15, 2017.

<sup>18</sup> UNHCR. "Displacement as Challenge and Opportunity Urban Profile of Refugees, Internally Displaced Persons and Host Community Erbil Governorate, Kurdistan Region Of Iraq." April, 2016, Erbil: UNHCR.

<sup>19</sup> The camp management project is conducted in collaboration with Erbil Joint Crisis Coordination Center (formerly known as the Erbil Refugee Council).

sparked a long-lasting sectarian conflict, massive security disruptions, and devastating political and social consequences. The protracted conflict almost equally affected people from all sections and components of the Iraqi society. However, the displacement has affected mostly civilians from ethnic and sectarian backgrounds such as (Sunni Arabs, Yezidi Kurds, Christians, Shabaks, and Shi'ite Turkmen). As the safest, most welcoming and the most peaceful part of the country, the Kurdistan Region was the first choice for the displaced people after they were forced to leave their hometowns. Therefore, combined with domestic needs in the Kurdistan Region, the continued waves of displacement from other parts of Iraq and neighboring Syria necessitated the establishment of a domestic charitable organization such as the BCF to address the growing humanitarian needs in the Kurdistan Region and post-2003 Iraq.

Recognizing its significant efforts in the humanitarian sector, the United Nation's Economic and Social Council granted the BCF a consultative status in April 2016. The BCF is also the only focal point for the Sphere Project in the Kurdistan Region and the whole Iraq.

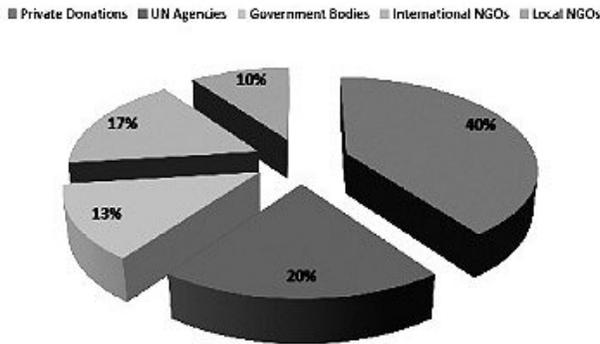
### *The Scope of BCF's Work*

As a response to the humanitarian situation in Iraq, the KRI, and the neighboring region, the BCF focused on essential relief assistance to reach the vast numbers of IDPs, refugees, and people in need among the Kurdish host community. While food,<sup>20</sup> shelter, and protection have been primarily directed at IDP and refugee communities, the majority of BCF's education and care efforts have targeted the host community, mainly through such projects such as orphan care, care for the disabled, and educational assistance to schools.

Perhaps the most dynamic humanitarian efforts of the BCF can be found in its successful practice in the Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM) sector. As explained above, the foundation has invested

---

<sup>20</sup> BCF's emergency response operation has been the provision of ready-made meals for fleeing Yezidis in early August 2014 following the ISIS assault on the city of Sinjar and other Yezidi populated areas. Within 45 days and in collaboration with the World Food Program (WFP), BCF provided more than 9 million ready-made meals for over 100,000 individual IDPs who had fled their homes seeking shelter at various locations within the Duhok governorate. Adair Ackley, "Saving Lives and Responding Rapidly to Iraq Food Crisis | WFP | United Nations World Food Program - Fighting Hunger Worldwide," UN World Food Program, August 19, 2014, accessed July 7, 2017. <https://www.wfp.org/stories/saudi-arabia-contribution-saves-lives-and-allows-wfp-rapidly-respond-food-crisis-iraq>; Musa Ahmad, "Current Humanitarian Situation," interview by author, June 22, 2017.

**Figure 1. Sources of funding for BCF's humanitarian work in 2016<sup>21</sup>**

immensely in this sector through undertaking management tasks at all IDP and refugee camps within Erbil Governorate. In addition, in collaboration with major stakeholders in the field, including the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the Erbil Joint Crisis Coordination Center (EJCCC), International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs), NGOs, donor countries, and national and local charitable corporations and people, the BCF has successfully managed 15 shelter camps within Erbil while committing to humanitarian work in other shelter camps located throughout the KRI. A map showing all shelter camps in the Kurdistan Region, including those managed by the BCF in 2017 is provided at the end of this chapter.

In terms of funding, the BCF, as a non-governmental and non-profit organization, relies on various legitimate sources such as partnering with UN agencies (UNICEF for example), INGOs, donor countries, and most importantly donations from local private corporations and individuals. Drawn from its 2016 annual report, followed are some graphs that demonstrate the main working sectors of the foundation, primary beneficiaries, and main funding sources.

<sup>21</sup> BCF, *Barzani Charity Foundation Annual Activities Report-2016*. 2016, Erbil, KRI: BCF.

