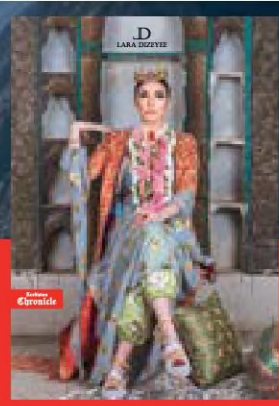


ONE ROAD  
MULTIPLE CONNECTION



# Kurdistan Chronicle

April 2023 Volume 1 Issue 3

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AN  
AGREEMENT  
FOR TODAY  
A ROADMAP  
FOR  
TOMORROW

JD  
LARA DIZEYEE

*Capturing the Beauty  
of Kurdish Heritage  
Through Fashion*



# EDITORIAL

## A MOMENTOUS MONTH OF REMEMBRANCE, RESILIENCE AND DIPLOMATIC TRIUMPH



**Treefa Aziz**

*Treefa Aziz serves as the Senior Foreign Affairs Advisor to PM Barzani.*

April is always a vibrant and momentous month in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, and this year proved especially significant and dynamic. The April 2023 edition of Kurdistan Chronicle explores the month's key events, from commemorations past and present to vital political developments, that herald progress towards a brighter future for all.

The anniversary of the Anfal genocide – a tragic event from the late 1980s during which Saddam Hussein's regime massacred more than 182,000 innocent Kurds – was commemorated on April 14. Additionally, the Yezidi community celebrated the Yezidi New Year on April 19, honoring the sacred Lalish temple and reaffirming their faith. Also, April 22 marked the anniversary of the first Kurdish newspaper, which was initially published in Cairo in 1898 by Mikdad Midhad Bedir Khan.

The most important development affecting the entire Kurdistan Region, however, was the agreement reached by the Kurdistan Region Government (KRG) Prime Minister Masrour Barzani and the Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani. The March 23 decision by the International Chamber of Commerce regarding the export of Kurdish oil, reached nearly a decade after the case was initially filed, elicited a breakthrough for Baghdad and Erbil to finally address an issue that began with Baghdad's suspension of the KRG's share of the federal budget in 2014.

The KRG's position had initially appeared weak after the court's decision and Iraq claiming victory. Yet an interim agreement reached on April 4, one week after arbitration ruling, suggested that Baghdad and Erbil had already been discussing the issue for some time. Indeed, multiple KRG delegations had visited Baghdad to negotiate the region's share in the

federal budget as well as a framework for a new federal oil and gas law.

The newly brokered deal would remain in effect until a federal budget law is passed by the Iraqi Parliament. If the terms of the agreement are fully implemented as agreed upon, the economic and political position of the Kurdistan Region will improve.

In the end, Prime Minister Barzani was able to transform a decades-long dispute with the federal government into a legitimate and significant enterprise for the Kurdistan Region. In fact, both Prime Ministers Sudani and Barzani negotiated in good faith to reach a pragmatic win-win agreement.

Support from the international community for the oil agreement was evident. Several U.S. and European officials praised the Baghdad-Erbil oil accord. Several high-ranking U.S. officials, including National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Energy Resources Ambassador Geoffrey Pyatt, and U.S. Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs Barbara Leaf all reiterated the "strong support for the agreement" of the United States, describing the deal "as a win for the whole country," and emphasized "U.S. full support for its full implementation."

Indeed, American diplomacy in Iraq in general, and in the Kurdistan Region in particular, has focused on improving internal conflicts and supporting greater cooperation between Baghdad and Erbil. Several high-level U.S. officials have visited the region to encourage positive change and advance strategic policy priorities. Both the KRG and the U.S. government continue to value its long-standing partnership based on shared values and interests.

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APRIL 2023





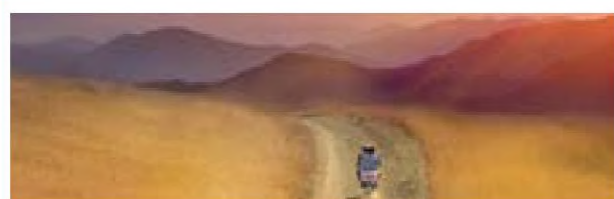
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## POLITICS

# A DEAL FOR TODAY, A ROADMAP FOR TOMORROW



**Marewan Hawramy**

*Marewan Hawramy is a writer and has master degree in diplomacy and international relations.*

## Context

Following the March 23 ruling by the International Court of Arbitration of the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC), which suspended oil exports from the Kurdistan Region to Turkey's port in Ceyhan, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and Iraq's Federal Government reached a temporary arrangement to resume the flow of crude oil exports.

On April 4, KRG Prime Minister Masrour Barzani and his Iraqi counterpart Mohammed Shia al-Sudani signed an agreement in Baghdad, marking a significant development in the relationship between the regional and federal governments. This deal is considered the beginning of a new era between the two parties after nearly a decade of tension over the management of oil-export revenues. Both sides have welcomed the agreement, which is crucial to the economic wellbeing of the region and the country.

## What led to the agreement?

Oil exports from the Kurdistan Region have been ongoing since April 2014 after the Iraqi government suspended

the KRG's share from the federal budget. This occurred around the same time as the emergence of the Islamic State (ISIS) and the subsequent displacement of almost two million Iraqi citizens and Syrian refugees to the Kurdistan Region. The KRG had been using the oil revenues to run the administration of the autonomous region and fund the overpopulated refugee camps.

This arrangement continued until February 2022 when, in a turn of events, Iraq's Supreme Federal Court ruled that Kurdistan's oil exports were unconstitutional. In response, the KRG adopted a resolute stance, asserting its right to manage the natural resources within its territories and characterizing the verdict as "politically motivated" and unjustified on a constitutionally invalid.

The Kurdistan Region's

oil exports were governed by the provisions of Oil and Gas Law No. 22 of 2007, while Iraq continues to administer its energy sector based on the outdated Oil and Gas Law No. 80 of 1961. The Kurds hold that the latter was primarily designed for a central government and is unsuitable for the current federal structure of Iraq, which has been in place since 2005.

Nevertheless, negotiations to settle the long-standing oil and budget disputes have been actively underway between Baghdad and Erbil since the incumbent cabinet of PM Sudani was formed in October 2022. Thereafter, high-level Kurdish delegations made several visits to Baghdad to discuss the differences and expressed optimism for achieving a lasting agreement.

In an exclusive interview with Kurdistan Chronicle, Umed Sabah, the President of the Diwan of KRG's Council of Ministers, highlighted the atmosphere of goodwill and determination that facilitated the agreement between Baghdad and Erbil.

Sabah emphasized that the regional and federal governments recognized the detrimental effects of the suspension of oil exports on the economy of Iraq and the well-being of its people. He further pointed out that the halting of oil exports from the Kurdistan Region and Kirkuk would result in a decline of 500,000 barrels per day in Iraq's overall oil exports, ultimately causing adverse impacts on both the economy and welfare of people in both the Kurdistan Region and Iraq.

PM Masrour Barzani and Iraqi counterpart, Mohammed Shia al-Sudani, during the signing ceremony of the Agreement, April 4, 2023.

Photo: Sabr Dri

## Content of the agreement

The recent oil agreement between the Iraqi federal government and the Kurdistan Regional Government includes four main provisions aimed at resuming the flow of oil from Kurdistan to the international market.

The agreement stipulates that a four-member joint committee will be established to formulate a mechanism for selling KRG's oil to traders who have contracts with the region until the passage of Iraq's federal budget. The Oil Ministries of both the KRG and Iraq will negotiate with oil companies regarding their duties and entitlements in the Kurdish oil sector. The oil revenues will be deposited into a bank account approved by Iraq's Central Bank, which will be supervised by the Iraqi government, while the Kurdistan Region's Prime Minister or his representative will have sole authority to access the funds. Lastly, a representative of the KRG, chosen by PM Barzani, will be appointed as deputy general director of Iraq's state oil marketing company (SOMO).

Kamal Mohammed, the KRG's acting Minister of Natural Resources, shed light on the complex technicalities of the agreement in an interview with Kurdistan Chronicle. According to Mohammed, the joint committee created under the new deal will oversee the sale of Kurdistan oil at the highest price each month. However, all other procedures, including the extraction, transportation, storage, and management of Kurdistan crude, will remain under the complete control of the KRG.

"The only stage of oil exports that had been deemed illegal according to the ICC arbitration is the loading stage. In other words, all other stages of oil exports have been found to be legal. In the past, the Kurdistan Region sold its oil at a lower price to encourage oil buyers who found dealing with the KRG risky due to restrictions imposed by the Iraqi government," Mohammed added.

It is important to note that the KRG has entered into partnership agreements with international oil companies (IOCs), while Iraq has typically dealt with these firms through service contracts. This difference has resulted in a lower income per barrel for the Kurdistan Region's oil exports in the past.

Mohammed pointed out that the traders and IOCs who have contracts with the KRG have now accepted the new arrangements stipulated in the Baghdad-Erbil deal.

According to the information obtained by Kurdistan Chronicle, the governments of Iraq and the Kurdistan Region have reached a consensus on exporting 400,000 barrels of crude oil per day, with a margin of  $\pm 10\%$ . The pricing mechanism for the exports will be determined by SOMO, which discloses the price in the first week of each month for traders to submit their offers.

## Transitional period

The agreement in question, however, is said to be a temporary formula to deal with the export suspension for a transitional period. That means that a more concrete and comprehensive deal is expected to follow. Asked about what comes next, the President of the Diwan of KRG's Council of Ministers noted that the agreement specifically outlines its temporary nature, as it is set to be replaced with the passing of Iraq's federal budget law by the parliament.

The Iraqi Council of Ministers has approved the budget bills for the fiscal years 2023, 2024, and 2025, which have now been submitted to the Council of Representatives for ratification. The budget law contains provisions for a financial clearing process between the KRG's oil revenues and its share from the federal budget. This

means that the Iraqi government will deduct the amount of monthly oil revenues from the KRG's monthly budget share to balance the difference.

## Economic and political implications

The deal between Baghdad and Erbil focuses exclusively on the resumption of oil exports, but it is evident that both sides anticipate positive political outcomes from the agreement in their relationship.

Since 2005, Baghdad and Erbil have had a tumultuous relationship, with the latter asserting that the former has not fulfilled its obligations to grant the Kurdistan Region its "constitutional rights," whether financial or political. Despite the challenges they have faced, both sides have continued to explore new initiatives to resolve their differences and have managed to maintain a functional relationship.

When asked whether the recent oil deal between Baghdad and Erbil could be considered a win-win, Sabah replied that the Kurdish delegation did not approach the negoti-

**Iraq continues to administer its energy sector based on the outdated Oil and Gas Law No. 80 of 1961. Kurdistan insists that the law was primarily designed for a central government and is unsuitable for the current federal structure of Iraq**



“

**Among the different stages of the oil business, including administration, extraction, transportation, storage, and marketing, only loading was ruled illegal by the ICC.**

”

*Kamal Mohammed, KRG's Acting Minister of Natural Resources*

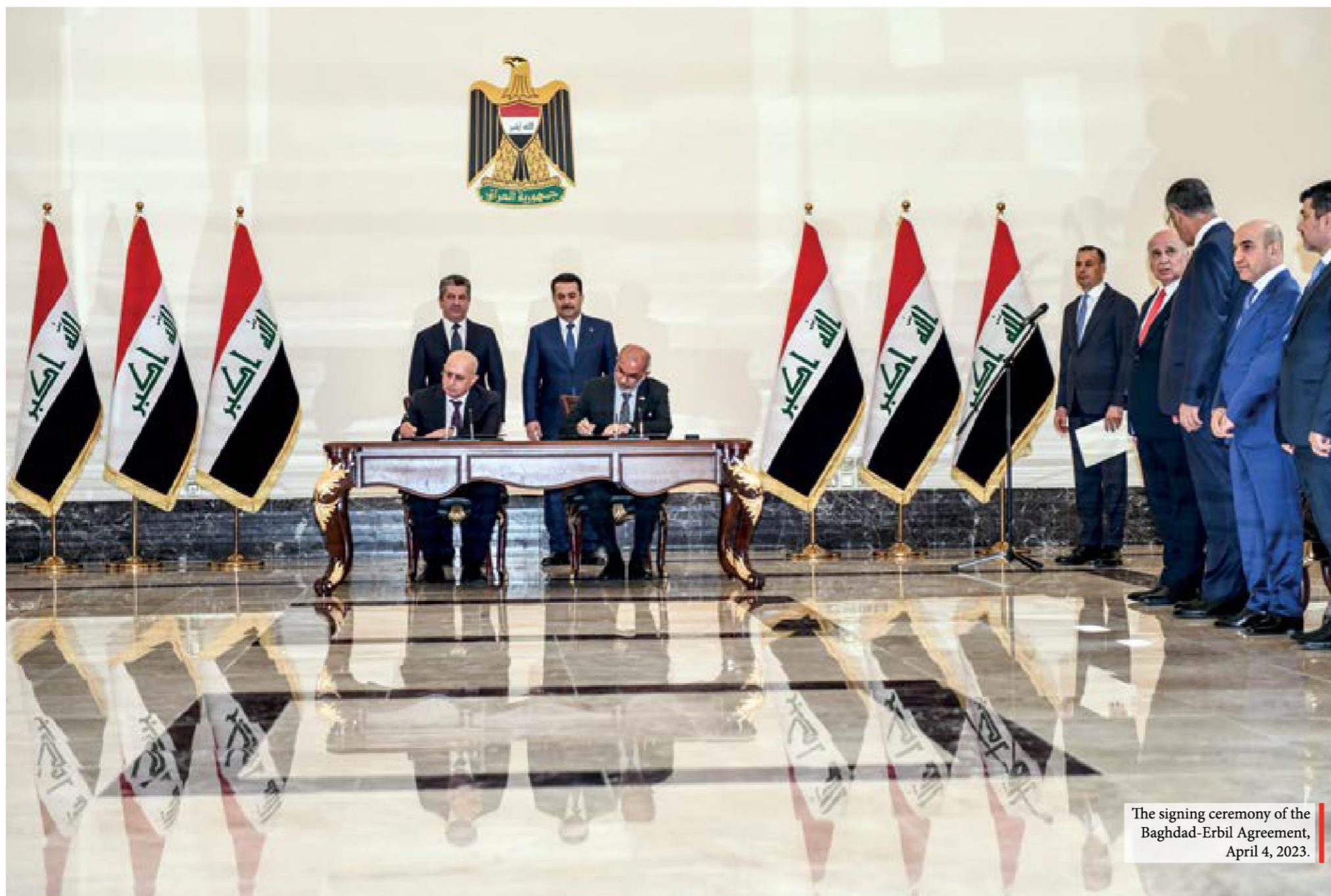


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**We are 100% committed to the deal and don't have any demands other than those in the budget bill. Moreover, we will fulfill our duties as a party to the deal and expect Iraq to fulfill its duties as well.**

”

*Umed Sabah, President of the Diwan of KRG's Council of Ministers*



The signing ceremony of the Baghdad-Erbil Agreement, April 4, 2023.

Photo: Sabr Dri

ations with the aim of outdoing the other party. Instead, they worked collaboratively as a single committee with their Iraqi counterparts to tackle the pressing challenges at hand.

“What was important for us during the negotiations was that we had the responsibility to protect the constitutional rights and interests of the people. This positive attitude helped us reach the deal,” Sabah stressed. “We are 100% committed to the deal and don’t have any further demands other

than those in the budget bill. Moreover, we will fulfill our duties as a party to the deal and expect Iraq to fulfill its duties as well.”

### International stakeholders

The disputes over oil exports affect not only Iraq and the Kurdistan Region, but also international stakeholders involved in the sector, particularly those working in the Kurdistan Region.

Therefore, any new agreement to regulate the oil sector between Baghdad and Erbil will also affect these vital partners.

After oil exports were suspended in March, there were concerns that the IOCs and traders would withdraw from the Kurdistan Region, but this did not materialize. On the contrary, according to Minister Mohammed, additional companies have expressed interest in investing in the KRG’s untapped oilfields.

In relation to the future of the contracts between the KRG and the IOCs, both Kurdish officials interviewed by Kurdistan Chronicle highlighted that Erbil would uphold its existing contracts within the new framework established by the agreement between Iraq and the Kurdistan Region.

### What if a party breaches the deal?

The Iraq-Kurdistan relationship has encountered numerous challenges due to internal, regional, and international factors in the past. This may raise concerns among both sides about the sustainability of the deal and each side’s commitment to it.

The Minister of Natural Resources of the Kurdistan Region stated that the political agreement that led to the formation of the current cabinet of Prime Minister Sudani serves as a guarantee for the deal. He added that the deal is considered “temporary” and only for a transitional period, as the permanent resolution of the oil disputes will be addressed in the Iraqi Oil and Gas Law, which is expected to be ready for ratification by the Iraqi Parliament within six months from the formation of the current Iraqi cabinet.

In October 2022, Iraq was finally able to form a new government after a year of early elections. According to the political agreement that facilitated this, the financial disputes between Baghdad and Erbil must be resolved. The agreement mandates a thorough audit of budget shares and oil exports from 2004 to 2023, with the resulting differences to be resolved.

This government-formation agreement, as the Kurdish minister argues, serves as the basis for the oil deal and,

in fact, guarantees the commitment of both sides.

### Delayed resumption of exports

Asked about the delay in resuming the flow of oil exports from the Kurdistan Region to Turkey’s Ceyhan port, Minister Mohammed noted that there are several technical, contractual, and administrative procedures that must be completed before exports can begin under the new arrangement. The minister acknowledged that these procedures are complex and time-consuming, but expressed hope that they will be concluded soon. However, he also noted that the final

### The political agreement, based on which the incumbent cabinet of the Iraqi government has been formed, forms the basis for the oil deal between Baghdad and Erbil

decision on resuming exports ultimately rests with Iraq and Turkey.

“Turkey has suspended the pipeline at the request of the Iraqi government. Therefore, the latter will be required to officially request the former to lift the suspension. It also must be noted that the ICC’s ruling has put Turkey in debt to Iraq. This financial matter between Ankara and Baghdad needs to be addressed or it might affect the decision to resume KRG’s crude export,” the Kurdish minister concluded.

# OPINION

## REFLECTING ON COL. LYON'S VISION AFTER THE RECENT BAGHDAD-ERBIL AGREEMENT



Dara Attar

Dara Attar is specialist in Kurdish affairs and an accomplished author on the subject.

The accord reached in April between Erbil and Baghdad has triggered a sense of déjà vu, evoking memories of an experience I had in London during the 1970s: I had the honor of fulfilling the request of the legendary Kurdish leader Mustafa Barzani to meet with British Col. Wallace A. Lyon, who held a strong conviction that Iraq could only achieve success and prosperity by working together with the Kurds, not against them.

Over the decades, the acrimonious disputes between Baghdad and Erbil concerning power-sharing, revenue allocation, the resolution of disputed territories and the Arabization of Kurdish areas, among other issues, have led to serious consequences for all involved.

However, the most recent agreement signed by the leaders of both the Kurdistan Regional Government and the Iraqi Federal Government charts a new course forward. With any luck, it will put an end to the protracted issues of the past and provide a framework for the two parties to reconcile their differences.