**Figure 2. Total numbers of beneficiaries from all sectors of BCF work (2016 and the first half of 2017)<sup>22</sup>**

<b>Working sectors</b>	<b>Beneficiaries in 2016</b>	<b>Beneficiaries in the first 6 months of 2017</b>
Food	2,978,913	2,971,282
NFI	1,290,249	1,435,475
WASH	406,111	522,361
Education	8,924	27,667
Disabled Care	607	998
Orphan Care	10,734	8,403
Livelihoods	6,050	12,548
CCCM	9 Camps	15 camps
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>5,758,176</b>	<b>5,152,457</b>

**Figure 3. Beneficiaries from BCF activities from all three communities (2016 and the first half of 2017)<sup>23</sup>**

<b>Beneficiary communities</b>	<b>2016</b>		<b>The first six months of 2017</b>	
	<b>Individuals</b>	<b>Families</b>	<b>Individuals</b>	<b>Families</b>
Host	478,664	90,314	183,918	28,257
IDP	4,098,311	788,088	4,602,386	884,423
Refugee	451,084	73,768	350,753	68,367
Total	5,028,059	1,006,086	5,152,457	985,474

Source: data was collected from BCF's Data Management Unit, in July 2017.

Reading through the data presented in Figures 1-3, we can see a dramatic increase in the population of beneficiaries in 2017 compared to 2016. While the total number of beneficiaries in 2016 amounted to 5,758,176 individuals, the first six months of 2017 witnessed approximately similar number of beneficiaries compared to 2016 as a whole. The dramatic increase in the number of beneficiaries can be explained by the sharp increase in the number of displaced people who arrived at major shelter camps managed by the BCF. While we see a significant increase in refugees from 2016 to the first half of 2017, the figures for people in need among the host community (locals) reached by the BCF saw a significant decline

<sup>22</sup> BCF, Internal Report, July 2017, raw data, KRI, Erbil

<sup>23</sup> BCF, Internal Report, July 2017, raw data, KRI, Erbil

compared to the disproportionate increase in beneficiaries among the two other communities (refugees and IDPs).

## **New Humanitarian Challenges**

While the humanitarian situation of the large IDP communities sheltered in major camps in the KRI still remains volatile and treated within the framework of “relief assistance,” the anticipated military outcomes of the ISIS war dictates a move towards a new phase of humanitarian work, one that will include economic activities to ensure self-reliance.

According to a testimony from a member of BCF’s board of directors,<sup>24</sup> the economic crisis has negatively affected refugees, forcing some families who have been living in their own homes to seek accommodation and shelter inside camps. We will outline a number of points to consider in this regard.

### ***The Future of Refugees and IDPs in the KRI***

As the war against ISIS seems to be drawing to an end,<sup>25</sup> there remains a fundamental question to be answered: what is the future of the large number of IDPs and refugees in the KRI? The anticipated new era with the end of ISIS and the upcoming referendum in the KRI requires clear and robust plans to address the newly emerging issues. Undoubtedly, the reconstruction, security, and reconciliation are the most pressing issues for the post-ISIS humanitarian era. Reconstruction is vital to allow the hundreds of thousands of IDPs and refugees to return home. In the meantime, security is fundamental for a voluntary return of people to their homes. The long-lasting conflict that devastated the social structure along sectarian, religious and ethnic lines requires long-term solutions to rebuild peace, trust and coexistence.

Therefore, the stakes are very high and requires coordinated efforts among major shareholders, including political, social, religious, and humanitarian actors. Undoubtedly, the war on terror needs to transform its mechanism to address the root causes of the chronic and destructive sectarian conflict that has been rampant in the region since 2003. Arguably,

---

<sup>24</sup> Ibrahim Samin, “Refugee Issues”, interview by author, July 6 2017.

<sup>25</sup> At the time of preparing this chapter, in July 2017, Haider al-Abadi, the current Iraqi Prime Minister, arrived in Mosul to announce the full takeover of Mosul by the Iraqi forces.

in the post-ISIS era, rebuilding trust and reconciliation may prove to be more challenging than defeating terror and reconstructing homes.

### ***The Social Dimension of the Crisis***

While there are no comprehensive studies examining the issue of refugee and IDP return, a 2016 study conducted by UNHCR in collaboration with the Erbil Governorate revealed that 25 percent of refugees and 11 percent of IDPs were unwilling to return to their homes and intend to stay in the KRI.<sup>26</sup> Paradoxically, this reality is combined with another pressing issue, which is the issue of integration of IDPs and refugees within the host communities. As we can hardly find any reliable academic accounts addressing this problem in the KRI as a whole, the few studies that we have come across suggest that certain IDP communities face grave difficulties to integrate with their host community and/or with other communities.<sup>27</sup> The situation is not much better when it comes to Syrian refugees but it is arguably less challenging compared to some IDP communities (such as Sunni Arabs and Christians). These communities seem to prefer maintaining their cultural space within other communities (especially the majority Kurdish host community). Generally speaking, the issue of integration and social cohesion remains among the most important areas that need special attention and strategic planning by major stakeholders in the KRI including the KRG, the humanitarian community, and civil society. The fear on a potential demographic imbalance hitting the KRI articulates itself in the public and intellectual discourse of the host community.<sup>28</sup> For these reasons and more, the future of refugees and IDPs in the KRI demands urgent action not only from the part of the host KRG but also from the central Iraqi government, the UN, and the wide international community.