### Recognizing aspirations for self-rule

My doubts about the likelihood of this agreement being realized stem from the fact that the Iraqi government has a track record of not fulfilling its promises over the past century. Furthermore, my meeting with Col. Lyon has reinforced my skepticism.

During our conversation, Lyon and I engaged in many topics surrounding the numerous challenges faced by the Kurdish people in Iraq. Lyon's extensive involve



Colonel Lyon fishing in Kurdistan in the 1930s. |

ment in Kurdistan extended across nearly three decades, spanning from 1918 to 1945.

Lyon was appointed as the British representative in Kurdistan in 1918, following the end of World War I. At the time, the region was under Ottoman rule, and Lyon was tasked with overseeing the withdrawal of Turkish troops and establishing a provisional administration. He quickly recognized the Kurds' aspirations for self-rule and worked tirelessly to ensure that their interests were represented in the post-war settlement.

Throughout this period, Lyon was instrumental in shaping the political and military landscape of the Middle East. During our

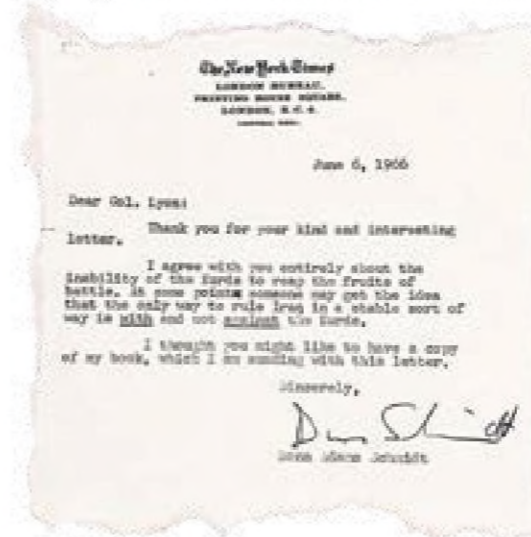


Col. Lyon hunting with some locals in Sharazour in the 1930s. |

conversation, Lyon strongly asserted that Iraq's stability and prosperity would remain elusive until the Kurdish issue was acknowledged and the Kurds were granted the right to autonomy. Given his unwavering support for the Kurdish cause in

colleagues, and he continued to advocate for their cause.

In 1945, he wrote a book entitled *The Kurdish Problem in Iraq*, in which he argued for greater Kurdish autonomy within Iraq. In the 1930s, he had, after all, played a key role in negotiating a settlement between the British authorities and Kurdish nationalists.



The original letter of Dana Adams Schmidt to Col. Lyon. |

Iraq, Lyon made a concerted effort to express his concerns to British and American authorities, in addition to actively engaging with journalists and academic communities on the matter.

### Steadfast dedication to the Kurdish cause

Following the end of the war, Lyon retired from military service and returned to England. However, he remained in contact with his Kurdish

Despite his retirement, Lyon remained engaged with Kurdish leaders, leveraging his influence and expertise to vigorously promote their pursuit of greater autonomy and self-government. His steadfast dedication to the Kurdish cause serves as a testament to his enduring commitment to the advancement of Kurdish interests and the realization of their aspirations for a just and equitable future.

Lyon posited that both the British and Iraqi Arabs had failed to comprehend the legitimate demands of the Kurdish people, an error of great consequence. His convictions were shared by a fellow admirer of Kurdish people, Dana Adams Schmidt, with whom he corresponded at length.

In fact, following our conversation, Lyon retrieved a letter from his desk – one that had been sent to him by Schmidt on June 6, 1966, while he was

serving as the correspondent for the New York Times in London. In the letter, Schmidt concurred with Lyon's view that the only means of achieving stability in Iraq is by working in tandem "with" the Kurds, rather than "against" them.

Lyon was deeply committed to his advocacy on behalf of the Kurds, and the letter from Schmidt served as an additional source of affirmation of his efforts.

At the end of the meeting, Col. Lyon gave me the original copy of the letter and sent it along with a Cambridge University scarf as a gift to Mustafa Barzani. When I returned to Kurdistan, I delivered Lyon's message to Barzani and handed him the scarf and the letter. Upon reading it, Barzani asked me to safeguard it.

### Prioritizing collaboration

Over the course of his extensive service in Kurdistan, Col. W.A. Lyon developed a deep-seated commitment to the Kurdish cause, which led him to become an unwavering supporter of Kurdish self-determination.

Regrettably, his decision to retire was motivated primarily by the consistent failure of Arab politicians to uphold their commitments to the Kurdish people, including the provision of a just profit-sharing agreement for oil revenues.

What stands out is that for the past seventy years, the Iraqi government has repeatedly pledged to address the concerns of the Kurdish people yet has consistently failed to follow through on its promises.

The success of the present agreement between Baghdad and Erbil will therefore hinge on the ability of the Iraqi government to fulfill its commitments. Whether Baghdad will exhibit the sort of leadership that Col. Lyon and Schmidt called for in 1966, which prioritizes collaboration with rather than against the Kurds, remains uncertain, but one must remain hopeful.

## DIPLOMACY

# AMERICAN INNOVATIONS TO DIPLOMACY IN THE IRAQI KURDISTAN REGION



Irvin Hicks

*Irvin Hicks is the Consul General of the United States of America in the Kurdistan Region.*

One of the things that I've always admired about my country is our indomitable spirit of innovation. Many of our founding politicians, statesmen, and diplomats were themselves inventors, including Benjamin Franklin, who invented new technologies from stoves to lightning rods, and even bifocal glasses. The internet, developed by U.S. government researchers and American academics, later went on to change the world. I like to think that we have carried on in that tradition here at the U.S. Consulate General as well, with a number of innovations to how we practice diplomacy in the 21st century.

Too often, diplomats get caught in the trap of being siloed, developing more and more expertise in smaller and smaller areas of inquiry. It can be hard to break out of that bubble, to engage with broader audiences of stakeholders and decision makers, and thereby to gain greater wisdom to promote impactful positive change.

To help overcome this tendency, the Biden Administration has put DEIA – diversity, equity, inclusion, and access – at the front and center of its foreign policy. By bringing in a larger number of more diverse voices to our work, we can avoid the pitfalls of our own blind spots, and by engaging a broader group of partners, we can energize our own efforts to make progress on strategic policy priorities.

## Coordinating innovation

As a part of this DEIA effort, the U.S. Consulate team launched the first-ever coordination group of over a dozen senior foreign diplomats in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region (IKR) – the Consuls General Coordination Group, or CGCG

– including representatives of like-minded nations who are now working collectively to advance issues including human rights, press freedom, gender equality, economic growth, and good governance.

Working to deepen and broaden U.S. trade and investment partnerships with the IKR has long been a Consulate priority, and another innovation is helping us do that. As we met with business leaders around the region, we recognized a strong desire for more contact with the U.S. business community. At the same time, the American Chamber of Commerce (AmCham) Kurdistan, under the able leadership of Mr. Dori Abouzeid, was looking to expand its network, promote opportunities for U.S. firms, and boost its influence as an advocate for American business values.

Recognizing how those interests aligned, we brought together the four IKR Chambers of Commerce and Industry – Duhok, Erbil, Halabja, and Sulaymaniya – with the AmCham-Kurdistan for discussions about how they could work together. The result? The formal launch on February 12 of the American Chamber of Commerce Network. This coordination framework brings these five great business organizations together for one purpose: to increase U.S.-IKR business ties. The group is already collaborating to co-host events in support of a June 2023 U.S. trade mission that will focus on opportunities in the IKR's agricultural value chain, from "Farm to Fork."

## Addressing policy challenges

Another great innovation was a recent, historic policy conference that we hosted here in

Erbil, bringing together over a dozen U.S. government experts on the region to discuss how to strengthen our strategic relationship with the IKR. Held in early April, this first-ever such conference brought together officials from the Consulate, U.S. Embassy Baghdad, the National Security Council, our Counter-Terrorism Bureau, and our policy offices in Washington covering the region.

There was no time like the present for such a historic event. The IKR faces serious political and economic challenges and opportunities, including on oil exports, the development of natural gas infrastructure, and the need to diversify the economy.



Photo: US Consulate General

Deepening political divisions are also putting at risk the region's progress and reform agenda, but young people are increasingly demanding a voice. Historically, the IKR has been held up as a model for the region on issues of diversity and peaceful coexistence. However, the State Department's 2021 and 2022 Human Rights Reports have noted concerning backsliding in democratic principles and human rights, including in the areas of freedom of expression, freedom of peaceful assembly, and freedom of the press. U.S. companies seeking trade and investment opportunities in the region report a lack of financial transparency while sharing concerns about corruption that make it difficult to attract American investors and grow the IKR's private sector.

Our recent policy conference provided an important opportunity for leaders from across the U.S. government's foreign policy establishment to consider ways in which the challenges facing Iraqi Kurds may be similar to, or different from, those faced by Kurds in other countries. Simultaneously, it showed the importance that the Biden Administration has placed on building political, economic, and security connections between the United States and its partners, and among those partners, across the Middle East region wherever possible, while still respecting each country's sovereignty and independent choices. We were grateful to be able to have frank and productive discussions

cy Director for Ethnic and Religious Minorities Florin Gorgis Seudin. The event provided an opportunity to congratulate those present on the tremendous efforts made by the KRG to protect the rights of religious minorities, while discussing other areas where progress can still be made.

## A partnership of shared values and interests

Finally, no visit to the IKR would be complete without taking time to appreciate the region's deep well of cultural heritage. Participants were wowed by their experience at the Citadel, with a guided tour by Citadel High Commissioner Nihad Qoja, including a visit to the U.S.-funded restoration efforts at the hamam, and the new U.S.-funded children's interpretive center. Several participants walked away with keepsakes from the Kurdish Textile Museum and from the Citadel bazaar.

The following day, we also took the opportunity to visit the excellent Erbil Civilization Museum, with an insightful tour led by Erbil Antiquities Directorate manager Nader Babakr Mohammed.

So what have these innovative engagements taught us? First and foremost, the IKR is special in large part because of its diversity and strong tradition of peaceful coexistence. Second, our cooperation with the IKR has been successful, and continues to be important, because of our 32-year friendship and partnership based on shared values and interests. We are committed to working with our Kurdish friends to ensure that tradition endures.

# HUMANITARIAN

## EARTHQUAKE RESPONSE KURDISTAN'S DETERMINATION TO LEAVE NO LIVES BEHIND



**Mohammad  
Dargalayi**

*Mohammed Dargalayi is a journalist and photographer, who has been working for nearly 13 years. He is a member of the Kurdistan Union of Journalists and the Kurdistan Photographers Association. He is a member of IFJ Global.*

On February 6th, the world was stunned by a catastrophic earthquake that rocked a wide swath of land spanning southern Turkey and northern Syria. The seismic event resulted in an estimated death toll of nearly 60,000 people, with more than 120,000 injured. However, within a mere 12 hours of the disaster, three search and rescue teams dispatched by the Kurdistan Regional Government's (KRG) Joint Crisis Coordination Center (JCC) had arrived at the border crossing, becoming the first group to respond to the millions of individuals in dire need of assistance.

The JCC teams consisted of a total of 184 highly trained first responders, including skilled medics and rescuers. Upon arrival at the disaster site, they were warmly received by Turkey's Disaster and Emergency Management Authority (AFAD) and promptly dispatched to Ishahiye in Maras province, an area that had been severely impacted by the earthquake.

In an exclusive interview with Kurdistan Chronicle, Tahsin Akrayi, Head of the Kurdistan Region Emergency Team, highlighted that his team had undertaken 14 days

of intensive, non-stop operations, resulting in the rescue of two individuals and the recovery of 12 bodies from underneath the rubble. Akrayi described his team as being "well-equipped and trained." He also noted that unlike other international rescue teams, the Kurdish rescuers worked around the clock, fully aware of the critical moments that could make a difference between life and death.

"The location where we rescued a father and his daughter was not initially assigned to the KRG team. We received a request asking for assistance. Once we arrived, we realized that three other teams had abandoned the location because they could not find the people. We, however, were determined to leave no lives behind. The Kurdish team worked extremely hard to safely remove the piles of concrete and rescue the father and his daughter," Akrayi explained.

The exceptional performance of the Kurdish rescue team during the operation resulted in the extension of their mission and the geographic expansion of their activities to cover additional areas. The AFAD teams found it necessary to utilize not only the expert human resources but

also the advanced machinery and equipment provided by the Kurdish teams to remove the rubble. This underscored the Kurdistan Region's capacity to exceed international expectations as a non-state entity. It also demonstrated that through resilience and the determination to overcome a tragic past, the Kurdistan Region is steadily evolving into a modern society that plays an influential role in the region and the world at large.

"Throughout the cross-border rescue operations, there was not a moment in which national, religious, or ideological differences were taken into consideration. The focus remained solely on aiding humanity, regardless of the backgrounds of the victims in need," Akrayi added.

During a ceremony in late April, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan awarded the State Medal of High Sacrifice to 93 national and international rescue teams, including the JCC from the Kurdistan Region. This was a timely recognition for Akrayi and his team who lived with the pain, panic, and perseverance of the people, the Kurdish official said.

Upon their arrival back home, the Kurdish first responders

from both government teams and the Barzani Charity Foundation (BCF) were greeted by President Masoud Barzani, who commended their work and highlighted that they had brought pride to the nation. Additionally, KRG Prime Minister Masrour Barzani met with the rescuers and expressed gratitude for their selfless dedication in saving lives beyond the borders of Kurdistan.

It is noteworthy that Turkey was not the sole destination for Kurdish humanitarian aid following the earthquake. The BCF facilitated the delivery of the first shipments of food and medical assistance to the Kurdish areas affected in the

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During a ceremony in late April, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan awarded the State Medal of High Sacrifice to 93 national and international rescue teams, including the JCC from the Kurdistan Region

northwest of Syria. The cross-border delivery into Syrian territories was a notable accomplishment for the Kurdish humanitarian teams, as the ongoing conflicts in the region made

the immediate delivery of aid a challenging task.

Almost three months since the earthquake, the Kurdistan Region continues to send substantial shipments of humanitarian aid to the affected areas where the people need time to get back on their feet, according to Srwa Rasool, the General Director of JCC at KRG's Interior Ministry.

The official told Kurdistan Chronicle that over 450 truckloads of humanitarian aid were sent to Syria and Turkey by the KRG in the nearly three months since the earthquake. Rasool also highlighted the nationwide donation drives initiated by Prime





The ceremony of awarding the Turkish State Medal of High Sacrifice to representatives of 93 countries. Ankara, April 25, 2023.

Minister Masrour Barzani in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake, citing them as evidence of the peace-loving nature of the people of Kurdistan who came together to help those in need, irrespective of political and ideological differences.

**Almost three months since the earthquake, the Kurdistan Region continues to send substantial shipments of humanitarian aid to the affected areas where the people need time to get back on their feet**

committed organization that can respond promptly to crises. She emphasized that JCC has demonstrated its capabilities on various occasions, including during its response to the arrival of nearly two million displaced

Iraqis and Syrian refugees in the aftermath of the emergence of the Islamic State (ISIS) in 2014.

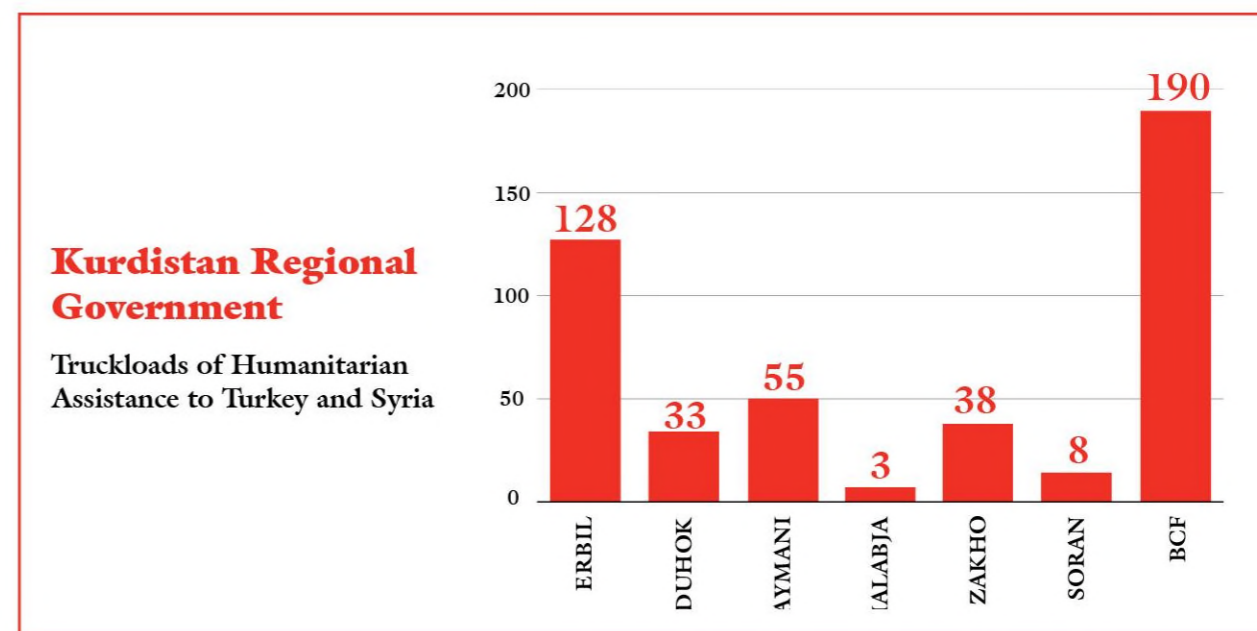
Rasool further described the JCC as a professional and



Kurdistan Region crew removing building rubble in the aftermath of the earthquake in Turkey.



Kurdistan Region crew removing building rubbles in the aftermath of earthquakes in Turkey.



Despite the financial hardship that the KRG was facing at the time, JCC, BCF, and their international partners established a safe place for many refugees. Even though many of their hometowns have been freed from ISIS control, thousands continue to reside

in the Kurdistan Region today.

During a speech at the reception for the JCC and BCF first responders, Prime Minister Barzani touched upon a noteworthy point: "Others opened their doors for us when we were in

need. We know this was a blissful action for them. And now we help others to show that we will never forget their help at those difficult times."

# Yezidîs



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**The Yezidis start their new year on Wednesday because, according to their beliefs, the creator created the universe in six days, and on the seventh day, Wednesday – a holy day throughout the year**

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## FAITH

# YEZIDIS WELCOME THEIR NEW YEAR WITH PRAYER AND HOPE

Kurdistan Chronicle - Lalish

Thousands of Yezidis flocked to Lalish, the spiritual heartland of their faith, to celebrate the eve of their new year. Located in a valley about 40 kilometers from the city of Duhok, Lalish is where Yezidis find both spiritual solace and physical protection during times of invasion and persecution.

The Yezidi New Year, Charshama Sor (Red Wednesday), falls annually on the first Wednesday of April in the Eastern calendar. The Yezidis start their new year on Wednesday because, according to their beliefs, the creator created the universe in six days, and on the seventh day,

Wednesday – a holy day throughout the year – the earth took form at Lalish, a particularly sacred religious site for the Yezidis.

The Yezidis believe that Charshama Sor is a time of renewal and blessing. They pray for a year filled with peace, prosperity, and good health. They also pray for the forgiveness of their sins.

## A place of pilgrimage

Yezidis from all over the world make a pilgrimage to Lalish to celebrate their New Year, coming from places as far away as Europe, Armenia, Turkey,

Syria, Russia, and Georgia.

"I traveled from Germany to celebrate the New Year at Lalish, the holiest place on earth for Yezidis," Sheikh Xwededa, a religious Yezidi man told Kurdistan Chronicle.

Explaining the reason behind his attire, Sheikh Xwededa stated: "I am wearing a white dress, as it symbolizes purity and cleanliness and serves as a constant reminder of God and death." He then concluded by reciting a verse of a Kurdish poem, which translates to "even if you become a prince, you must not forget God."

The eve of the New Year holds a spe-



Yezidis visiting the holy Lalish Temple during the Charshama Sur festival. |

Photo: Safin Hamid

cial significance for Yezidi families, providing a rare opportunity to come together, share news, and take commemorative photographs.

## After genocide and displacement

In August 2014, the community faced a horrific genocide campaign by ISIS in northern Iraq's Shingal district. Thousands of Yezidi women and men were killed or enslaved, and tens of thousands more were displaced.

Eight years after the genocide against the Yezidi people, 2,693 Yezidis, including 1,262 women and 1,431 men, remain missing. Meanwhile, approximately 180,000 Yezidis remain internally displaced persons (IDP), mostly living in 15 IDP camps in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

Najla Jameel Khalaf, a 22-year-old Yezidi girl who was displaced from Shingal, expressed a strong desire to return to Shingal as soon as possible. "I wish to return," she lamented, "but most of Shingal is still in ruins, and there is no stability." Najla was dressed in a white gown with a red and white jamadani draped around her shoulders. She explained that the red jamadani symbolizes the blood of Yezidi martyrs who died at the hands

of ISIS.

The President of the Kurdistan Regional Government, Nechirvan Barzani, reaffirmed his commitment towards the rescue efforts aimed at saving the thousands of Yezidis who were kidnapped by ISIS.

In a statement issued on the occasion of the Yezidi New Year, Barzani congratulated all Yezidi brothers and sisters throughout the Kurdistan Region, Iraq, and the world. He paid tribute to the Yezidi victims of terrorism and assured everyone that the search for the missing Yezidis would continue until their fate was revealed. "As long as there are missing Yezidis, we will stand with them and continue our efforts to rescue them," President Barzani said.

## Celebrating but living with trauma

As the sun set, 365 candles, one for each day of the year, were lit, transforming Lalish's temple into a mesmerizing sight of eternal fire.

The following day, on Wednesday, every Yezidi household decorates their entrance with red anemone roses, locally known as kulika nissan or April poppy roses, which are harvested

from the surrounding mountains. For the Yezidis, the red color of the anemone rose represents love and continuity in life, as well as the good news of the arrival of blessings and goodness. It also serves as a warm welcome to visitors.

Food is shared among neighbors. They pay each other visits in the morning and afternoon and serve sweets, chocolate, tea, and coffee to their visitors.

Despite the lingering pain of the past, this year's Yezidi New Year celebrations were filled with joy and cheer. Unlike previous years, when the community was still reeling from the aftermath of ISIS's genocide, this year's festivities offered a glimpse of hope and resilience.

However, their struggle is far from over, and the Yezidi community continues to face numerous challenges as they rebuild their lives and seek justice for the atrocities committed against them.

As he bid farewell to his guests in the town of Shariya, a Yezidi man expressed his mixed emotions towards the New Year festivities, stating: "we are happy and celebrating, but we are still living with the trauma."



A group of Yezidi women lighting candles as part of the Charshama Sur rituals. |

Photo: Safin Hamid

# TOLERANCE

## BEAUTIFUL HISTORY OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IN THE KURDISTAN REGION OF IRAQ



Nadine Maenza

Nadine Maenza is the President of the International Religious Freedom (IRF) Secretariat and former Chair of the United State Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF). She is also a Global Fellow at The Wilson Center.



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**The Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) has a long and beautiful history of pluralism, making it a bright spot for religious coexistence among countries that have some of the worst religious freedom in the world**

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In addition to its stunning mountains and landscapes, the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) has a long and beautiful history of pluralism, making it a bright spot for religious coexistence among countries that have some of the worst religious freedom in the world.

Even as Iraq's religious and ethnic minority populations have declined as they struggled with growing sectarianism, the people of the KRI have instead sought to cultivate a flourishing society with a mosaic of religious communities including Muslims, Christians, Jews, Yazidis, Zoroastrians, Baha'is, Sabean Mandaean, Kaka'is, and others.

Many of the region's most ancient communities, including the Yazidis, the Syriac-Assyrian-Chaldean Christians, the Kaka'is, and others can trace their roots in these lands back centuries and in some cases millennia. Considering the intense hardships that they have faced in recent decades, for many it is within the KRI where a remnant of these communities lies.

### Protecting religious minorities

Instead, it is important that we also highlight and support communities with surprisingly positive contributions – like Taiwan, Northeast Syria, and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq – so they can continue to be safe places for religious minorities and all who want to live in peace. The societies that they have created benefit all who are seeking stability in these otherwise tumultuous regions. They deserve widespread international support and honest encouragement to continue their efforts.

The area under the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) is in stark contrast to the countries it borders – Iran, Turkey, and Syria – especially in its support of Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states: “Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.”

For instance, the Baha'i community traces its history in the KRI back 170 years. While Baha'is are illegal in the rest of Iraq and terribly persecuted in neighboring Iran, the KRG has openly supported them and protected their right to gather, worship, and participate in society.

USCIRF reported that the region “continued to be a crucial safe destination for Iraqis displaced from elsewhere in the country, and the KRG's extension of greater municipal representation for religious and ethnic components is commendable.” It also applauded KRG Prime Minister Masrour Barzani's October 2021 declaration to make Ankawa, a Christian area in Erbil, a district allowing largely Syriac-Assyrian-Chaldean residents the ability to oversee their local affairs.

### Concrete actions

When ISIS swept through Iraq and Syria in 2014, the KRI was able to protect its borders while generously accepting over 2 million refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) fleeing both the Syrian Civil War and the ISIS's genocidal campaign primarily targeting Yazidis, Syriac-Assyrian-Chaldean Christians, Shia's, and other religious and ethnic minorities with horrific atrocities.

The massive influx of people desperate for safety boosted the KRI's population by one-third and was a heavy burden economically. Even now, the region continues to host approximately one million refugees and IDPs, including over 175,000 still living in camps eight years after fleeing ISIS.

**As religious freedom continues to deteriorate around the world and geopolitical trends change, it has never been more important for international partners to support the KRG so that it can remain a refuge for religious and ethnic minorities and all who seek peace and security**

With the United Nations set to pull out of Iraq to focus on Ukraine and other newer war-torn areas, the KRG will need the support of the international community. Only then can we ensure that Yazidis, Syriac-Assyrian-Chaldeans, and others still displaced can fully recover from the genocide and either return to their homes or resettling in the KRI or abroad if returning is not a safe or viable option.

Fortunately, I have been able to visit the KRI frequently

over the years and have developed great friendships with those from various religious and ethnic communities. I understand the difficulties that can arise in this complicated region and appreciate the open door to government officials to share and dialogue about potential solutions. It

table at the Erbil Forum 2023 co-hosted by the IRF Secretariat, Rudaw Research, and the Seed Foundation. It was encouraging to see Muslim leaders from both the Sunni and Shia tradition, as well as Yazidi, Syriac, Assyrian, and Chaldean Christian leaders, as well as others, engage in robust

ing the rights of all their diverse communities, including through a regular IRF roundtable, and in connecting to the global network of roundtables and other national and international partners.

As religious freedom continues to de-



Assyrians celebrating the Akitu spring festival in the Kurdistan Region.

Photo: Safin Hamid

is vital that the needs and concerns of these communities continue to be shared honestly and that concrete actions are taken by both government and civil society actors to address these concerns.

In February, I had the honor of moderating a Religious Freedom Round-

dialogue about issues of common concern.

The KRG has been proactive in seeking to develop religious literacy, expand education, and nurture multi-faith dialogue to bolster their pluralistic society. Civil society organizations play a vital role in advancing

teriorate around the world and geopolitical trends change, it has never been more important for international partners to support the KRG so that it can remain a refuge for religious and ethnic minorities and all who seek peace and security.

## THE UK CONSULATE CELEBRATES THE CORONATION OF A NEW MONARCH IN ERBIL



Rosy Cave

*Rosy Cave is the Consul General of the United Kingdom in the Kurdistan Region.*

On May 6, 2023, the United Kingdom (UK) witnessed the historic coronation of King Charles III and Queen Camilla, marking the dawn of a new era for the British monarchy with an event that we at the British Consulate General celebrated with a garden party in Erbil on Sunday, May 7.

The coronation ceremony is a time-honored tradition dating back over a millennium, and this ceremony blended ancient customs and contemporary values. King Charles joins a long line of British monarchs who have been crowned at Westminster Abbey, a line that connects the King to our collective history.

### A new era

For the last coronation of a British monarch, her late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, the world was a vastly different place. Much has changed for both the UK and the Kurdish people over the past 70 years that separate these two momentous events.

Since then, the relationship between the UK and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) has also evolved immensely, having been reborn in the crucible of Saddam Hussein's appalling Anfal campaign against the Kurds.

The KRI has since developed economically and politically into the place that it is today, and the overarching trajectory of the relationship between our two governments and our two peoples has been one of progress. This includes an increasing tempo of visits between our leaders, the establishment of the British International University, our ever-growing team at the Consulate General, and our support for the peshmerga, which includes offi-

cers being trained at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst. Upon graduating, the Kurdish anthem is played at the institution from which both the Prince of Wales and Prince Harry graduated and which this year hosted the King for his first Sovereign's Parade.

Just as the KRI has developed over time, so has the monarchy. This was reflected by the fact that the coronation of His Majesty King Charles III was defined by four themes: community, diversity, sustainability, and youth. In Britain, to celebrate the coronation, people across the country came out onto the streets to eat and celebrate with one another – taking the opportunity to participate in a shared communal life.

### Celebrating coexistence

In Erbil, the British Consulate General welcomed friends of the UK, including HE Hoshyar Zebari, representing HE Masoud Barzani; HE Sheikh Jaffar, Vice President of the Kurdistan Region; HE Qubad Talabani, Deputy Prime Minister; and HE Hemin Hawrami, Deputy Speaker of Parliament. Members of both the Iraqi and Kurdish Parliaments, political party leaders, religious leaders, business leaders, peshmerga officers, members of the UK armed forces and our coalition partners, and representatives from the diplomatic and international community were also in attendance.

Diversity is a defining characteristic of modern Britain and the KRI, while the successful coexistence of diverse communities is one of ours and the KRI's greatest strengths. The coronation ceremony celebrated diversity, with religious figures from a wide range of faiths represented at the traditionally Angli-

can Christian service. This element of the service recalled the enduring commitment of the KRI's people to welcoming and protecting those of different faiths and backgrounds.

In the UK, people with their roots in the KRI make up a significant part of the patchwork of peoples in our green and pleasant land. The links between

cus on supporting young people, so it was fitting that youth was one of the coronation themes.

The King will become the monarch of a country that strives to provide opportunities for young people from all backgrounds. People such as the young Kurdish woman, Bnar Talabani, who arrived in the UK in 1988

awareness, will affect us all, and it is so inspiring that there are young people from across the world and in the KRI who are taking innovative approaches to tackling the challenges we face. Whether developing renewable energy solutions or teaching the next generation to be climate-aware, their work is making a better, greener, more sustainable world for tomorrow.



British Consulate General in Erbil

our two peoples and our shared commitment to diversity was exemplified by another ceremony in London, which took place a few weeks ago, to appoint a Kurd, Sarbaz Barznji, as the Mayor of Lambeth.

Lambeth, of course, is home to Lambeth Palace, the residence of the Archbishop of Canterbury, whose duty it was to anoint the sovereign. The link between the two ceremonies is a powerful reminder that Britain and the KRI are places where people from diverse communities can succeed and flourish.

### Youth and sustainability

The successes of Kurds, especially from the younger generation, in Britain is something I am always delighted to hear about and celebrate. His Majesty King Charles has always fo-

having fled Saddam's atrocities, this year became a doctor, having received an OBE medal from King Charles for her services to medicine during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In keeping with this focus on supporting the KRI's young people, His Majesty's government focuses on giving opportunities to the region's young people through our Chevening Scholarship Programme.

The fourth theme of the coronation was sustainability. King Charles has made no secret of his support for environmental issues, consistently raising awareness and promoting sustainable practices. The coronation, with all its tradition and pageantry, was also consciously focused on sustainability. Even the King's ceremonial coronation robes, usually made anew for each new monarch, were recycled. The climate crisis, about which King Charles has done so much to raise

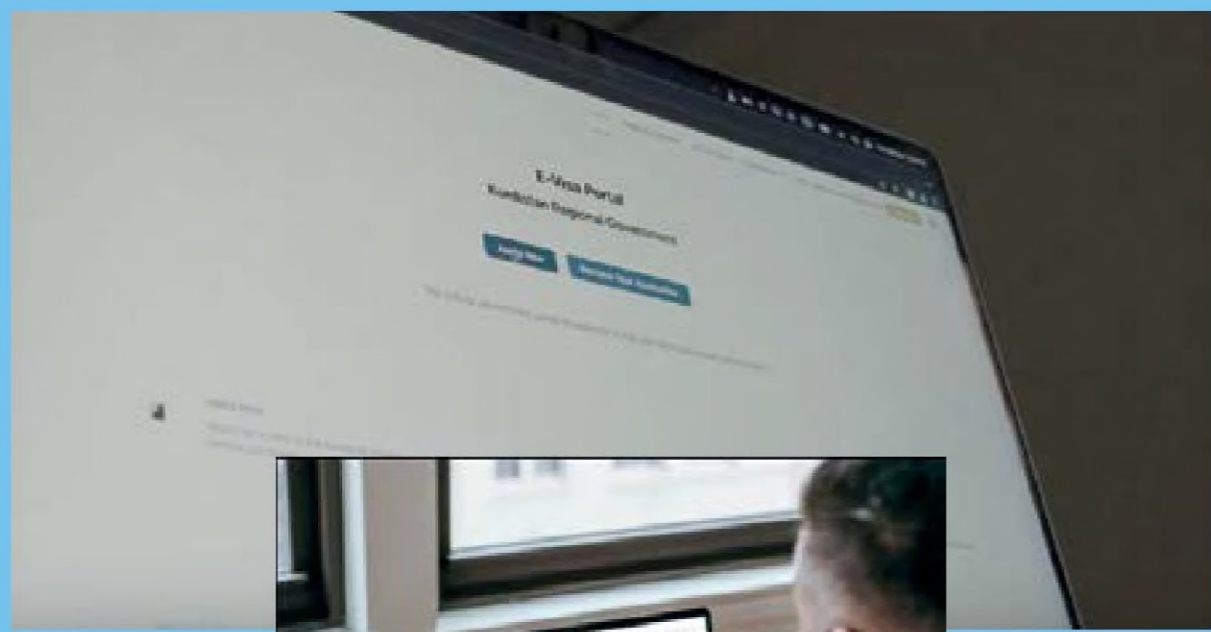
The coronation throws into sharp focus how far we have come in the seven decades since we last crowned a British monarch, but through the blending of the ancient and the modern, the ceremony also indicating how much further there is for us to go in this new Carolean Age in making the country and the world a more inclusive, more sustainable, and more youth-oriented place.

As this new era dawns for the UK, His Majesty's Government will work together with the Kurdistan Regional Government and the people of this beautiful region to forge closer bonds, broaden the areas of our cooperation, and deliver on our shared objectives. Just like the coronation, which brought together the past and the present, our friendship is built on the foundation of our shared experiences but also the promise of all that we can do together in the future.

# TRAVEL

## STREAMLINING TRAVEL TO KURDISTAN THE NEW ELECTRONIC VISA SYSTEM

<https://visit.gov.krd>  
<https://visit.gov.krd>



Visitors to the Kurdistan Region of Iraq can now benefit from a new electronic visa system (e-Visa Portal) launched by the Kurdistan Regional Government's (KRG) Ministry of Interior, which simplifies the visa application process and makes it easier for travelers to obtain a visa prior to their arrival.

The process is fast and efficient, with most applications being processed within 72 hours. This new system is part

of the KRG's efforts to promote tourism and encourage more visitors to the region, by making it easier for them to experience all that the Kurdistan region has to offer.

According to Hiwa Afandi, Deputy Minister and Head of the Department of Information Technology, "the e-Visa Portal is one of five key components of the recently implemented digital Border Crossing Control System, which enables smoother economic interaction between KRI and the world by providing an end-to-end digital solution for visa applications,



Hiwa Afandi, Head of KRG's Department of Information Technology



Hemn Merany, General Director of Diwan at KRG's Interior Ministry

Photo: Mohammad Shwani

“The e-Visa Portal is one of five key components of the recently implemented digital Border Crossing Control System, which enables smoother economic interaction between KRI and the world.”

“The system simplifies the visa application process, makes it more efficient, and encourages more people to visit this beautiful part of the world.”

particularly for citizens of countries eligible for visas on arrival.”

The e-visa system allows travelers to apply for a visa through the KRG's official website (<https://visit.gov.krd>) and receive their visa via email. The e-visa is valid for a period of 30 days and can be used for a single entry. Visitors can also extend their visa if they need to stay in the region for a longer period of time.

According to Dr Hemn Merany, general director of the Ministry of Interior, the introduction of the e-visa system is a positive development for visitors to the Kurdistan region. "It simplifies the visa application process, makes it more efficient, and encourages more people to visit this beautiful part of the world," Merany said.

The new e-visa system is particularly beneficial for travelers from Europe-

an countries, the United States, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and the Gulf Countries. Citizens of these countries can also obtain their visas upon arrival at the Kurdistan Region's airports and borders.