### ***The Economic Dimension of the Crisis***

Perhaps one of the determining variables in the humanitarian crisis in the KRI has been the coincidence of the start of the economic crisis that hit the KRI, combined with the massive increase in the number of IDP

---

<sup>26</sup> UNHCR, "Displacement as a Challenge," p.51.

<sup>27</sup> UNHCR, *Displacement as a Challenge*, pp.26-27.

<sup>28</sup> MERI, *In It for The Long Haul: A New Response For IDPs In The Kurdistan Region Of Iraq*. Erbil, KRI: Middle East Research Institute. October 2015. Accessed July 7 2017, <http://www.meri-k.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/IN-IT-FOR-THE-LONG-HAUL-A-NEW-RESPONSE-FOR-IDPS-IN-THE-KURDISTAN-REGION-OF-IRAQ.pdf>.

arrivals to the region. As the major economic crisis was triggered by plummeting oil prices in 2014 and cuts in fiscal transfers to the KRG in February 2014,<sup>29</sup> the crisis hit the KRI on all levels of government and society. The massive shortcomings in the KRG budget meant not only equally large reduction in salaries of the huge number of government employees, but also limited KRG's ability in humanitarian response towards the influx of newly-arrived IDPs. The economic crisis not only negatively affected the public and community contribution to humanitarian efforts in the region, but also significantly increased the number of people in need. After losing a substantial portion of their monthly income, many host families are now in a desperate need of food and financial assistance to afford a decent life. Faced with the urgent and ever-increasing humanitarian crisis of IDPs and refugees in Iraq and the KRI, the concerned humanitarian community may have overlooked the hardship faced by many families within the host community, consequently, directing the bulk of their assistance to IDPs and to a lesser degree to the refugees.

Consequently, this fixed humanitarian policy will have a two-fold effect on the host communities: firstly, it will lead to underestimating the impact of the economic crisis on average citizens and will likely exclude them from assistance and development programs; and secondly, the continued uneven distribution of resources resulting from the lack of salaries for the host people while it is available to the most IDPs, will widen the economic gap between the two communities. As the previously cited study suggested, the economic gap may consequently create social tension and resentment between the two affected communities.<sup>30</sup>

### *A New Phase of Humanitarian Work*

As the war settles down and new political, social, and economic developments emerge in the KRI (especially on the issue of the referendum for independence), the humanitarian community is required to adapt to the new phase of humanitarian work in the KRI. It goes without saying that the humanitarian community cannot continue supplying the hundreds of thousands of IDPs and refugees who reside in the KRI with relief assistance alone. With the decreased funding resources secured by major humanitarian agencies, the focus should be shifted towards livelihood projects

---

<sup>29</sup> World Bank, *The Kurdistan Region of Iraq: Assessing the Economic and Social Impact Of The Syrian Conflict And ISIS*. Washington DC: World Bank Group. 2015, p.5.

<sup>30</sup> UNHCR, *Displacement as Challenge*, p.27.

and promoting economic performance of the IDPs and refugees. Here, the burden falls not on the KRG alone, as the communities at stake are coming from Iraq and neighboring Syria as well. Therefore, other stakeholders need to get involved to address this issue.

## **A Decline in Funding**

Perhaps another, more visible, challenge that is affecting humanitarian work in the KRI in particular and in Iraq as a whole, is the gradual but steady decline of funding. The decline has hit the humanitarian community on three levels: UN affiliated agencies, international NGOs and donor institutions, and national NGOs. One may find an outstanding example of the decline in UN's Iraqi humanitarian response budget. While already by the end of November 2016, the UNHCR's funding gap had stood at 57 percent,<sup>31</sup> seven months into the following year (2017), the funding crisis is still hampering the humanitarian response in the KRI and wider Iraq. The required budget for UNHCR's Iraq response for the year 2017 has been estimated at 578 million dollars. However, so far, only 21 percent of the required funding has been received which amounts reaching 123.9 million dollars. This will leave the UN agency with a staggering 541.1 million dollar-gap in its budget.<sup>32</sup> In early July 2017, the World Food Program (WFP) announced major cuts in its food stipend program to IDPs in the KRI due to major shortcoming in its funding. The decision has been putting more pressure on the KRG, which has experienced a strained economic downturn since 2014.<sup>33</sup>

## **Concluding Remarks**

The chronic and destructive armed conflict that raged throughout the Kurdistan Region pre- and post-1991 has turned the Kurdish population into humanitarian objects. This is true up to 2003, when the Kurdistan Region became a safe haven and a sanctuary for displaced people fleeing

---

<sup>31</sup> Mays, Al-Juboori and Hassin, Ahmad. *Humanitarian Challenges in Iraq's Displacement Crisis*. Ceasefire Center for Civilian Right and Minority Rights Group International. 2016. Accessed July 9 2017, [http://minorityrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/MRG-report-A4\\_english-DECEMBER-2016\\_WEB-2.pdf](http://minorityrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/MRG-report-A4_english-DECEMBER-2016_WEB-2.pdf).