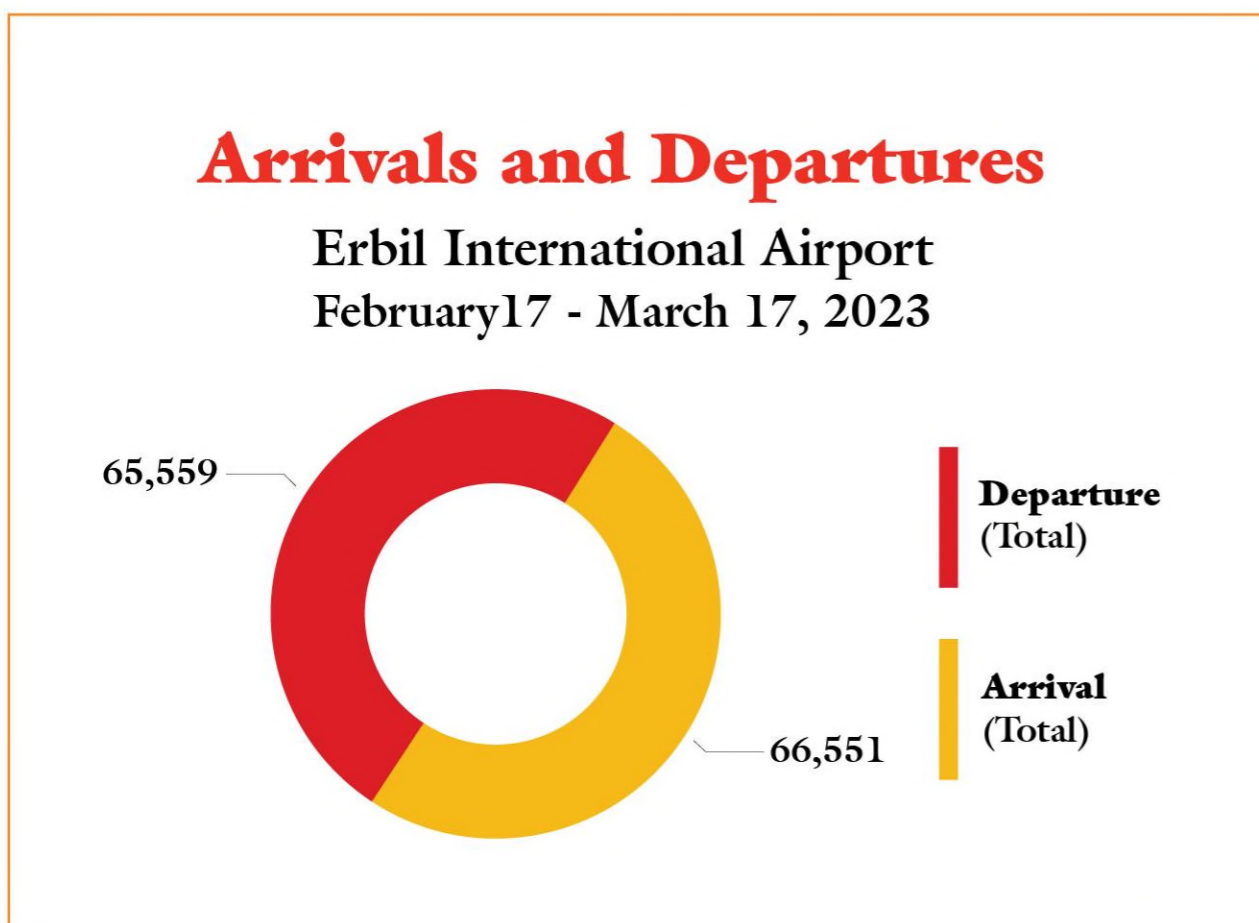
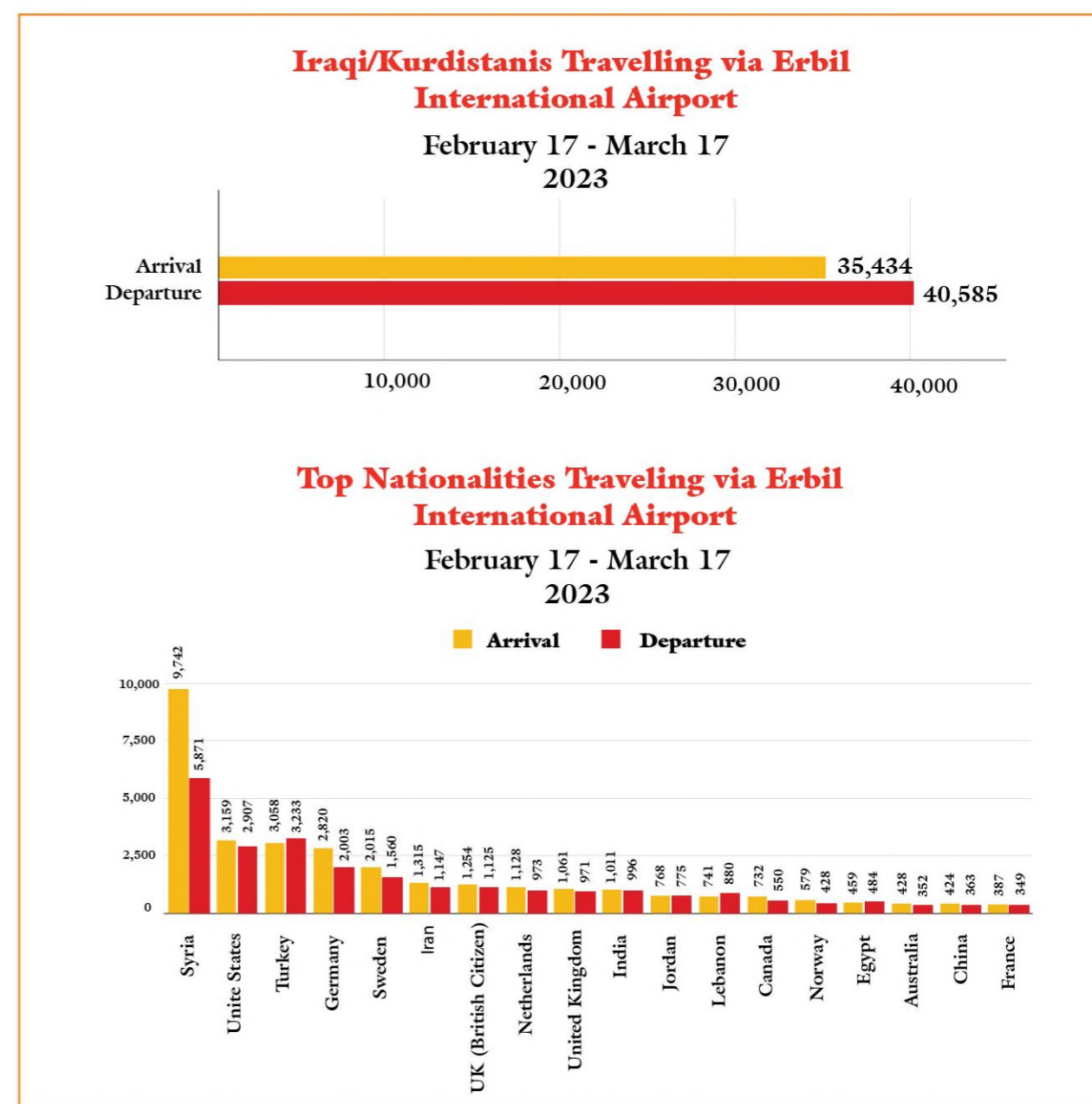
The Kurdistan region is home to stunning landscapes, rich cultural heritage, and friendly people. With this new e-visa system, it is now easier than ever for visitors and tourists to



Brigader Kamil Barznjy, the Director of Erbil Residency

“In just four months since the e-visa's introduction, over 40,000 foreign nationals from different parts of the world have already visited the Kurdistan Region.”

Photo: Mohammad Shwani



explore and experience all that the region has to offer. The KRG hopes that this initiative will help to boost tourism in the region, promoting economic growth and creating more opportunities for the local population and international visitors.

According to Brigader Kamil M. Baqr Barznjy, the director of Erbil Residency, there has been a significant increase in the number of people who are interested in visiting the Kurdistan Region. “The good news is that the new e-visa system has made the process much more convenient

for visitors. In just four months since the e-visa's introduction, over 40,000 foreign nationals from different parts of the world have already visited the Kurdistan Region”, Barznji said.

The KRG has been making significant strides towards digitalizing its various systems, including tourism, banking, and government ministries. The government's efforts to modernize and streamline these areas are aimed at improving efficiency and accessibility while also increasing transparency and accountability.

In addition to e-Visa Portal, the KRG is working on digitizing its banking systems to provide faster and more secure financial transactions. The government is also focused on transforming its ministries into more efficient and technology-driven organizations, allowing them to better serve the needs of the Kurdish population. These initiatives demonstrate the KRG's commitment to modernizing its infrastructure and creating a more advanced and prosperous Kurdistan region.

# GENOCIDE

## REBUILDING FROM THE ASHES THE STORY OF THE KRI'S EMERGENCE



Ibrahim Sadiq  
Malazada

Ibrahim Sadiq Malazada  
is a researcher and sociology  
professor at Soran University.

The curse of the state, or rather the nation-state, affected the Kurdish people on two levels. On the first level, it deprived them of having a state of their own. On the second level, the Kurdish homeland was annexed to the states of others. Thus, a policy of denial – aimed to tame and assimilate the Kurds within the framework of different forms of chauvinist policies – was adopted. It was, at best, a bitter struggle for survival and basic rights.

The state of Iraq was established, as it turns out, as a nationalist Sunni Arab project. The policy of Arabization began with the arrival of the king's man and Sati' al-Husari, both of whom were non-Iraqis. One of the first signs was the exclusion of the Kurds from the first Iraqi constitution in 1925. This was also reflected in the violation of the Mandate Termination Agreement in 1931, which had granted a special status to the Kurdish region. With marginalization initiated, the denial of rights and the continuation of the policy of Arabization continued, from the Arabization of the land to the Arabization of the people.

**With marginalization initiated, the denial of rights and the continuation of the policy of Arabization continued, from the Arabization of the land to the Arabization of the people**

The Baath Party appeared in 1951, and their ideas grew in the womb of the Arab nationalism that King Faisal was purveying as an identity to be imposed on everyone. It was the Iraqi Uruba, an Uruba culture taking hold in Iraq, which was thereafter considered part of the Arab world. With Israel declaring its statehood on May 14, 1948, Iraq joined the resistance countries – everything was for the liberation of Palestine. Enveloped into this 'everything' was revenge against the Kurdish people, who were considered a client enclave of Israel and thus part of Israeli plans for imperialism and colonialism. Thus, the Iraqis and the nationalist Arabs deluded themselves into believing that a second Israel was coming from northern Iraq and that the Arabs had to unite their ranks to quell the Kurdish sedition. From that point, genocide was initiated.

With the formation of the Baath government in 1968, the genocide was driven by a policy of divide, rule, and destroy. The decision to exterminate the Faili Kurds and uproot them from their lands was launched under the pretext that the Faili had not obtained Iraqi citizenship and constitut-

ed a fifth column. The Faili Kurds are an essential part of the Kurdish people, and their areas of influence were mostly Arabized.

The first Iraqi decision was to exterminate the Faili Kurds in 1969, and the campaign continued until 1980, which succeeded in eradicating twenty thousand people while the rest were expelled to Iran where they face very difficult living conditions.

The next step came after the 1975 Algiers Agreement between Iraq and Iran and was aimed to crush the Kurdish liberation movement. The campaign involved evacuating and destroying thousands of Kurdish villages that lay within 15-25 km of the borders with Iran, Syria, and Turkey. More than half a million people were gathered in forced compounds and besieged by Iraqi security forces in inhumane conditions, with large groups deported to southern Iraq. The campaign destroyed approximately 4,500 villages, including 31 Christian villages, along with livestock and agriculture.

After the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq War, hundreds of thousands of young Kurds were forcibly recruited to the battlefield to fight and die in a fierce war that they had nothing to do with. During the war, Baghdad issued its second decision to annihilate the Barzanis. As described above, Kurdish villages had already been destroyed, including the Barzani villages, and village families were deported into five compounds. In 1983, however, these compounds were raided and besieged by the Iraqi army and special forces, and 5,000-8,000 Barzani males were kidnapped. In response to the fate of the Barzanis, Iraqi President Saddam Hussein said, "We sent them to hell."

Thus, the Baathists' aggression against

the Kurdish people continued, and Baghdad issued a third genocidal campaign, that involved careful planning and implementation beginning in February 1987 with the appointment by the Iraqi Revolutionary Command Council of Ali Hassan al-Majid as the general military commander with absolute powers for the northern regions. When Al-Majeed moved to Kurdistan, he cavalierly announced: "Either I wear Kurdish pants, or they wear Arab headbands (al-Iqal)." This statement was patent: the Baathists were planning for the final solution of genocide.

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**The first Iraqi decision was to exterminate the Faili Kurds in 1969, and the campaign continued until 1980**

The campaign began with several actions. First, the Revolutionary Command Council issued an action plan for genocide. Second, according to this plan, large areas outside the borders of the large cities of Kurdistan were designated as 'forbidden areas'. Third, the general census of the Iraqi population was conducted, and those from the forbidden areas were not counted, denying them participation in the state and rendering them foreigners.

The 'forbidden areas' were attacked eight times during the so-called Anfal (genocide) campaigns. The first campaign began on February 21, 1988, and the last ended on September 6, 1988. These campaigns included the use of chemical weapons on many towns and cities and ended in the city

of Halabja, which claimed the lives of five thousand civilians within a few hours on March 16, 1988.

Meanwhile, Iraqi forces and militias attacked the 'forbidden areas', and tens of thousands of civilians were arrested, mostly women, children, and the elderly. At the end of each campaign, families were transferred to concentration camps, and men, women, and children were separated. Then, everyone was transported in trucks to pre-prepared mass graves. Within eight months of the campaign, more than 180,000 innocent Kurdish men, women, and children were executed.

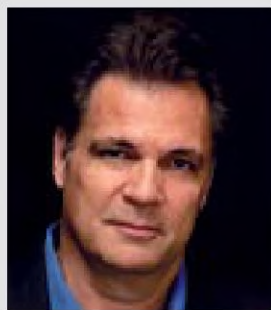
It was the uprising of March 1991 and the liberation of the Kurdish cities, including Kirkuk, that halted the genocide. After one million Kurds migrated at the end of March 1991, the UN Security Council issued Resolution No. 688 on April 5, 1991, to protect the Kurdish people. Kurds began to return to their areas, and preparations for regional elections and the establishment of

the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) were outside the will and control of the Iraqi government for the first time.

Finally, in 2006, the Iraqi Supreme Court recognized the genocide against the Kurdish people in the three aforementioned cases, although this confession did not result in full justice. This was only achieved with the apologies of successive Iraqi governments after 2003 for the genocide campaigns and the declarations that the survivors of the genocide must be fully compensated (yet to be materialized by the central government), which included the proclamation of a law criminalizing the denial of the genocide of the Kurdish people.

## OPINION

# THE SPIRIT OF THE KURDS HOPE FOR THE WORLD



Stephen Mansfield

*Stephen Mansfield is a New York Times Bestselling author, global speaker, and speaker coach. He is an advocate for Kurds. He is also a senior fellow of Public Leadership at Palm Beach Atlantic University.*

**T**hey ought to be among the most bitter people on earth. They would be justified in withdrawing into insular communities seething with resentment and rage. They are, after all, among the most betrayed people in history. Yet they are blessedly free of these poisons and exhibit such open-heartedness, forgiveness, and hospitality as to offer hope in a tumultuous world.

The world's nearly forty million Kurds—the largest group of people on earth without their own homeland—have certainly known their sufferings. After centuries of war and abuse came the betrayals by the Western powers in the wake of World War I.

Later, there were the persecutions of the Iraqi regimes and Turkey's genocidal policies. Then came Saddam Hussein, and the gassings of Halabja, as well as the collusion of European and American corporations in a host of atrocities. The bigotry often faced by the Kurdish diaspora only added to these agonies. Injustices reached to the heavens.

Surprisingly, though, the Kurdish people of the world—after all they have endured—are devoted to being among the most richly hospitable people on earth.

## Sacrifice and steely action

Nowhere is this largeness of heart more evident than in the realm of religion. Though the Kurds are a 95% Muslim people, they have shown kindness to faiths they might understandably have regarded as enemies. The Kurds, having been the victims of religious treachery themselves, have instead offered a welcoming hand.

A visit to Iraqi Kurdistan reveals how much this is true. In the halls of the Kurdish Regional Government in Erbil, one finds offices devoted to the welfare of Christians and Yezidis as well as Muslims. Mullahs attending to government business stop to warmly greet the Christian visitor. A visiting team of rabbis from Jerusalem receive the same cordial welcome.

This Kurdish graciousness extends far beyond mere ceremony and Middle Eastern hospitality. It has, at times, taken the form of sacrifice and steely action.

During the dark days of the ascent of ISIS, Iraqi Kurdistan welcomed tens of thousands of Christian refugees. Christians worldwide celebrated this Kurdish heroism, and even the Pope expressed his gratitude. Lives were saved. A faith, despite its persecutors, lived on. The Kurds, in the grandness of their spirit, made this possible. It was the warmth and power of Kurdistan on the rise.

## A global spirit

Yet it is not just in Iraq that Kurds have crossed religious lines before a watching world. In Nashville, Tennessee—the U.S. city with the largest Kurdish population—a Christian pastor's wife has fallen gravely ill. The news reaches the Kurdish community. They remember this pastor. He was there when many of them arrived in Nashville to escape the devastations of

Saddam Hussein. He and his church served the beleaguered Kurds and befriended them. The Kurds of Nashville now remember their friend. He has honored them by serving them. They will do the same.

Food begins arriving at the pastor's home—food cooked in Kurdish homes and restaurants. Kurdish friends begin to offer help—to provide transportation for a family mem-

Kurdish graciousness, Kurdish generosity, and a uniquely Kurdish sense of honor have prevailed. And lives are changed.

The world takes note: Kurdistan is recreating itself around the world—in London and in Berlin, in Geneva and in Istanbul.

This magnificent Kurdish spirit, this largeness of heart and tenderness of

have risen from ashes to offer their valiant spirit to the world.

We can hope with them that not only the Middle East, that not only the broader world, but that one day a Kurdish homeland will be filled with their sense of honor, their gift for hospitality, and their divine grace of compassion.

Thank God for the Kurds. Thank God

**Surprisingly,** though, the Kurdish people of the world—after all they have endured—are devoted to being among the most richly hospitable people on earth.

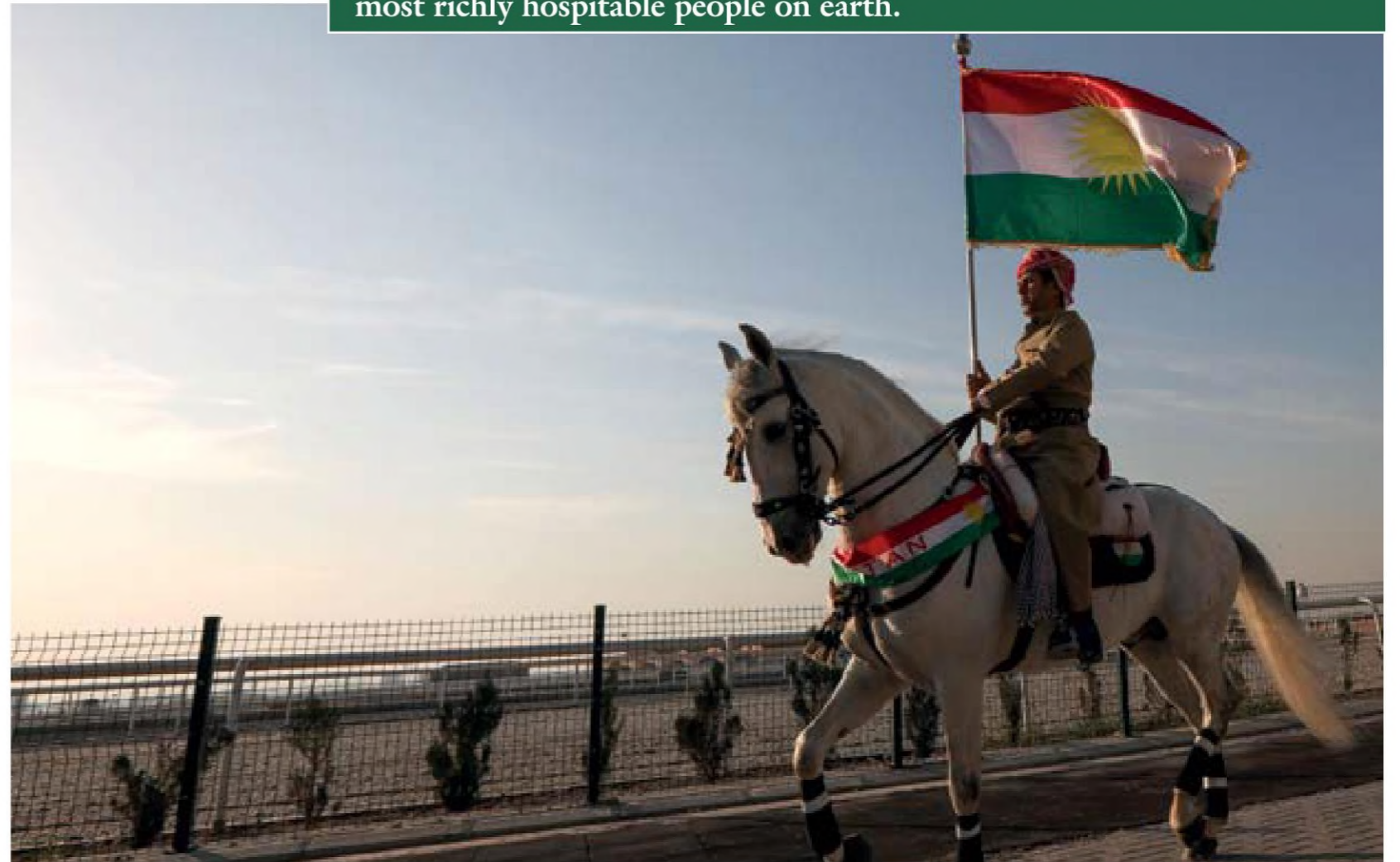


Photo: Safin Hamid

ber or care for the family's yard or to do anything to relieve the current suffering. News of this outpouring of love and devotion spreads throughout the city. Even national news outlets speak of it. Once again in our time,

soul, is not just the stuff of quickly forgotten tales. It is instead a reason to hope. It is a message to the world. There are a people on the rise. They are the glorious Kurds. They have suffered. They have been tested. They

for the presence of Kurdistan among us. May their spirit continue to rise and ennoble us all.

# EDUCATION

## THE GERMAN INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL PROVIDES A HOME FOR THE GERMAN-KURDISH COMMUNITY

Kurdistan Chronicle - Erbil

The German International School in Erbil has a unique population of Kurdish students, with the majority of them having a German nationality. The school, which has been operating since 2010, has also attracted local Kurdish families who want their children to receive a high-quality German education.

The school follows the official German school curriculum and is financially supported by the German government and recognized by the Kurdistan Regional Government's Ministry of Education.

Pupils also learn Kurdish and Arabic, and the school offers both elementary and secondary education. Students graduating with an International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma can study in Germany or elsewhere overseas.

### Unique origins

"The school started in 2010. There is a large German-Kurdish community in Germany, and back then, Erbil was thriving economically. After Saddam Hussein was gone, and things started to prosper again, many German Kurds decided to return to Kurdistan," Daniel Bucker, Principal of the German International School told Kurdistan Chronicle.

In 2009 a group of people started an association to start a German school, which was swiftly realized. "Germany (the German government) decided relatively quickly that it wanted to support the school, and so it became in 2010 one of the approximately 140 German schools abroad."

However, what distinguishes it from the others is that it is mostly for German-Kurdish returnees. "It is to some extent unique, as most German schools are for expatriates," he added, highlighting that

Students graduating with an International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma can study in Germany or elsewhere overseas

the school is for "families who originally came as refugees to Germany

and then decided to return to Kurdistan."

Principal Bucker added that although there are German expats living in the Kurdistan Region, it's rare for them to bring their kids to Erbil. As a result, most pupils are German Kurds.

"When you talk to people in Germany, some of them are concerned about the security situation, often wondering if it is okay to live there and not knowing too much about it. They see in the news that Kurdistan is suf-



Cultural activities at the German International School in Erbil.

fering from war and instability or Iraq from instability and so they do not see that the city itself is safe.”

### Coming to Erbil

According to Principal Bucker, his decision to teach in Erbil came as a surprise to his parents.

“They were a little bit uncertain about whether it was a good idea,” he said. “My mother actually went through the list of German schools back then and asked: why don't you go to the German school in Sydney, Silicon Valley, or Tenerife?”

However, he told his parents that this was the job that he applied for, and later his parents came to accept it. “My family was at first a bit worried, but I think that worry dissipated relatively quickly, as we were in regular contact, and I told them what life is like here.”

Nevertheless, the school and the Kurdistan Region itself have seen their highs and lows, such as when ISIS threatened the Kurdistan Region in 2014, and some German Kurdish families left.

“A number of families had difficulties staying here [after 2014] because of

## The Kurdistan Region is more secure than Baghdad or other places in the world

financial and other problems, so they returned to Germany,” Deputy Principal of the school, Media Samagha, told Kurdistan Chronicle.

German teachers were also temporarily relocated to Germany due to security reasons.

Moreover, after the Kurdish independence referendum in 2017, when Baghdad temporarily put an embargo on the Kurdistan Region, several families also left.

“The students have a choice: they can stay here – this is their home – but they can stay in Germany too,” Samagha added.

“You know, people come and go,” Principal Bucker emphasized. “A lot of people return because they say this is where my family is from or this is where my home is. But we also see people who say okay, it's not what I expected, or it didn't work out with my work.”

### Feeling of security

Anglika Bauer Ipek, a teacher at the school, said some families also left when they found “better work in Europe,” all while others were returning to Kurdistan from Germany. “This is



A group of students at the German International School in Erbil.

Photo: Safin Hamid



Photo: Safin Hamid



Photo: Safin Hamid

The German International School in Erbil.

She also added that the Kurdistan Region “is more secure than Baghdad or other places in the world. As a woman, I feel truly secure working here or walking in the park or in the streets. It's not dangerous to live here.”

The German International School in Erbil has thus provided a unique opportunity for the German-Kurdish community to have access to high-quality German education while living in their homeland.

It has also played a vital role in fostering a sense of belonging for the German-Kurdish community and provided students with the skills and opportunities to succeed both in Kurdistan and abroad.

the modern nomad story.”

Ipek said that she decided to move to the Kurdistan Region with her Kurdish husband from Turkey to support the region's developing democracy.

“We decided to build something here and to support this German school in Erbil,” she said. “It was a really good decision to be here and to be a teacher.”



The Goethe Institute and Framing Photo-journalism School brought together young, talented artists from Kurdistan and Germany to fill downtown Erbil with music and dance again.



Photo: Mohammad Shwani

# CHARITY

## BARZANI CHARITY FOUNDATION SERVING VULNERABLE COMMUNITIES



Karzan Noori

Karzan Noori is Administrative Board Member and Program Planning Manager at the Barzani Charity Foundation (BCF).

The Barzani Charity Foundation (BCF) is a non-governmental and non-profit organization that has been aiding vulnerable individuals and communities in the Kurdistan Region and beyond since its establishment in 2005. The foundation was named after the legendary leader, Mustafa Barzani, who was the most prominent figure in modern Kurdish politics. One of the defining characteristics of the BCF is its commitment to serving all communities regardless of religion, ethnicity, or political affiliation. The foundation highly values the humanistic and compassionate aspects of all religions, seeing them as a means to unite rather than divide people. The foundation has been actively involved in various religious events, helping those in need regardless of their faith or background.

During times of crisis and hardship, the BCF has been a consistent source of support to those affected. For example, when extremist groups attacked the Christian residents of Mosul in 2008, many fled to the Kurdistan Region seeking refuge. The foundation was one of the first organizations to respond to their needs,



providing them with shelter, food, and other necessary assistance. The Vatican formally recognized the foundation's efforts and expressed gratitude for its help during this difficult time. Another instance where the BCF demonstrated its commitment to supporting communities in crisis was during the ISIS attacks on the Yezidis. The foundation and its partners provided over nine million meals to 150,000 people in 45 days. This level of assistance was critical in supporting the Yezidis, who were facing a dire humanitarian situation.

The BCF also plays an essential role in promoting peaceful coexistence among different communities. The foundation believes that every religious and ethnic group deserves respect and support and has worked tirelessly to bring people together around shared values of love and kindness. As a result of its work, the foundation has earned the trust and support of donors and partners from diverse backgrounds.

Recently, the BCF was involved in two critical religious events: the holy month of Ramadan and the Yezidi New Year on April 19 (Red Wednesday). During Ramadan, the foundation provided food parcels and prepared meals for tens of thousands of people across the Kurdistan region and other regions of Iraq. In the Kurdistan region and other gov-

ernorates of Iraq, 65,600 food parcels were provided. Additionally, 35,000 prepared meals were given to poor people, workers, and orphans in Kurdistan. Moreover, more than 80 families received cash as alms, which were collected and distributed by the organization.

During the Yezidi New Year celebration, the BCF distributed food parcels and eggs to 750 Yezidi families in need. Through its ongoing efforts, the foundation has demonstrated its unwavering commitment to supporting vulnerable individuals and communities in the Kurdistan Region and

businesses. The foundation contributed 600,000 USD to the program, aiming to improve the selected beneficiaries' lives by providing shelter, livelihood, and basic needs.

After the earthquake in Turkey, the BCF provided 210,000 prepared food meals for the survivors. Additionally, the BCF aided earthquake survivors in Afrin, Syria, by distributing food parcels to over 114,000 families.

The BCF is a remarkable organization that has made a significant difference in the lives of countless people. Its tireless work in responding to crises,

expresses gratitude to its donors, partners, staff, and volunteers for their unwavering trust, support, and tireless efforts in serving the less fortunate. It recognizes that their commitment and dedication have made it possible to provide essential aid to those in need, such as food, shelter, and livelihood opportunities.

The BCF is committed to continuing its assistance programs that aim to improve the lives of poor families and promote social cohesion and harmony among different religious and ethnic groups. The foundation firmly believes that through collaboration and



BCF crew providing support to children with special needs.

beyond.

The BCF also collected and distributed cash as alms to more than 80 families and helped to build homes for 13 families. Furthermore, the program helped three poor families start small

promoting peaceful coexistence, and helping those in need has earned the trust and support of communities across the Kurdistan Region and beyond.

The foundation acknowledges and

mutual support, it can make a significant impact in uplifting communities and achieving its mission of creating a better world for all.

OPINION

# LOGISTICS AND SUPPLY CHAINS FOR LANDLOCKED COUNTRIES

## THE KURDISTAN REGION AS A VIABLE BUSINESS MODEL



Robert Bell

Robert Bell is a specialist in marketing, logistics and value stream or supply chain implementation. He is educated at St Andrews and Oxford University and is a Visiting Fellow at Durham University Business School. He has worked in over 35. Many of the ideas raised in this article are covered in webinars available on YouTube robjbell webinars.

**As a landlocked entity, the Kurdistan Region in Northern Iraq (KRI) is dependent on problematic neighbours — war-torn Syria, sanctioned Iran, federal Iraq, and Turkey**

There are currently 44 landlocked countries worldwide. The largest by area is Kazakhstan, in Central Asia, while the most populous landlocked country is Ethiopia, in Africa. The vast majority, 32, are developing countries, mostly in Africa and Central Asia. 17 of them even fall into the category of "least developed countries," which describes nations that combine low income, low development and economic instability. For these countries, the fact that imports and exports must transit through at least one neighbouring state (and often change modes of transport) represents a significant additional cost and handicap. In Logistics and Supply Chain terms this means 30-40% or even higher additional costs.

As a landlocked entity, the Kurdistan Region in Northern Iraq (KRI) is dependent on problematic neighbours — war-torn Syria, sanctioned Iran, federal Iraq, and Turkey — for imports and exports. Ideal location for a Landlocked-Lab to explore how best landlocked countries can meet the UNs Strategic Development Goals by 2030 and everything to do with Net Carbon Zero by 2050. What can be done on Energy, food and protein security as well as transformational entrepreneurship to make things happen?

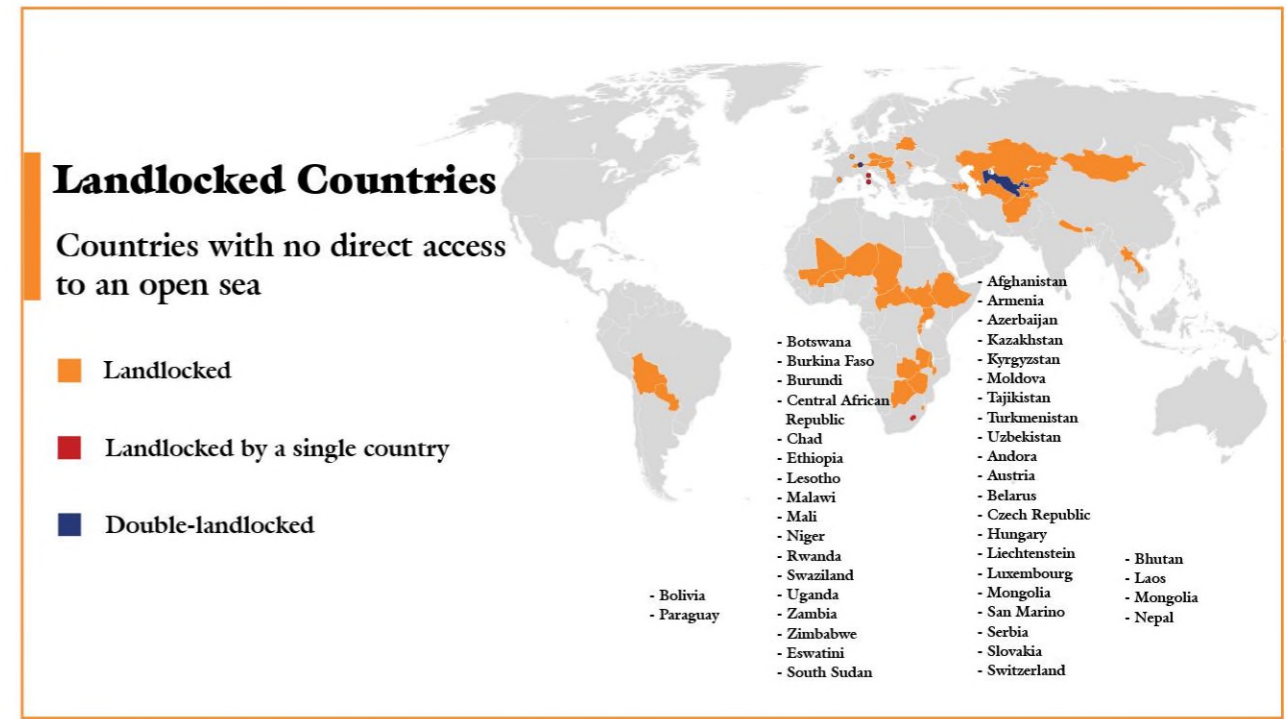
With almost 100 years of oil in reserve and substantial new finds possible, Iraq has the potential to be a global player — especially with Russian constraints. The KRI produces about 400,000-450,000 barrels per day

of oil; about a tenth of the national total. The fields are smaller and more geologically challenging than those in southern Iraq and, given increasingly tough global climate policies and the advance of renewable energies, the KRI is faced with a more imminent challenge to diversify the economy, exports and KRI government revenues.

Food and protein security is a pressing global challenge one of the key UN SDGs. The KRI sits on some of the most fertile soil in the Middle East. Despite the potential to be self-sufficient, scarce reserves are being diverted to imports — back at the landlocked challenge. Agriculture generates around 6% of employment. This could rise and, with the use of increasingly high-tech agri-business techniques can be the catalyst for a range of AI and ML technologies that can offer exciting career paths for youth.

KRIs harvest is dominated by wheat, barley, potatoes and tomatoes. Land for wheat cultivation has increased by 80% since 2012 harvesting over 1 million tonnes. Globally, the conflict in Ukraine is generating serious shortages and opportunities for alternative suppliers. This opens up a strong opportunity for by-products. Wheat derived starch is essential for the packaging industry and the rise in on-line retail and home delivery, packaging is a huge growth area.

Favourable climate and soil fertility offer ideal conditions for another versatile crop in high global demand - potatoes. Due to a lack of investment in KRI agri-business, production and productivity are stagnat-



ing and the potential for this crop — from snack food to starch - is not being realised. Pomegranates are another important crop. Brand Kurdistan can learn from a number of other countries to add value in country. For example, Blue Skies in Ghana are producing cut fruits for supermarket chains across Europe. Their FRESH-PACT initiative is all about packaging — to replace single-use plastic. Another opportunity for Brand Kurdistan.

Agribusiness offers huge potential for KRI diversification. This means mapping the value stream in the country and targeting investment, training and support at each stage. Upstream, soil quality and seed varieties are important and, harvest techniques are improving all the time. Downstream, there is storage and transportation before food processing or fresh produce market access. Upstream, we are aiming to be the most cost-effective producer and this means partnerships with countries in the know like the UK, Holland and Denmark on specific produce and technologies. Then, the route to market is all about branding and packaging — a range of design techniques that can be the catalyst for more high-tech jobs.

Another related area are traditional crafts that can be part of significant global markets - hand-made rugs and carpets. In 2021 the top export-

ers of Hand-Woven rugs were Turkey (\$2.71B), India (\$889M), China (\$577M), Belgium (\$433M), and Egypt (\$287M). For generations this has been in decline across KRI but remained strong in Turkey and Iran — with strong Kurdish links. These carpets are usually made from natural materials such as wool, cotton, silk, and jute. A wonderful catalyst for the global transition from synthetic to natural fibres. Then, handmade carpets are known for their intricate patterns and vivid colours achieved through intricate weaving and knotting techniques. This is high-end branding and could be a catalyst for a range of design and craft-related start-ups that could build back significant market share — despite the country being landlocked.

Kurdistan is not alone in being a landlocked country and the above focal points could offer useful insights for all. The idea could be framed around a transitional and transformational agenda. That's WHAT needs to happen ahead of the SDG targets for 2030 and net carbon zero for 2050 as well as how to make this happen. There's more to this than investment in infrastructure and equipment. We need to use this as a catalyst for entrepreneurship, capabilities and skills.