<sup>32</sup> UNHCR, Iraq Situation Response

<sup>33</sup> Rudaw, "Food aid for IDPs outside of camps to be reduced in Kurdistan, Iraq," *Rudaw*, July 3, 2017, accessed July 7, 2017, <http://www.rudaw.net/english/kurdistan/030720177>.



KRI needs to address the humanitarian challenges alongside the obvious political, social, and economic ones. This chapter may serve as a guiding foundation for policy-makers and researchers for more in-depth research, along with long and short-term policies to address the volatile political and humanitarian situation in the KRI and Iraq as a whole.



## About the Authors

**Ranj Alaaldin** is a Visiting Fellow at the Brookings Institution in Doha and an Associate Fellow at the International Center for the Study of Radicalization and Political Violence (ICSR), King's College London. Alaaldin consults on regional and local trends in politics, energy and security, with a particular focus on Iraq, Turkey, Iran, Syria, and Libya. His research focuses on intrastate conflict, governance and human security issues. He has conducted extensive research on Kurdish politics, social and economic development in the Kurdistan Region, Shiite militia groups and power-sharing between the federal government in Baghdad and the KRG. Alaaldin was previously a Visiting Scholar at Columbia University and a Senior Consultant at the Next Century Foundation (NCF), a track-two conflict resolution think-tank. He led election monitoring teams in Iraq between 2009–14 and lead fact-finding missions to Libya (during the 2011 uprising), Turkey, Jordan, Egypt, and Lebanon. Alaaldin has presented his work at Princeton University, the Wilson Center, Hudson Institute, the Overseas Development Institute, the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR) and the Royal Institute for International Affairs (Chatham House). He has advised government and non-government organizations and has published in peer-reviewed academic journals as well as the *New York Times*, the *Guardian*, the *Daily Telegraph*, *Foreign Affairs*, CNN, and the *Wall Street Journal*. He is a contributing author to two edited volumes published by Oxford University Press (OUP) and is the author of a forthcoming book on armed groups in Iraq. He holds a Ph.D. from the London School of Economics and Political Science.

**Dlawer Ala'Aldeen** is the Founding President of the Middle East Research Institute (MERI), a policy research institute and think tank based in Erbil, the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Between 2009–12, he was the Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research in Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), where he led an ambitious reform program to modernize the higher education system. Prior to this, he was a Professor of Medicine at Nottingham University, UK, and held a number of senior board and executive positions at several national institutions and learned societies in the U.K., including the Royal College of Pathologists, the Medical

Research Council, the Health Protection Agency and Society for General Microbiology. He has been engaged in lobbying for human rights in Iraq since the 1980s, and in capacity building, nation-building and institution-alization projects since 1992. He has published extensively in peer-reviewed international journals and authored or co-authored several books. His current research interests are in the areas of political and security dynamics, governance system, human rights and democratization in the Middle East, with particular focus on Iraq and Kurdistan.

**Falah Mustafa Bakir** is the Minister of Foreign Relations, Head of the Department of Foreign Relations (DFR) in the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). In September 2006, he was appointed the first Head of the Department of Foreign Relations (DFR). He administers the KRG's foreign policy and bolsters relations with the international community. Bakir has traveled across the globe, promoting bilateral ties between the Kurdistan Region and other regions, nations, and countries around the world, as well as representing the KRI at multinational fora. He has led the DFR for four successive cabinets and has been part of the rapidly expanding relations between the KRG and foreign governments. He previously served as the KRG's liaison officer to the Multi-National Forces' Korean Contingent stationed in 2004 and the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) in 2003 in Erbil. He was also a senior advisor to the Prime Minister of the KRG from 2002 until 2004, when he was appointed Minister of State. He started his career as a Public Relations Officer of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) from 1992 to 1996. He then served as the Deputy Head of the KDP's Public Relations Office from 1996 to 1999. Bakir also served as the Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation from 1999–2002.

**Sirwan Barzani** holds the rank of Major General from the Ministry of Peshmerga, and is the founder and Chairman of Korek Telecom. He is currently commanding the Peshmerga forces in Sector 6 (Gwer - Makhmor) in the war against ISIS. General Barzani's sector, which consisted of 150 Peshmerga, was the first offensive encounter against ISIS, and was able to take back control of the lands that were taken by the terrorist group. General Barzani has received numerous awards and acknowledgements for his humanitarian and military work, including International Socrates Award, International European Quality Award from Oxford University, and a certificate of recognition from Salahadin University. He was awarded the Medal of Honor by the Afro-Asian Arab Council in Cairo, Egypt, where he was also named their goodwill ambassador, and holds a

medal from the humanitarian network in the Middle East, ICRIM. He has received a certificate of appreciation from the Order of World Peace Organization in Italy, and a certificate of international arbitration and security from the American Academy (Science Studies and Training) in Cairo. General Barzani has been a central committee member of the Kurdistan Democratic Party Leadership since 2010, and is an advisor to the president of the KRG. General Barzani is the President of the America-Kurdistan Friendship Association (AKFA). He graduated from the Military Academy II and received an honorary doctorate in National Security from the Cambridge Academy of Sciences, Technology, and Arbitration.