Globally, there is a need for entrepreneurship as a means to generate more

start-ups and employment. Here, we have highlighted several areas for business growth. And yet, we cannot assume that entrepreneurship is fully understood. With landlocked countries and regions in mind, we need to focus on transformational entrepreneurship — start-ups with high social impact meeting local and global challenges and needs rather than a simple focus on profit. For example, it is quite possible to fast fashion clothing that ends up as waste in landfill but this is generating lasting harm. We can harvest pomegranates but need to consider alternatives to single-use plastic trays. Above all, sustainability is not just a cost — it can generate fresh business opportunities.

The KRI can become a Landlocked-Lab not restricted to a single discipline such as Energy or Agri-Business, but draw inspiration from multiple disciplines to create learning experiences that have an impact on how best to transition and transform socio-economic outcomes for land-locked countries. From this, viable business models and investible start-ups can flow. This can all be complementary to any Brand Kurdistan initiatives two progress and raise the profile of entrepreneurship that aims to build clear social returns on all investments.

# KURDS LEARN CHINESE FOR BETTER JOB PROSPECTS



Learning Mandarin Chinese is seen as a form of soft power that China can use to help establish diplomatic and commercial ties

**L**earning Mandarin Chinese is seen as a form of soft power that China can use to help establish diplomatic and commercial ties.

Dilan Kawa Ibrahim, a 22-year-old native of Iraqi Kurdistan, has always been captivated by the cultures and languages of East Asian nations. Her interest in Korean dramas led her to teach herself the language, but her fascination did not stop there.

As a child, Dilan's father was a photographer with the South Korean Army in Erbil, the capital of Iraqi Kurdistan. As part of South Korea's commitment to the Iraq War between 2004 and 2008, he performed peacekeeping and other reconstruction-related duties.

Dilan's exposure to South Korean soldiers left a lasting impression on her, and when she learned that a Chinese language department had been established at Salahaddin University, she applied without hesitation, thinking that the language would be similar to Korean. However, she soon realized that Chinese was unlike any other language she had encountered.

"The Chinese language is powerful; every word has multiple meanings," Dilan remarked.

Despite the challenges, she persisted and was delighted to find that all her lecturers were in Chinese. Now in her fourth year of university, Dilan works part-time as a translator at the Chinese General Consulate in Erbil.

Dilan said speaking Chinese is a manageable task with daily practice, but writing Chinese remains a difficult challenge. Nonetheless, she remains steadfast in her determination to continue mastering the language. With China's growing influence around the world, Dilan's



A professor giving a lecture to a group of Kurdish students at the Department of Chinese Language, Salahaddin University-Erbil.



Qassim Khidhir

Qassim Khidhir has 15 years of experience in journalism and media development in Iraq. He has contributed to both local and international media outlets.



Students of Chinese Language at Salahaddin University-Erbil.

Photo: Safin Hamid



Former Chinese Consul General Ni Ruchi during a visit to the Chinese Language Department.

Photo: Safin Hamid

proficiency in Mandarin Chinese may well serve as a valuable asset in her future career endeavors.

### Reviving the Silk Road

In the Middle East, only three countries boast Chinese language departments: Iran, Turkey, and the Iraqi Kurdistan region. The Chinese language department at Salahaddin University in Erbil was established in 2019, following an agreement between the university and China's General Consulate.

The College of Languages at Salahaddin University comprises numerous language departments, including Kurdish, Arabic, Farsi, Turkish, English, German, and French.

The China General Consulate has provided the department with three Chinese teachers to aid in language teaching. Currently, the department has 33 students, 13 of whom will graduate this year. However, the pandemic prevented the department from admitting new students for the last two years.

Dr. Barzan Jafaar Ali, head of the Chinese language department, told Kurdistan Chronicle that China has already awarded two scholarships to students in the department, with the expectation that upon completion of their master's degrees, they will return to teach at the department. Furthermore, he stated that this summer, a group of students from the department will travel to China as part of a summer camp funded by the Chinese government.

"Kurdistan was on the Silk Road during the Middle Ages; today, China hopes to restore this relationship with the Kurdistan region through commerce and culture," said Dr. Barzan, who believes that the Kurdistan region is the starting point for this revival throughout the rest of Iraq and beyond.

Dr. Barzan noted that many students in the department chose to enroll because they believe it will enhance their job prospects. Many Chinese companies operate in the Kurdistan region, and numerous Kurdish enterprises conduct business with China.

Mohammad Amin Ahmed, a 20-year-old first-year student in the department told Kurdistan Chronicle that he chose to study Chinese because there are so many Chinese companies in Kurdistan.

### We are like one family

In a fourth-year class of 13 students, China has left an indelible mark. All 13 have been working part-time for Chinese businesses for the past two years, where they learn Chinese on the job. Rayan Mustafa Qadir, a 21-year-old student, says Chinese companies approach them not because they speak Chinese fluently but because they want to assist them in practicing more.

"Every day at work, they teach us new words and expressions and correct our mistakes; it's like learning Chinese on the job," said Rayan, who works part-time at a Chinese electronics company. Rayan is grateful for the opportunity and finds it irritating when her peers belittle Chinese prod-

ucts. "China produces high-quality products, but our businesses import primarily low-quality, inexpensive products from China," said Rayan. The students share a close bond with their Chinese teachers, who have become more than just mentors but friends as well. If a student is sick, the teachers bring herbs. Sometimes they even cook Chinese food like dumplings for them inside the class. In turn, the students prepare traditional Kurdish dishes for their Chinese instructors, "they like kebab a lot," as Rayan cheerfully put it.

"They teach us hard work, dedication and a better education system," added Rayan. Rayan's father, who always pushed her to do well in university, often tests her by asking her to translate Chinese news and inquires about what she has learned each day. Rayan

has even adopted a Chinese name, 李艳 (Li Yan), which means Grateful or Colorful, and plans to live and work in China one day. "In the future, I want to teach the Kurdish language in China, as the Chinese are teaching us their language in Kurdistan," Rayan added.

As for Dilan, whose Chinese name is 袁红梅 (Yuan Hongmei), which is the name of a flower, she is not interested in conducting business with Chinese enterprises but rather in strengthening bilateral ties between the Kurdistan region and China. Dilan hopes one day to represent the Kurdistan region in China or work in the education sector to introduce the Chinese education system to Kurdistan.

# WHO ARE THE IRAQIS? AN IN-DEPTH LOOK AT THE PEOPLE OF IRAQ



Kamaran Salayi

Kamaran Salayi is a researcher and university professor.

The composition of Iraq has long been a topic of discussion, given its intricate blend of ethnic, religious, and sectarian groups. The question arises: does Iraq consist of one homogenous people or multiple distinct peoples?

Throughout the country's history, various terms have been employed by politicians, historians, and the international community to describe the people of Iraq, reflecting the complexity of its social fabric. This article seeks to delve into the constitutional terminology, historical context, and practical expression of Iraq as a nation composed of multiple coexisting peoples.

## The evolution of constitutional terminology

A glimpse into Iraq's constitutional history reveals a profound acknowledgement of its diverse composition. The 1925 constitution referred to the legislative authority as the "Iraqi National Assembly," implicitly suggesting the participation of various groups. Subsequent constitutions in 1958, 1963, and 1970 recognized the partnership between Arabs and Kurds as the primary nationalities within Iraq alongside other components and groups. The 2005 Constitution explicitly declared Iraq a "multinational, multi-religious,

and multi-sectarian country," firmly establishing the nation's plurality.

## Political discourse and recognition of diversity

Political leaders from different parties have consistently utilized terms like Arab, Kurdish, or Turkmen people in their speeches and official communications. This tacit agreement among politicians implies the understanding

## In Article (3) of the 2005 Constitution, however, it writes: "Iraq is a multinational, multi-religious and multi-sectarian country."

that Iraq is a nation comprising multiple peoples, each possessing distinct national, social, cultural, religious, and sectarian characteristics. By recognizing and embracing this diversity, politicians strive to address the legitimate aspirations and identities of these groups.

## A practical expression of coexistence

The attempt to homogenize Iraq's diverse

communities under centralized political systems has proven unsuccessful. Rather, these communities have continually asserted their particularities, distinctiveness, and legitimate ambitions. The term "Iraqi nation" serves as a practical expression of coexistence, emphasizing shared geography, common customs and traditions, and a predominantly Islamic faith among these peoples. It promotes solidarity among the various components without advocating for division or hostility.

## Respecting identities and overcoming tutelage

In the contemporary era, imposing guardianship or suppressing the role of distinct peoples no longer aligns with prevailing notions of the right to self-determination. The era of unilaterally approaching the efforts of peoples from an ideological standpoint has come to an end. The pursuit of equality and solidarity should not be predicated on false claims of belonging to a single people but on acknowledging and appreciating the individual identities and characteristics of each group. The term "Iraqi nation" allows for the celebration of diverse identities while fostering a sense of unity within a shared homeland.

## Coexistence within a homeland

On many occasions, the leaders of the

Kurdish people have emphasized the independence of the Kurdish people in Kurdistan while expressing their pride in belonging to Iraq. This honesty and transparency in addressing the Kurdish people and other communities living in Iraq reflect the complex dynamics of the nation.

It is understandable that some individuals may view the term "Iraqi nation" as a distortion that does not align with their political understanding. However, a closer examination of Iraq's modern history and the experiences of other nations reveals the inherent realities. It is worth noting that certain critics might perceive the use of this term as an endorsement of those in power or an attempt to

## Masoud Barzani, stressed that the Kurdish people in Kurdistan, despite their pride in belonging to Iraq, are an independent people and not part of another people

favor a singular nation, potentially disregarding the national, cultural, and social characteristics of the Iraqi peoples.

To those who hold such reservations, it is essential to recognize that a nation represents interdependence, solidarity, brotherhood, and equality among its diverse peoples. Just as the concept of an "Islamic nation" does not erase the distinct characteristics of its constituent peoples but instead fosters respect and moral values among them, the term "Iraqi nation" similarly does not seek to diminish the unique traits of its diverse components.

While the notion of a "nation" typically refers to a collective yearning for a shared origin, history, and language, it also implies that the individuals within these groups do not forfeit their individual nationalities. Despite residing in one geographical area and having interconnected lives, the various groups in Iraq maintain their distinct identities.

Thus, the Iraqi nation consists of a collection of peoples destined to coexist within a shared homeland. Each group within this nation aspires to a larger national identity, with the Arab people desiring an Arab nation, the Kurdish people yearning for a Kurdish nation, and the Turkmen expressing similar aspirations. Nonetheless,

within Iraq, these groups, in addition to their sense of belonging to the broader Islamic nation, collectively form the Iraqi nation due to their coexistence within the same geographic boundaries.

## Conclusion

The Iraqi nation epitomizes the coexistence of diverse peoples living within a common geographical territory. It encompasses the intricate fabric of Iraqi society, recognizing the individual identities, rights, and ambitions of each group while fostering a sense of unity. By acknowledging the complexity of Iraq's social composition, the concept of the Iraqi nation can serve as a framework for promoting inclusivity, harmony, and progress within the country.

## MARTYDOM

# THE MAN WHO FOUGHT ISIS WITH A WIRE CUTTER



Selim Çürükkaya

Selim Çürükkaya is a distinguished writer who has contributed his expertise to a variety of prominent newspapers as a columnist. He holds membership in the prestigious literary organization PEN, and has authored a total of 12 books, some of which have been translated into different languages.



Kurdistan  
Chronicle

During the blazing summer of 2014, the world was caught off guard as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) claimed full control of Mosul, the second-largest city in Iraq. After a six-day battle with Iraqi forces, the barbaric group announced its self-proclaimed Caliphate, sending shockwaves throughout the international community.

Then, just two months later, the world witnessed one of the most heinous massacres of the 21st century in the Kurdish Yazidi town of Sinjar. Despite the gravity of the situation, only a handful of individuals outside the directly affected regions were willing to take action, jumping into their combat boots and preparing for battle.

Said Churukaya, better known as Dr. Said, was one of the few people who couldn't sit in his comfortable apartment in Germany and indulge in a leisurely lifestyle filled with coffee dates, work, and social outings as if

“

**Said Churukaya, better known as Dr. Said, was one of the few people who couldn't sit in his comfortable apartment in Germany and indulge in a leisurely lifestyle filled with coffee dates**

nothing had happened. He followed the live coverage of the news on TV and readied himself to join his fellow Peshmerga fighters to halt the vicious expansion of ISIS.

## Explosives clearance on the front lines

Dr. Said was born in a Kurdish village in southeast Turkey and studied medicine for three years before dropping out to join the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in 1990. Ten years later, and right after Abdullah Ocalan was arrested, Dr. Said and a group of his



Dr. Said and his Peshmerga comrades during the anti-ISIS operations.

comrades in the leadership of the party, abandoned the group. They believed that the post-Ocalan PKK was derailed, dragged away from the principals on which the party had been founded. Dr. Said soon moved to Germany, where he

pertise in leading a specialized explosives-clearance team. The areas that had been liberated from ISIS by the peshmerga were heavily booby-trapped, with no regard for the laws of war or humanistic principles. Dr. Said's team was among the first to enter these territories to detect and safely remove these explosives. Once he gave the green light, the peshmerga were able to move forward and secure the region against future attacks from ISIS.

## The liberation of Sinjar

Dr. Said, a seasoned explosives expert, had already defused a multitude of ISIS booby traps on numerous frontlines when he received intel that the peshmerga, in coordination with the US-led Global Coalition, were planning a large-scale operation to liberate Sinjar. Without hesitation, Dr. Said reached out to Kurdish military officials and offered his assistance. Upon arrival, Dr. Said and his team bravely ventured ahead of the peshmerga to carefully detect and disarm explosives. There he once again proved that his bravery, leadership, and expertise were vital to countering the terrorist group.

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sought asylum and started his own business and a new life.

With years of experience in combat operations in the rugged terrain of Kurdistan, Dr. Said was confident that his expertise in explosive clearance would be invaluable in putting an end to the atrocities committed by ISIS in the Kurdistan Region. For him, this was a momentous journey, one that he knew could create a legacy for generations to come.

Upon his arrival in Erbil, Dr. Said wasted no time in contacting peshmerga commanders to offer his ex-

Months after the liberation of Sinjar, Dr. Said revealed in a TV interview that his team had made a remarkable

Kurdistan  
Chronicle

## Months after the liberation of Sinjar, Dr. Said revealed in a TV interview that his team had made a remarkable discovery of 200 tons of explosives

discovery of 200 tons of explosives, out of which nearly a quarter had been neutralized. The Kurdish media widely reported one of his major accomplishments: detecting and neutralizing an ISIS truck packed with five tons of explosives, which saved the lives of hundreds of peshmerga. During an interview, Dr. Said was asked if he was not afraid when disconnecting the explosives. He replied, "No, we fear the unknown. If you have knowledge and courage, you will not be afraid."

In the final stages of the international campaign to liberate Mosul, Dr. Said was called to clear a mansion rigged with TNT in Tiz Kharab village. He was joined by a Finnish journalist who was already planning to conduct an interview with him. The mission was not easy, as the peshmerga learned later that



ISIS had boobytrapped almost everything in that strategic location, which needed to be secured before they could advance further.

“

**Dr. Said's life and legacy and serves as a reminder of the ongoing struggle for peace and stability in the region**

”

Dr. Said and his team swiftly investigated the area and unearthed wires that connected several explosive devices. An explosive-laden truck was successfully defused, and several mines were removed from around a house, but a fatal mistake led to a massive explosion, as one of the members of the team accidentally stepped on a trigger. Boom! The explosion killed him immediately and left Dr. Said and several others injured. Despite being flown to Germany for treatment, the injuries proved fatal, and Dr. Said passed away on October 29, 2016.

### Countless lives saved

“This master fighter, the commander

of mountains and plains, was a true peace-lover. He fought for the end of torture, for the freedom of languages and cultures, for the end of slavery and war in his country and the Middle East, for children to grow up among flowers, for young men and women not to die in minefields, and for the elderly to live in peace,” Selim Chorukaya wrote about his martyred brother.

Dr. Said's legacy lives on through the countless lives that he saved and the impact he made on those who knew him. His bravery and dedication to the fight against ISIS inspired many around Kurdistan. His expertise in explosive clearance was invaluable in the war against terror, and his selfless

acts of heroism will not be forgotten. In the wake of his passing, Dr. Said's family and friends continue to honor his memory and the sacrifices that he made for his people. His brother's book — available in Turkish, English, Kurdish, and Arabic on Amazon — is a testament to Dr. Said's life and legacy and serves as a reminder of the ongoing struggle for peace and stability in the region.

Dr. Said's story is one of courage, dedication, and sacrifice. He gave his life to protect not only people in Kurdistan but everyone around the world who, had it not been for people like Dr. Said, could be the next victim of the barbaric ISIS.



# Dr. Said

# GEOGRAPHY

## KURDISTAN IN OLD MAPS



Jan Dost

Jan Dost is a prolific Kurdish poet, writer and translator. He has published several novels and translated a number of literary Kurdish masterpieces into Arabic.

It is unfortunate that the word “Kurdistan” as a designation of a homeland for the Kurdish nation provokes such controversy and tension among chauvinists who have been denying the existence of a geographical area of land with this name and claiming that a homeland in the name of Kurdistan has only recently appeared, despite the overwhelming historical evidence of the name’s veracity.

As if the great poet Malaye Jaziri (1570 – 1640) mentioning the name of Kurdistan at the beginning of the 17th century is not enough. Nor is the appearance of this name in ancient historical sources written by non-Kurds, such as the book Jami’ Al-tawarikh (History)

Date Collector) by Rashid Al-Din Fadl-Allah Al-Hamdani in 1310 AD, followed by the historian Hamdallah Mustafi Qazwini’s famous book Kitab Nuzhat Al-Qulub (The Picnic of Hearts) in 1339.

But what also interests us here is that the name of the Kurds’ homeland has appeared in ancient geographical maps of different varieties.

### Maps of an earlier world

The use of maps dates to ancient times in Mesopotamia. They were first used by the ancient Egyptians, Greeks, and Chinese and later, with the spread of Islam, Arab-Islamic maps appeared and filled the need of Arabs desiring to know about the lands they should move to, conquer, or liberate, as well as the borders of their new countries. Al-Idrisi (1100-1166) was the first to draw cartography, who was then followed by geographers or so-called Bulldans. In these sources, the country of the Kurds was called “the region of the mountains or the mountain” because of the predominance of the rugged mountainous nature of the land of Kurdistan.

One ancient cartographer who referred to the land of Kurdistan was Ibn Hawqal (died 977 AD), author of the famous Sourat Al-Ardh (The Earth Image). In this valuable book, he published a set of maps that he had drawn himself of the known geographies of his time, wherein all of them refer to Kurdistan as the mountains. In one, he drew a special map of



A map of Kurdistan from 1681 by Fredrick Duvet.

Kurdish areas calling them “Kurdish Resorts, Summer Cottages and Their Groves.”