**Gazang Bradosti** is a Visiting Lecturer at Soran University, and is also a Fellow at the University. She is the Executive Officer at the Swedish Migration Agency in Sweden. In addition, Bradosti is working on a charity project to open a library for children in Soran. She has also worked in Palestine and Israel where she was monitoring and reporting any human rights violations in the occupied territories. In 2011, Bradosti was elected President of the European Law Students' Association at Örebro University. She graduated from the Örebro School of Law in Sweden and holds a Master's degree in Public International Law from the Sydney Law School.

**Stafford Clarry** is a humanitarian affairs advisor to the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). A native of Hawaii, his abiding interest is the cultural heritage of Hawaii and Kurdistan rooted in connections between the land and its indigenous people. He holds academic degrees from Syracuse and Harvard University and began his long career in humanitarian service as a volunteer with the American Peace Corps in village India in 1968. He continued serving with international NGOs and UN organizations in South Asia, East Africa, and the Middle East in humanitarian relief and development efforts addressing the needs of underprivileged, underempowered, and displaced communities. For many years, he focused on reconstruction and resettlement in Iraqi Kurdistan where more than 4,000 rural communities had been destroyed.

**Michael M. Gunter** is a Professor of Political Science at Tennessee Technological University in Cookeville, Tennessee. He also is the Secretary-General of the EU Turkey Civic Commission (EUTCC) headquartered in Brussels. In the past, he taught courses for many years during the summer at the International University in Vienna, as well as courses on Kurdish and Middle Eastern politics, among others, for the U.S. Government Areas Studies Program and U.S. Department of State Foreign Service Institute in Washington, D.C. He is the author of 10 critically praised

scholarly books on the Kurdish question, and editor or co-editor of four more books on the Kurds, among others. He has also published numerous scholarly articles on the Kurds and many other issues in such leading scholarly periodicals as the *Middle East Journal*, *Middle East Policy*, *Middle East Quarterly*, *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies*, *Orient*, *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, *Maghreb Review*, *American Journal of International Law*, *International Organization*, *World Affairs*, *Journal of International Affairs* (Columbia University), *Brown Journal of World Affairs*, *Columbia Journal of Transnational Law*, *Vanderbilt Journal of Transnational Law*, *Current History*, *Third World Quarterly*, *International Journal of Turkish Studies*, *Insight Turkey*, *Turkish Studies*, *Terrorism: An International Journal*, and *Arms Control*, among numerous others. His most recent books are *Out of Nowhere: The Kurds of Syria in Peace and War* (London: Hurst Publications, 2014); and *The Kurds: A Modern History*, 2nd ed. (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2017).

**Mariette Hägglund** is currently a graduate student in Peace and Conflict studies at the University of Tampere in Finland, and was a Visiting Fellow at the Center for Transatlantic Relations at the Johns Hopkins University Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS). She is a member of the Supervisory Board at the Mediterranean Development Initiative and an advisor for the World Youth Leadership Network (WYLN). Previously, Hägglund has worked as an individual contractor for United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR). She has also worked with human rights and global health issues as an intern at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs at the Permanent Mission of Finland to the UN in Geneva. Hägglund has written articles for various newspapers and online media outlets, and had a weekly column about the policies of the Trump administration for the Finnish organization Svenska Bildningsförbundet. She received her bachelor's degree in Sociology, Law and Development studies from the University of Helsinki. She is fluent in Finnish, Swedish, English and German.

**Ashti Hawrami** is the current Minister of Natural Resources in the KRG since May 2006, and has been twice reappointed (in the six cabinet on October 28, 2009, and in the seventh cabinet, on April 5, 2012). Before joining the KRG cabinet, Hawrami held several senior oil executive positions in the private sector. He began his career as an engineer in the Iraqi National Oil Company (INOC) in Basra from 1971 to 1974. After moving to the U.K., Hawrami worked as an engineer on the North Sea in Scotland for the British National Oil Company from 1975 to 1982. From 1982 to 1985, he worked as a senior oil engineer for the company Intera in London.

He was a senior engineer for an exploration consultancy from 1985 to 1988, and from 1988 to 1999 he was the proprietor and director of DUK, a limited liability UK engineering and services firm. In 1999, he became Chairman and CEO of ECL Group Plc. After retiring from ECL, he was appointed Minister of Natural Resources in 2006. Hawrami holds a Bachelor's degree in oil engineering from Baghdad University and a Ph.D. in Reserve Oil Engineering in Scotland.

**Pari Ibrahim** is the founder and Executive Director of the Free Yezidi Foundation. Ibrahim left Kurdistan with her family when she was three years old, fleeing attacks by the Saddam Hussein regime. She lived outside the city of Duhok in the town of Khanke. She now resides with her family in the Netherlands, and leads the efforts to raise funds for the Foundation and awareness of the plight of the Yezidis. After the ISIS attacks on Sinjar and the Yezidi population in August 2014, Ibrahim founded the Free Yezidi Foundation to help Yezidi civilians in need and raise awareness of the situation. On behalf of the Foundation, she has spoken at the United Nations Security Council, the British Parliament, and a number of prominent universities and think tanks in the United States and elsewhere. Ibrahim has also been active in organizing protests and speaking with the media, including Al-Monitor, the BBC, and the Dutch news show Brandpunt. After the first fact-finding missions to meet with survivors, Ibrahim understood that the Foundation would be most effective by providing services and assistance to survivors in the IDP camps. She has spearheaded FYF efforts to establish women's and children's centers in one such camp, leads the FYF justice project, and conducts general advocacy to promote greater humanitarian and human rights support to Yezidi civilians. Ibrahim studied at the University of Amsterdam. She speaks Kurdish (Kurmanji), Dutch, English, and German.

**Salam M. Islam (a.k.a. AbdulSalam Medeni)** is CEO of the Rwanga Foundation, and is a civic activist with experience in civil society program management and training. He focuses on the evolution and development of civil society in post-conflict environments. He started working as an activist with civil society in Iraqi in the early 1990's. In 1994, he was one of the founders of one of the most active student unions in the Kurdistan Region, The Kurdistan Students Development Union, with more than 10,000 members. He served as branch director and went on to be elected general secretary of the union. Salam joined the National Democratic Institute (NDI) in February 2005 in Iraq where he provided capacity building and leadership development trainings to Iraqi activists and civil

society organizations (CSOs). Between 2005 and 2009, Salam trained domestic observation networks working in Iraq in the elections, constitutional referendum and voter registration processes. In 2008, he worked with youth in Kurdistan to advocate for a law preventing smoking in public places. The group gathered 5,000 petitions and the team convinced more than 50 MPs in Kurdistan parliament to pass the law. He also participated in drafting some laws in Kurdistan (Anticorruption Act; Journalism Law; NGOs Law; Iraqi Personal Status Law; Organizing Volunteerism in Kurdistan Act). Salam has written five books and more than 700 articles in local Iraqi and international newspapers and magazines about developing democracy, civil society and developing leadership skills. He also served as a lecturer at multiple universities in Iraq and had his own TV and radio shows. Salam is doing consultancy work with international NGOs to conduct trainings and facilitate events inside and outside Iraq. He has served as an adviser for the Deputy Prime Minister of Kurdistan Regional Government on Civil Society and Youth issues. People know Salam as Abdul-Salam Medeni, a pseudonym he uses as a writer and lecturer.

**Tea Ivanovic** is a Fellow at the Center for Transatlantic Relations at the Johns Hopkins University Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS). She was the Project Manager for the 2016 Transatlantic Economic Forum, and several conferences on Iraqi Kurdistan hosted by CTR-SAIS. Previously, Ivanovic was at the financial consultancy Capstone LLC, and at the Institute of International Finance (IIF), in Washington D.C. While completing her M.A., she was a Graduate Research Fellow at the Center for Constitutional Studies and Democratic Development (CCSDD) in Bologna, Italy. She was involved with the organization of the 60th anniversary of the SAIS Europe Center, and was the Vice-President of the Women in International Affairs (WIA) organization. Ivanovic was also at the United Nations University Institute of Comparative Integration Studies (UNU-CRIS) in Bruges, Belgium, where she was the editor for United Nations University publications. She was also responsible for the organization of a joint UNU-CRIS and International Studies Association (ISA) conference in Bruges. Ivanovic published her thesis “External Pressures and Domestic Changes: The European Union, Council of Europe, and the Minorities in Vojvodina” in the academic journal *Philologia*. She contributed a book chapter to the publication *State (in)Security and Theory of International Relations*. While at SAIS, Ivanovic wrote extensively for the school’s newspaper, the *SAIS Observer*. She has contributed to and co-authored articles for the *Huffington Post* and *The Cipher Brief*. She holds a

M.A. in International Economics and International Relations with a concentration in European and Eurasian Studies from The Johns Hopkins Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS). She graduated *Summa Cum Laude* and *Phi Beta Kappa* from her B.A. in International Studies and Philosophy from Virginia Tech, where she received a four-year athletic scholarship for the D1 varsity tennis team. She speaks English, Dutch, Serbo-Croatian, French, and basic Italian.

**Dilshad H. Khidhir** is currently the head of BCF's Research and Staff Development section and a part-time lecturer at the School of International Relations and Diplomacy, Ishik University in Erbil. He specializes in Kurdish nationalism and identity, Kurds in American foreign policy, social policy, and humanitarian work in Iraq and the Kurdistan Region. He holds Ph.D. from the School of Politics and International Relations, the University of Nottingham, the U.K.