After this, the famous historian, geographer, and linguist Mahmud Al-Kashgari (1008-1102), who wrote the book Diwan of Turk Languages, published a map in which he referred to Kurdistan as the land of the Kurds and detailed that its borders met with Iraq, Khorasan, Azerbaijan, the Levant, and Egypt. Undoubtedly, the phrase “The Land of the Kurds” is a

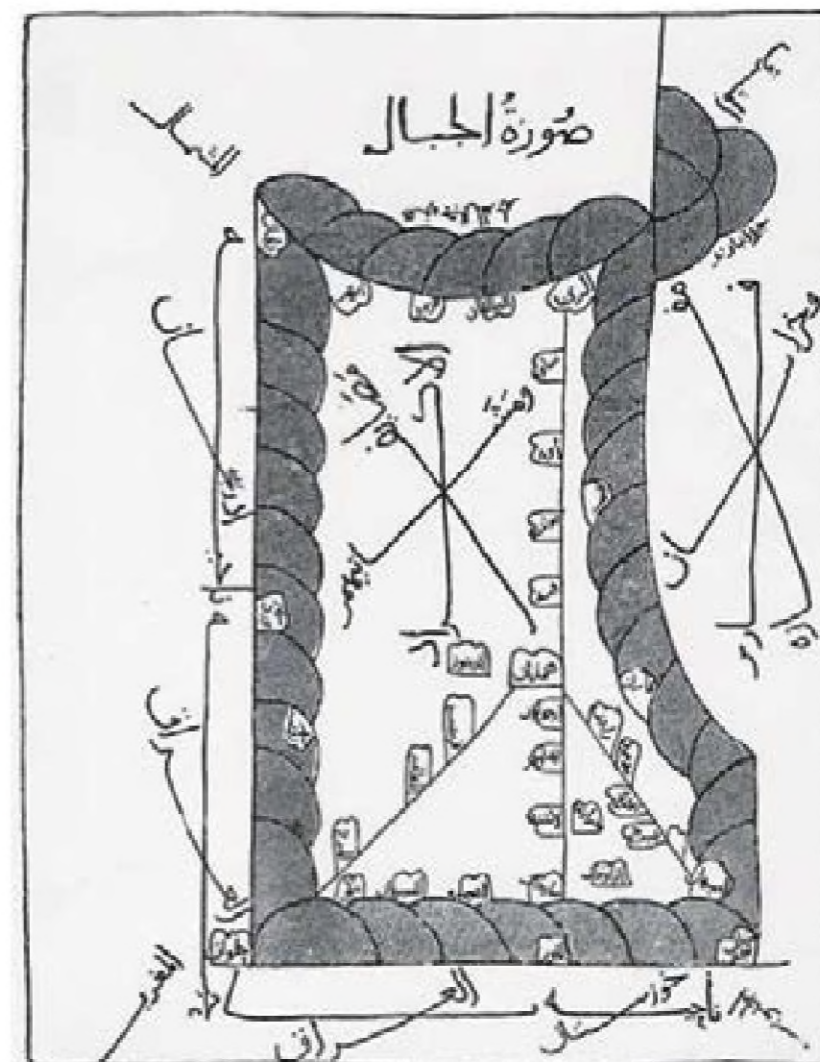


“The Land of the Kurds” is a literal translation of the word Kurdistan

literal translation of the word Kurdistan, as the word ‘stan’ or ‘istan’ means a ‘country’ or ‘land’ in Persian.

It is also worth noting that the Turkish nationalist author Al-Kashgari, a hateful racist in fact, attempted to use the guise of scholarly research to advance his views. If this great Turkish author had been as racist as is the case now among some scholars, he would have ignored the reference to a land called The Land of the Kurds altogether. But he did not draw that from the roots and springs of chauvinism that shaped the minds of the ideologues among the Young Turks, the Committee of Union and Progress, or the Baath Party; instead, he wrote it with the conscience of a scientific researcher who puts historical truth at the forefront of his priorities.

But as far as I know, the name of Kurdistan did not appear in the form of this word in any of the maps drawn by the Arab and Muslim Bulldans such as Al-Idrisi, Al-Maqdisi, Ibn Hawqal, and others. Rather, the Euro-



A map from the 10th century by Ibn Hawqal referring to “the land of Kurds”.

pean travelers were the first, and they referred to the country of the Kurds by the current name, Kurdistan.

### Enter the Europeans

In a map drawn in 1596 by the Dutch traveler, merchant, and explorer Jan Huygen van Linschoten, there is an area marked Curdi beneath Armenia extending to the west of Lake Van that, I believe, is meant to be the Land of the Kurds. This is one of the oldest maps on which the name of Kurdistan appears. Many of the maps preceding this and even some following it write the land of the Kurds between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers as Mesopotamia, a well-known historical name that means ‘country between the two

rivers’.

This is, perhaps, the first indication that appeared on the maps of Europeans who took an interest in the region and tried to draw its borders and to designate the areas where people were distributed. Thus, we can say that the name of the Kurds appeared in European maps more than four centuries ago, and this information will remain viable until we discover more from the ancient maps, which have become archaeological sources.

But the appearance of the name Kurdistan on maps as a Kurdish homeland or a region inhabited by Kurds dates to 1680 AD, meaning three hundred and thirty years ago, when the Dutch

cartographer Frederick Duvet (1630-1706) published his map in which he drew the countries of the Ottomans, Iran, Armenia, Georgia, and other countries in the Middle East.

In this map, Kurdistan is shown in Latin in these forms: Churdistan, a rather strange spelling that was not widely circulated, as the name Kurdistan or Kurdestan and even Curdistan were common in the maps following Duvet's one, for example in the maps of the famous English cartographer Emanuel Bowen (1714-1767), who was an official cartographer for King George II of Britain and King Louis XIV of France. Despite his great abilities and extensive efforts in drawing maps for these two royal figures, which would help them to occupy new countries, he died poor, and his son Thomas inherited poverty and a love of maps.

What attracts us about Bowen is that he drew a map of the Ottoman countries, including Kurdistan. It is quite striking that the borders of Kurdistan in this map differ from those drawn by his Dutch predecessor Duvet. In Bowen's 1680 map, we see that Kurdistan is an almost oval-shaped circle surrounding Lake Urmia on all sides, while in Duvet's map Kurdistan was shifted to the west and is a vast area extending from the western boundary of Lake Urmia to the border of the Tigris River, which separates it from the state of Diyarbakir and South of Lake Wan.

In 1711, the French cartographer Henri Chatelain also drew a map of Kurdistan with the word Curdistan, whose borders are almost the same as those drawn by Bowen. In the map drawn by the French mathematician and cartographer Rigobert Bonne of Fars Country in 1771, the features of Kurdistan appear clearer than those of its predecessors and includes



Kirkuk, Mosul, and even the border of Hamadan in the east. Sixteen years later, Bonne drew another world map, this time showing the borders of Kurdistan reaching the confluence of the Tigris and Small Zab rivers.

### Maps and borders

In my view, the geographical differences in the borders of Kurdistan are due to the different sources upon which these travelers and geographers (cartographers) relied. In addition to the ambiguity that encircled this name, was this area the only region in which the Kurds were located?

We note that none of the cartographers included Diyarbakir and the areas of present-day southern Iranian Kurdistan within the borders of Kurdistan maps, but these areas certainly encompassed tribes of Kurdish people settled there since ancient times. Furthermore, the states whose borders were drawn by those European cartographers did not have a national character. For example, they wrote the states of Diyarbakir, Jazira, or Erzurum without specifying the settlers' nationalities.

We can also say that the information of those travelers was sometimes inaccurate, as they depended on geographical perception or imagination without actual travelling in and visiting the areas and exploring the area's borders and the nationalities therein. For instance, one cartographer drew Yemen in the middle of the Arabian Peninsula on the borders of what is now known as Qatar and Bahrain.

Nevertheless, what ultimately concerns us is that these historical documents refute the nationalist-chauvinistic claims that there is no national homeland called Kurdistan. This historical fact deserves to be source material for academic and scientific research, and I hope that the officials of Kurdish institutes and universities, especially in the Kurdistan Region, give this sensitive issue their attention, as it is a scientific response to the allegations of those who deny the right of the Kurdish people to establish their desired state.

## OPINION

# HOW TO SOLVE THE KIRKUK ISSUE ONCE AND FOR ALL?



Saman Shali

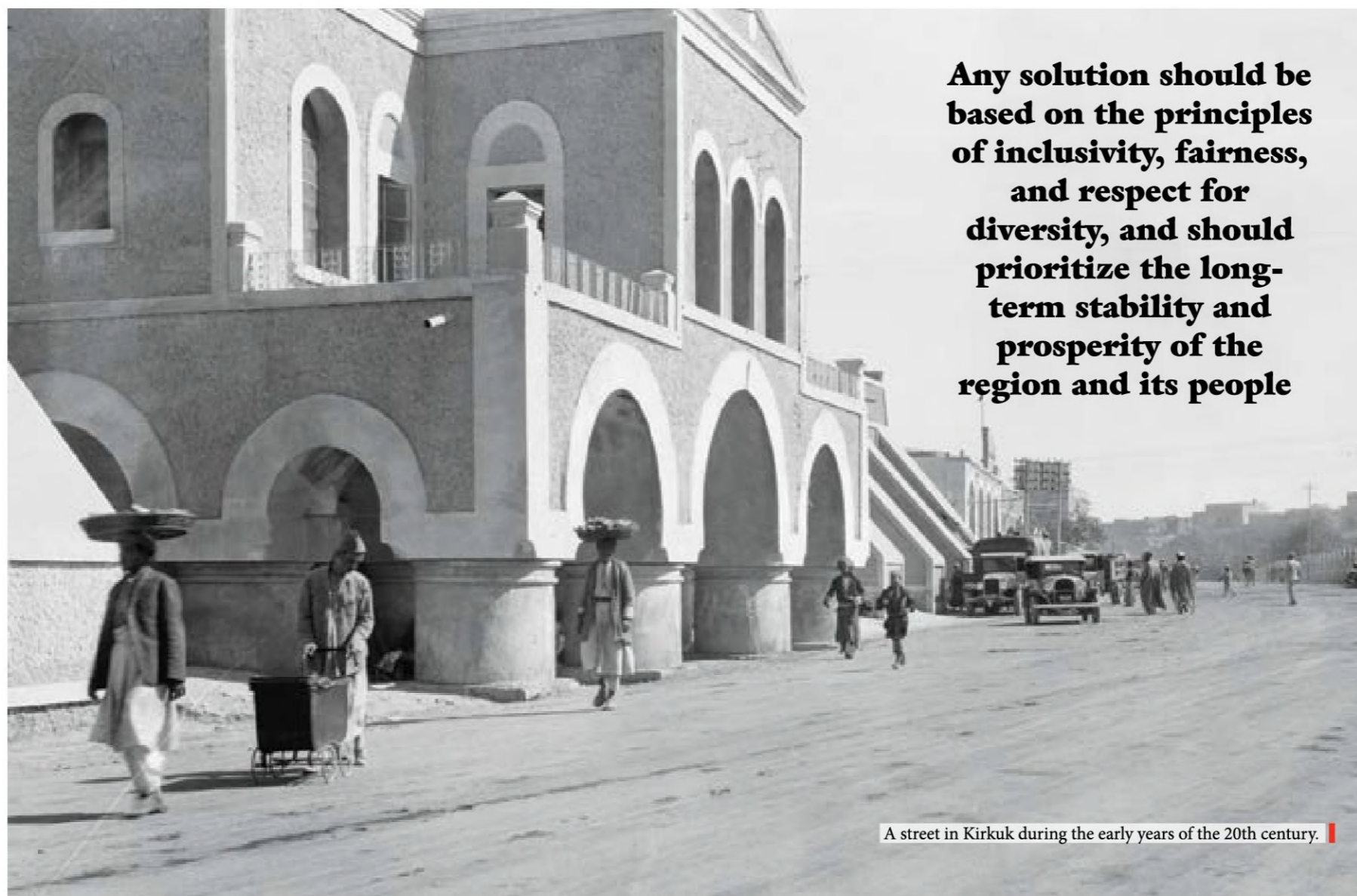
*Saman Shali is a political analyst and researcher based in the Kurdistan Region.*

The issue of Kirkuk is a complex and sensitive one. It involves historical, ethnic, and political factors, and has been complicated by the Iraq government's policy of Arabization over several decades. Although the constitution provides clear steps to resolve the issue through Article 140, Iraqi governments have failed to implement it and have instead created more obstacles. Kirkuk is considered a disputed territory or disconnected area and has thus become a source of tension between Baghdad and Erbil and the various ethnic and religious groups in the region, including Kurds, Arabs, and Turkmen. Resolving the Kirkuk issue requires a comprehensive approach that addresses the concerns and aspirations of all stakeholders.

Below are some possible steps that can be taken to work towards a solution:

1. Dialogue and negotiation: Open and inclusive dialogue and negotiation between Baghdad and Erbil, as well as other ethnic and religious groups in Kirkuk, is crucial. This could involve bringing all stakeholders to the table and engaging in meaningful discussions to identify common interests and find

mutually acceptable solutions. The process should be transparent, inclusive, and based



A street in Kirkuk during the early years of the 20th century. |

**Any solution should be based on the principles of inclusivity, fairness, and respect for diversity, and should prioritize the long-term stability and prosperity of the region and its people**

on respect for the rights and aspirations of all communities in Kirkuk.

2. Constitutional reforms: Reviewing the Iraqi constitution to clarify the status of Kirkuk and its governance can be an important step. The constitution should recognize the rights and identities of all ethnic and religious groups in Kirkuk and ensure their representation and participation in decision-making processes. This may involve revisiting constitutional articles related to Kirkuk, such as Article 140, which outlines a framework for resolving the status of disputed territories. This step must be preceded by a real census, conducted by the United Nations, to determine the true identities of those who have histori-

cally lived in the area.

3. Power-sharing arrangements: Establishing power-sharing arrangements in Kirkuk can help to address the concerns of different communities. This may involve sharing political, administrative, and economic power among Kurds, Arabs, Turkmen, and other groups based on agreed-upon mechanisms that ensure fair representation and participation.

4. Security and stability: Ensuring security and stability in Kirkuk is critical to creating an environment conducive to resolution. All parties should commit to maintaining peace and stability, and efforts should be made to address security concerns

and prevent any escalation of violence. This may involve deploying joint security forces that represent diverse ethnic and religious groups and building trust and confidence among the communities in Kirkuk.

5. Economic development: Promoting economic development and the equitable distribution of resources in Kirkuk can contribute to resolving the issue. This may involve investing in infrastructure, services, and economic projects that benefit all communities, create job opportunities, and address economic disparities between different groups.

6. International mediation: Engaging international mediators or facilitators can help create a neutral and impartial platform for negotiations and assist in finding solutions that are acceptable to all parties. International organizations with relevant experience in conflict resolution can play a constructive role in facilitating talks and building consensus.

7. Reconciliation and rebuilding trust: Reconciliation efforts should be an integral part of any resolution process. Acknowledging past grievances, promoting forgiveness, and building trust among the communities in Kirkuk are essential for a lasting solution. This may involve truth and reconciliation commissions, confidence-building measures, and initiatives that promote social cohesion and intercommunal harmony.

Resolving the Kirkuk issue will likely require time, patience, and political will from all parties involved. With such a complex issue, a comprehensive and inclusive approach that respects the rights and aspirations of all ethnic and religious groups in Kirkuk is essential. Any solution should be based on the principles of inclusivity, fairness, and respect for diversity, and should prioritize the long-term stability and prosperity of the region and its people. In the end, the people of the area can decide what form of governance they choose so that they can live freely together in peace and harmony.

# CULTURE

“ **ISTANBUL IS THE KURDS’ CAPITAL CITY OF CULTURE** ”



## ABDULLAH

Born and raised in Nisêbin (Mêrdîn), a Kurdish border town between Syria and Turkey, Abdullah Keskin went to study Turkology (Turkic Studies) in Ankara University, which he left shortly afterwards in 1991 for going to Istanbul and working as an editor in Welat, the first Kurdish newspaper to be published after the newly-accepted law for freedom of speech in non-Turkish languages in Turkey. After founding and working for a short period in Welat, he took part in launching Avesta Publishing House in 1995, which started to publish books in Kurdish alongside Turkish despite an actual lack of legal basis for ‘writing and publication in non-Turkish languages’. He still lives in Istanbul where he spent half his lifetime getting a great deal of important works in Kurdish and/or about Kurds printed.

## KESKIN



**Ciwanmerd Kulek**

*Ciwanmerd Kulek is a writer and translator based in Diyarbakir. He has a degree in English Language Teaching. He is the author of several novels and short story books in Kurdish, and has translated a dozen of works from the world literature into Kurdish.*



### Kurdistan Chronicle

You set up your publishing business at a very young age and you keep running the oldest and most prominent Kurdish publishing house for nearly thirty years in Istanbul. Did you think that it would come all along this way?

No! We didn't have any prediction at all. In 1995, when Avesta was founded, we published three books about Kurds in Turkish all of which were subsequently banned. Following the freedom of speech in Kurdish in 1991 some publications were launched, but the initial excitement and enthusiasm about Kurdish faded away as time went by. We had one aim in all that turmoil: publishing books. There was still no recognition, bans and other problems created by the state continued; readers, writers, publishers, all of us were self-taught, without an academic education; we were getting to know Kurdish letters and writing for the first time. Besides, the works produced in Kurdish were very problematic and they were not so interesting. We wanted to change that. We started out by publishing four books in Kurdish by unknown writers (needles to say that there wasn't any renowned person). Since we didn't have an office, we enregistered a friend's address to get a licence. We had dreams like anyone else around, yet we didn't have great expectations. We didn't take up this job to succeed, we just felt obliged to do it.

### Kurdistan Chronicle

More than 800 titles have been published by Avesta so far, most of them being in Kurdish. In your opinion, what were the greatest achievements of Avesta?

As the publishing business was only done by the political movements and groups back then, because of

### Kurdistan Chronicle

Looking back, what was your overriding motivation to pursue that job?

We took up this job not as a “job”, it was a passion of our life, it was our whole life, and it is still so. Like someone who was thrown to a desert, you live everything from the scratch, you discover it, since we had not been allowed to benefit from the experiences of the ones before us. Newspapers like Kurdistan and Jin had been published here in Istanbul, but we learnt about them through Stockholm 80-90 years later. We found out that it was not such a barren land through our struggles. Release of “new” works, saving them from being lost forever makes one feel excited, it still does. And, certainly, I love being immersed in this job very much.

### Kurdistan Chronicle

Which parts of society was targeted and influenced by the works published? Do you think all those publications had an impact and met the objectives?