**Kamal Y. Kolo** is the Dean of the Scientific Research Center at Soran University where he has been a faculty professor since 2010. He holds a Ph.D. in Petroleum Geology from the University of Bucharest (1985) and a second Ph.D. in Biogeosciences from Vrije Universiteit Brussel (2009). His main research interests lie with petroleum studies and microbe-mineral interactions. He has co-authored several book chapters and numerous journal articles in applied sciences. He initiated and leads several Ph.D. research projects within the Research Center at Soran University. Kamal has worked on the question of ethnic and religious minorities in Iraq, their social history, literature, culture, political role and their future in Iraq specifically through international forums and through numerous publications and lectures. Published co-authored works include: *Das Ende Des Babylonischen Exiles* (2011); *Annemarie Schwarzenbach: Werk, Wirkung, Kontext*, (2010); *Es War Einmal In Aradin* (2009); *Inside out: textorientierte Erkundungen des Werks von Annemarie Schwarzenbach* (2008). He has given talks at numerous panels and conferences, including: On Christians and Yezidi minorities, Daesh and Kurdistan Independence, Institute Kurd de Paris (2017); Ethnic and Religious Minorities in Iraq: A history of Persecution, American Congress Washington D.C (2016); The Exodus of Religious minorities from Iraq, University of Central Florida (2013); The Exodus of Christians and Aramaic People from Mesopotamia, Musée Juif Bruxelles (2009) and Institute of Jewish Studies at the University of Antwerp (2008); European Parliament (2007).

**Luqman Sleman Mahmood** is head of Media and Publications for the Holy Lalish Center. He is also a guide at the Lalish Temple, where he

receives international guests and political delegations. In addition, he is a high school teacher in Shekhan, in the Province of Duhok. He has conducted many intellectual and academic debates on Yezidi culture and religion in Iraq and Iraqi Kurdistan. He has made several TV programs on Yezidi religion over the past ten years and has made 43 documentaries on various aspects of Yezidi culture. He holds a B.A. in Economics from Mosul University.

**Ibrahim Sadiq Malazada** is a lecturer, a Kurdish socio-political researcher and writer, and has worked at Koya University in the Kurdistan region of Iraq from 2012 in the Department of Social Science, and moved to the sociology department of Soran University at the end of 2016. His primary research has been in nation building, religion, and genocide as a way of understanding the behavior of successive Iraqi regimes against the Kurdish society. Malazada is currently involved in a number of projects relating to the Islamism, violence and Kurdish society. In addition to his academic career, he has over two decades of experience in policy and media and has worked with a variety of Kurdish newspapers and TV channels in Iraq and Europe. He has collaborated extensively with humanitarian organizations in the Middle East and Europe as an adviser on social integration and intercultural relations. His research interests include political Islam, nation building and peace operations. He also writes for *Al-Monitor*, a leading website on the Middle East. He holds a Master degree and Ph.D. in sociology from Brunel University London.

**Awat Mustafa** is the Director of Public Relations and Program Director at the Barzani Charity Foundation. He has been involved in large-scale programs in Iraq and Syria to help overcome humanitarian emergencies and build up hunger prevention programs. Under his leadership, BCF managed to serve millions of internally displaced people and refugees in the Kurdistan region of Iraq and the northern part of Iraq. For the last nine years, Mustafa has dedicated his time to serve people who suffered from manmade disasters. Before joining BCF, Mustafa has worked as a research coordinator at Rand Corporation, as a public outreach consultant at the World Bank, and as an expert on Iraqi issues to the immigration court in the UK. He also has extensive experience as a legal consultant and is a certified interpreter. Mustafa holds a B.A in Leadership and Management and is finalizing his M.A. in International Development at the Newcastle, Northumbria University. He is a well-known figure within the humanitarian field and has participated and held speeches at international major conferences and university seminars across Europe and the U.S. He

speaks Kurdish and English fluently and is confident in Arabic, Turkish and Farsi.

**Abdulsattar Majeed Qader** is the Minister of Agriculture and Water in the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). In the late 1980s, he was forced to flee the country due to political activities against the former regime. As a farmer and the son of a farmer, he is in a good position to understand and relate to the people's demands and the agricultural problems in the Kurdistan Region. He has been a practitioner and activist putting into practice and implementing key skills and strategies obtained either with studies or with experience. Prior to his current position as Minister of Agriculture, he has held other significant positions in the Islamic Movement, the Islamic Union and also the Islamic Group of Kurdistan IGK, which is the continuation of the former two Islamic parties (where he was the chief director of the politburo). He had been able to relate to the people within the structure of the political parties, in the government apparatus and in the wider social environment. He holds bachelor degree in Quranic Studies and has taken many courses on general management, human resources, political parties, politics, political organization and civil society, elections and electoral systems, and has taken practical courses with many organizations such as UN, the IRI and NDI.

**Bayan Sami Abdul Rahman** is the Kurdistan Regional Government Representative to the United States of America. Key to her role are strengthening ties between Kurdistan and the United States, focusing on political, security, humanitarian, economic and cultural matters and promoting coordination and partnership. Prior to her U.S. appointment in 2015, Abdul Rahman was the High Representative to the U.K. Before her career in public service, Abdul Rahman worked as a journalist for 17 years. She won *The Observer* newspaper's Farzad Bazoft Memorial Prize in 1993 and worked for various newspapers, including *The Observer* and the *Financial Times* in London and Japan. Her late father, Sami Abdul Rahman, was a veteran of the Kurdish freedom movement and a leader of the opposition to Saddam Hussein's regime. He was Deputy Prime Minister when he was killed alongside his elder son Salah and 96 others in 2004.

**Ali Sindi** is the Minister of Planning of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) since October 2009, and is also the Acting Minister of Trade and Industry of the KRG since October 2015. He was a senior advisor to the KRG Prime Minister between 2002 and 2009, and was Deputy Minister of Health and Social Affairs in the KRG between 1996 and 2001. Sindi is a medical doctor and specialized surgeon who holds a Master's

Degree in Public Administration from Harvard University, and a diploma in Administration and Leadership from Yale University.

**Sasha Toperich** is a Senior Fellow and Mediterranean Basin Initiative Director at the Center for Transatlantic Relations (CTR), at the Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS) of the Johns Hopkins University in Washington D.C. He is also the President of the America–Bosnia Foundation (ABF), President of the World Youth Leadership Network (WYLN), a business consultant to a number of companies worldwide, and a world-renowned pianist. He is co-editor of the book *A New Paradigm: Perspectives on the Changing Mediterranean* (Brookings Institute/CTR, 2014) with Andrew Mullins, and *Challenges of Democracy in the European Union and Its Neighbors* (Brookings Institute/CTR, 2016) with Aylin Ünver Noi. He is the co-author of two papers in the book *Unfinished Business: Western Balkans and the International Community* (Brookings Institute/CTR, 2012), titled “The Regulatory Environment in the Financial System in Bosnia and Herzegovina and How to Improve It” and “A New Paradigm for the Mediterranean: US–North Africa–South-east Europe.” He also co-authored the article “Challenges of Democracy in Bosnia–Herzegovina” in the book *Challenges of Democracy in the European Union and Its Neighbors* (Brookings Institute/CTR 2016). Previously, Toperich held several diplomatic positions for Bosnia and Herzegovina. In 2002–2003, he was an advisor to the Ambassador of Bosnia and Herzegovina to the United Nations, from 2003–2007, he was a Special Envoy of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina to the United States; and in 2009 and 2010, he served as a Counselor at the Permanent Mission of Bosnia and Herzegovina to the United Nations. He is a featured columnist at U.S.Military.com, holds a blog at the *Huffington Post*, and is a contributor to *The Hill*. A native of Sarajevo, he earned his B.A. and M.A. degrees from the Rubin Academy of Music in Jerusalem and his Ph.D. in music from the Academy in Lovran, Croatia. He is also the recipient of the UNESCO Artist for Peace title.

**Bashar Matti Warda** is the Chaldean Catholic Archbishop of Erbil in the Kurdistan Region of Northern Iraq. He joined Saint Peter’s seminary in Baghdad and was ordained as priest in 1993 after which he joined the Redemptorist Order of Flanders. He received his M.A. in Theology at the Catholic University of Louvain in 1999. In 2009, he was elected as Archbishop of the Archeparchy of Erbil at the Synod of Bishops of the Chaldean Catholic Church, and was consecrated on July 3, 2010 having received the consent of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI. As a leading international

voice for the persecuted Christians of Northern Iraq, the Archbishop's present responsibilities extend far beyond his normal peacetime pastoral duties. As de facto chief administrator for the welfare of both the displaced Christians of Mosul and Nineveh Plain, as well as the pastoral leader of his existing Archdiocese, his work includes ultimate oversight over food, housing, education, and pastoral care for nearly twenty thousand threatened Christian families. As an accomplished educator, the Archbishop is the author of several books and numerous articles. He presently teaches multiple courses at Babel Theological Seminary in Erbil and was the founder of several Catholic schools in Baghdad. In 2011, the Archbishop was the founder of the Mar Qardakh School in Erbil, which received its International Baccalaureate accreditation in 2015. In 2012, he initiated the founding plan for the Catholic University in Erbil, which held its inaugural opening in November, 2015. Since the ISIS invasion of Mosul and Nineveh in 2014, the Archbishop has emerged as a global spokesman for the remaining Christians of Iraq. He has appeared on CBS Sixty Minutes, NPR, CBC, EWTN, and in numerous other articles and broadcasts. In 2015, he was the keynote speaker at the International Convention of the Knights of Columbus, and most recently spoke to over 19,000 pilgrims at the World Youth Day in Krakow, Poland.

**Nahro Zagros** is the Vice-President for Scientific Affairs at Soran University, returning to the Kurdistan Region seven years ago after living in the U.K. He is also a member of Human Capacity Development Program (HCDP) Committee at the Ministry of Higher Education. He writes frequently on cultural, social and political subjects for national and international newspapers and academic journals. He is currently working on writing a book on the current cultural and political life of the contemporary Yezidis in Iraq. Zagros works as a senior fellow at London Center for Policy Research, where he focuses on Kurdistan political affairs within the wider context of the Middle East. He is a board member of International Institute for the Study of Kurdish Societies (IISKS) in Germany. He is also on editorial board of two academic journals: *Twejer*, published by Soran University; and the *Journal of Middle East Research* (IMER). Besides his academic work and duties, Zagros is an accomplished violinist and composer. He performs regularly with his musical bands, The Zagros Band and Mambo Jambo, in the U.K. He has composed several musical pieces for orchestras in Kurdistan and Europe as well as music for commercial TV documentaries and adverts. He holds a Ph.D. in Ethnomusicology from York University, U.K.