The biggest part of our readers are students. Young people comprise 60-70% of the followers of our social media accounts. We notice through book fairs and events that there is an older generation too. Besides, we are pleased that there is a growing number of women, both as writers and readers... Women make up 25% of our social media followers. We have printed out more than 100 titles by women. In addition to that, there is a group of readers in Turkey who have an interest in reading books about Kurds and other minorities. Researchers are also very interested in our works. All in all, we can say that we have a readership from all parts of the society.



avesta 



## Kurdistan Chronicle

**You had trouble in distributing your works a bunch of times for political reasons and faced trials. What are the reasons for that?**

We publish books in a language that is marked as “a language not understood” in many legal documents. Despite the fact that publishing books in Kurdish was banned in the first seven years of my publishing career (1995-2002), Kurdish books were hardly a subject of persecution, as authorities didn't want to “legitimize” Kurdish. If a book in a certain language is banned, it means that language is acknowledged. Because they have to find a translator for it, they have to translate the texts and that translator should have been confirmed by the state. Therefore they chose to ignore Kurdish books, instead they aimed at Turkish ones. About 40 books we have published have been banned or we were ordered a sentence of jail or monetary fine. Courts act quite arbitrarily and on political intentions. However, what is worse than the obstacles created by the state are the problems in the civilian domain. Illiteracy and unacknowledgment make the Kurdish book market smaller.

## Kurdistan Chronicle

**Have you ever felt as an outsider or exiled in Istanbul? Do you have any other cities in mind which can be an alternative to it?**

No, not at all! I don't feel an outsider in Istanbul. No other city makes me feel the sense of freedom I have in

this city. Istanbul is a city where the Kurdish literary and cultural works were first produced. It is the Kurds' capital city of culture. The biggest portion of Kurdish population lives here. I can live feeling myself as a Kurd here much more than in Diyarbakir. Of course it could be different if there was a Kurdish administration in the North, then one could make a comparison. It doesn't matter if you are in a city of Kurdistan or in one of Turkey, because most of the events or works are made in Istanbul.

## Kurdistan Chronicle

**You're familiar with other parts of Kurdistan, and publish works by authors from all these regions. Reflecting on the authors and well-known personalities coming from all four parts, what are the similarities and differences that attract your attention in their literature and views of the world?**

There are big differences. Except for a few examples, Kurdish literature is something new in the North, they are mostly produced in the last 20 years. In the South, however, novels and short stories were published in newspapers nearly a century ago. For instance, *Di Xew de* (Le Xewma) by Camil Saib (1927) or *Meseleya Wijdanê* (Meseley Wijdan) by Ahmad Mukhtar Caf (19..) are great works both in terms of the topics and styles; they tell about social problems, even criticize the society. Works by contemporary authors are literarily powerful, and are more free in terms of topics. We see that good examples of literary work are created in the last years, while we used to have more folk tales and personal accounts in the

past. One of our most crucial disadvantages in the North is the language. Our connection with our language has been severed throughout a couple of generations, and we don't like novels much. We are short on the very successful works in this area. We idealize society, while they criticize it.

## Kurdistan Chronicle

**In Turkey, the question of Kurds has metamorphosed over the years, it has taken many forms from whether they exist or not to who and what they are like. How much do you think the Kurdish political elite supports that huge cultural output Avesta has produced and benefits from it to strengthen its arguments for the political struggle in Turkey?**

Turkish has now become a language in which the greatest number of books about Kurds are published. Although there are remarkable efforts for studies in Kurdish in the recent years, it is still incomparable to Turkish in terms of numbers and print runs. The books which aren't available in English, important works are translated into Turkish. Turkish has become a significant resource for Kurdish studies. Some official organizations in Turkey, along with academics, researchers and journalists make use of these works. But the political discourse of Kurdish politicians gradually distances itself from the “national issue”.

## Kurdistan Chronicle

**Having published so many works on Kurdish history, culture and identity, what do you think are the differences between Kurds of today**

**and past? At which points did Kurds succeed and what did they fail?**

Knowledge is very important and, as sacred books point it, saying preceded everything, everything started by saying. Former generations made significant efforts, they laid strong foundations but that didn't last long. The period from 1991 up to today is the longest and most stable period. A wide range of literature was formed in many fields. With little but strenuous efforts Kurdish cultural and intellectual heritage was collected. But, instead of intensifying Kurds' will for their rights, that decreased it. We had bigger goals when we had less knowledge about our society, country and culture. We have more knowledge of ourselves and our sur-

roundings now, but our goals and understanding is weaker than before. We will see if this is something temporary or permanent. On the other hand, before Kurds' discourse was meant to convince Turks, and some sort of progress has been achieved in that, if not a complete one. But now, we have forced to put forward arguments which should have been done thirty years ago; and we notice that a discourse arguing why something or another is not necessary for Kurds is starting to take over, which makes convincing Kurds, who are political actors themselves, even more difficult than convincing Turks. It seems that ‘Kurdish question’ has now turned into an intra-Kurdish question.

## Kurdistan Chronicle

**In the beginning of the 21st century it was widely argued by northern Kurds and those in Turkey that this will be a century in favor of Kurds. Almost a quarter of this century has passed and there are many complaints about what Kurds are currently going through. Do you think that it was a sheer demagoguery or there was a real likelihood for those views indeed?**

Yes, there was such an opportunity and it did materialize to a certain degree, but it could have turned out better too. Having reached 21st century and surviving the previous ones



Abdullah Keskin with President Masoud Barzani.

by itself is a historic success. 150-200 years ago travellers, missionaries and diplomats argued that 20-30 years are left at most for Kurdish people and their language to continue to exist, but Kurds and Kurdistan survived

stand; however, the bad thing for us is that we take 3-4 steps or just turn around whereas we could take ten steps forward. Some matters should be fixed and settled more fastly now, such as Kurdish education and then



Abdullah Keskin and former Iraqi President Jalal Talabani, former Kurdish members of Turkish Parliament Leyla Zana and Ahmed Turk.

even centuries after that. There is no danger of extinction today as much as in the past, anyone can save many things from being lost or extinct with little opportunities. Despite that, we have huge problems before us. Kurdish studies are still carried out by a tiny group of elites. They cannot reach out to the society, while the society itself doesn't care much about these works. Failure, for us, is not that we are going backwards, it is already somewhere behind where we still

making Kurdish an official language. If it isn't achieved, Kurdish language has a great risk of being lost, and if the language is lost or used very little, Kurdayeti (Kurdish cause) makes no sense any more.

**Kurdistan Chronicle**

**Why do you think a constant rhetoric of grievances is dominant in Kurdish political discourse in a country like Turkey where the big-**

**gest Kurdish population live? Is it because all the circumstances are actually and constantly in disfavor of them, or Kurds aren't capable of changing the circumstances in their favor?**

You must have noticed the word 'heqîqet' (reality / righteousness), which is used widely in Kurds' Turkish speeches and discourse nowadays. 'Absolute righteousness', like many other things, doesn't allow different thoughts to come about. In her memoir lately translated into Kurdish, Golda Meir says, "I have only one thing that I wish I can see before my death: I wish my people won't be in need of mercy." This rhetoric is outdated now, it must change, it makes more harm than good. The more powerful Kurdish movements became, the more their national discourse weakened, they have smaller and smaller aims and expectations. The view that "all the world has betrayed us" has become a custom among third world nations. I don't think they attract so much attention in the international affairs. Look at us, for example, nearly the whole world, from the US to Europe is striving to unite Kurds in the South and the West and making efforts to negotiate with us as a nation or state, not as a party, however, our situation is evident. Despite not being entirely independent of it, we have more internal conflicts than external ones, if not less. Kurds are not used to accept the reign of other Kurds, as it was during the period of amirates which lead to their collapse. Kurds never had less obstacles in the history, and neither do we have more troubles than the Kurds in the past.

**Kurdistan Chronicle**

**People have great expectations from the coming elections. You have witnessed many elections in your lifetime. What makes this one significantly different from previous ones? Do you agree that it might have dramatic results for Kurds?**

As a Kurd who lives in Istanbul, I also want this administration to change. They have governed for more than 20 years, it is enough. Kurdish question is an issue with the state, not with po-



litical parties. No one can do anything without an entire agreement. I am not much hopeful of the opposition, they don't say anything in concrete. They could be worse for the Kurdish question than the current administration. Kurdish vote is important, but it does everyone good except for



Abdullah Keskin with Orhan Pamuk and Muhsin Kizilkaya.

the Kurds themselves. They made the opposition win so many municipalities, what was it good for? Therefore, I wouldn't prefer Kurds take side nonsensically with anyone in the the intra-Turkish issues. Turkish society is a 'conservative' society in general, they don't need to make them their foes. Kurdish politicians need to make use of the art of politics and prioritize their people's interests.

**Kurdistan Chronicle**

**If you had to assess Kurds' performance in all fields of arts, which ones would you mark as the ones Kurds remained behind, and which are the ones that they are promising in?**

It changes according to each part of Kurdistan. I can see that the art of cinema is flourishing in all parts in the last 10-15 years. Kurds don't have movie theaters but they have movies. In the South and the East more research studies, especially in the field of history, are done, and they have a more vibrant literature there. We could also add the West

(Rojava) to our list of Kurmanci literature. They are not disconnected from their language as we are. We are listless and impatient, here in the North we are better in poetry and short stories. And lastly, in all the other three parts they are better than us at painting and sculpturing.

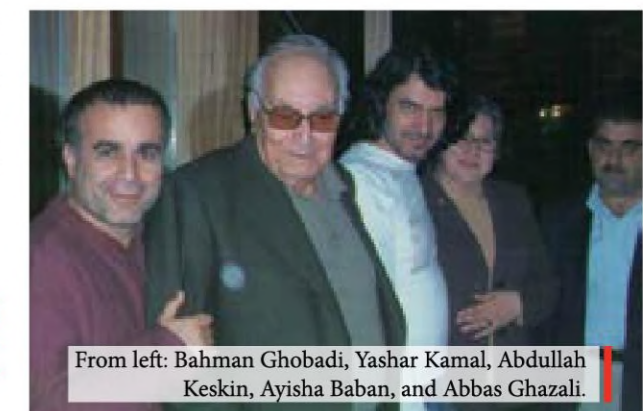
**Kurdistan Chronicle**

**You love Kurdish foods very much. What are your thoughts on Kurdish cuisine?**

I am very curious about the gastronomy in general. I am open to different tastes, I do my best to get to know other cuisines. However, our dishes has remained unchanged like many other things. Of course there is a good side to that, it is more authentic, but you have to try new things as well. If you were to evaluate our cuisine with regard to all our different parts and regions and cultures, it probably makes up a cuisine richer than those of several countries. It is not exhibited though. You have few options in the restaurants, since our cities are not developed that much.



Abdullah Keskin with former HDP co-chair Salaheddin Demirtas.



From left: Bahman Ghobadi, Yashar Kamal, Abdullah Keskin, Ayisha Baban, and Abbas Ghazali.

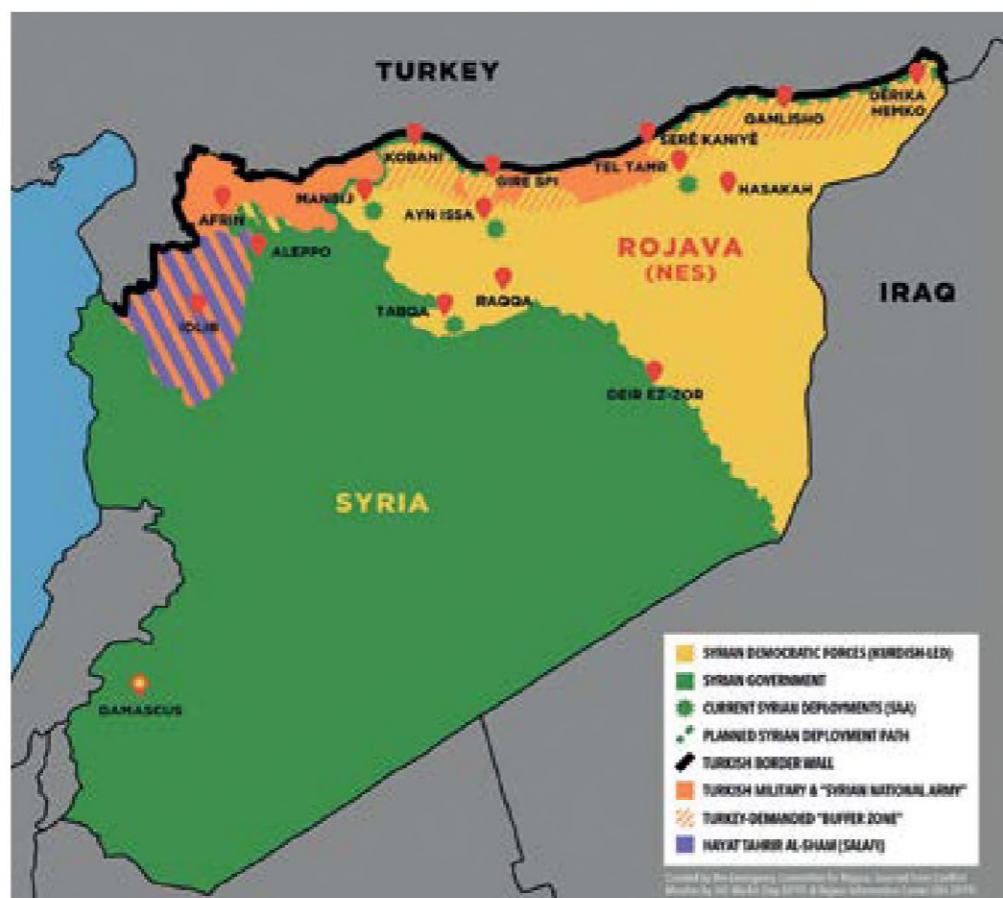
I bring plants, vegetables and other stuff from many places and try different things with them. When I am bored, I turn to cooking. For instance, I tried to make a rice of wheat with lentils and gulik (a plant) and added shrimp to it. The result was great.

OPINION

# WILL RUSSIA'S EFFORTS BROKER A PEACE DEAL BETWEEN TURKEY AND SYRIA?

**O**n April 25, Moscow hosted another round of talks regarding a rapprochement between Syria and Turkey that included defense ministers and intelligence officials from the three

severed at the beginning of the Syrian Civil War in 2011, after which Turkey has tried to overthrow the Syrian regime and even occupy parts of Syrian territory including parts of Kurdistan in Syria. The main obstacles hinder-



countries as well as a fourth country, Iran.

The main goal of the four-party meeting was to bring Syria and Turkey closer together after relations between the two countries were

ing the conclusion of an agreement are Turkey's security concerns, its occupation of Syrian territory, and the repatriation of the Syrian refugees.



Hoshyar Siwaily

Hoshyar Siwaily is Director of the Kurdistan Democratic Party's Foreign Relations Office.



Although Russia and Iran are not part of the Syrian-Turkish conflict, they have strategic interests in forging a deal. Both countries want to end the U.S. military presence in Syria and believe that a peace deal will make the U.S. position untenable. For its part, Syria wants Turkey and the United States to withdraw their forces and for Turkey to cease its support of extremist groups against Damascus. Meanwhile, Turkey's intentions and interests are clear: ending the presence of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and Syrian-Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD).

Although Russia and Iran are making serious efforts to normalize Syrian-Turkish relations, their success depends largely on the seriousness of the two opposing sides and of the United States in its support for the Kurds in Western Kurdistan.

Turkey has said that it will not withdraw from Syria unless it guarantees the protection of its borders by



disarming the SDF and eliminating Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) activities in Syria. As Syria's relations with the outside world improve, time may be in its favor, especially with presidential elections in Turkey only two weeks away. Turkey's diplomatic

efforts to reach an agreement are interpreted as being related to the upcoming elections, especially the return of Syrian refugees,

which is seen as a public demand in Turkey.

What remains unclear is the future of the Kurdish cantons in the region when and if Syria and Turkey reach an agreement. This depends on several factors: the seriousness of Russia in bringing the Kurdish side and the government together, the position and leverage of United States in Syria, and Turkey's appetite for any credible role for the SDF/PYD in the future of Syria.

Unity among the Kurdish parties, which former Kurdistan Region's President Masoud Barzani has endeavored to facilitate in the past, is

crucial in strengthening their negotiating position. This is a noble goal, but one that awaits deeds and not only words.

The importance of unity among Kurdish parties cannot be overstated. It is crucial for achieving the political and social goals of the Kurdish people, strengthening their negotiating position with external actors, promoting stability and security within Kurdish communities, and overcoming historical and cultural divides. President Masoud Barzani's efforts to facilitate unity among Kurdish parties are commendable and should be continued in order to achieve a brighter future for the Kurdish people.

# ANNIVERSARY

## KURDISTAN ITS ROLE IN PROMOTING KURDISH IDENTITY AND LANGUAGE

### Marking 125 years since the inaugural publication of the first Kurdish newspaper

**The publication of Kurdistan was a  
significant moment in the history of  
the Kurdish language and people**

In 1898, Mikdad Midhad Bedir Khan, a Kurdish prince, established the first Kurdish newspaper, Kurdistan, in Cairo. Prior to this, the Kurdish language had been mainly used for poetry and spoken communication, with education and writing conducted in Arabic, Persian, and Turkish. After all, the Kurdish people had been deprived of their basic rights, including the right to publish their own language, after Kurdistan was invaded and divided by Sultan Salim I and King Ismail after the Battle of Chaldiran in 1514-1515.

Bedir Khan, the founder of Kurdistan, was a member of the Bedir Khan family, a prominent family that played a leading role in Kurdish national politics. He believed that the promotion of Kurdish language and culture was essential for the survival of the Kurdish people

and the establishment of Kurdistan was an avenue to achieve this.

The publication of Kurdistan was a significant moment in the history of the Kurdish language and people. It represented a move towards asserting Kurdish identity and promoting the use of the Kurdish language, which had previously been suppressed by various colonial powers. While it initially focused on political and cultural issues affecting the Kurds, it afterwards played an essential role in shaping Kurdish national consciousness and identity, as well as raising awareness of the Kurdish cause and struggles.

Since the publication of Kurdistan, there have been many other Kurdish-language newspapers, magazines, and other publications that have contributed to the development and pro-



The front page of the Kurdistan Newspaper.

motion of the Kurdish language and culture. However, Kurdistan remains a significant milestone and its founder is revered as a pioneering figure in the Kurdish nationalist movement.

### “What have you done for your homeland?”

Prior to the late 19th century, the Kurdish people had no access to newspapers published in their mother language, nor schools or printing houses dedicated to cultural matters. It was not until after the publication of the first Turkish, Arabic, and Persian newspapers that this first Kurdish newspaper was established.

Bedir Khan, a skilled Kurdish prince, came up with the idea while on a trip to Cairo, then a regional political, commercial, and cultural hub. However, printing a newspaper in the mother language while in exile posed a challenge, as the printing house staff did not speak Kurdish, and there were few Kurds living in Cairo or Egypt. Therefore, Bedir Khan had to print Kurdistan at the Hilal printing house and send 2,000 copies of the first issue to Kurdistan.

Kurdistan quickly extended beyond being a cultural medium, serving as a unifying platform for Kurdish intellectuals. It fostered a unique relationship with its readers as demonstrated by Bedir Khan's call in the first issue

for readers to contribute articles, with the aim of expanding its readership and encouraging people to take ownership of the publication for their benefit.

Bedir Khan published the first five issues of Kurdistan in Cairo, targeting the Kurdish literate class and feudal lords. The newspaper was not simply a mere sequence of Kurdish letters and words; it carried valuable messages, with Bedir Khan communicating directly with his readers and posing questions like, in the second issue: "Princes and lords of Kurdistan, what have you done for your homeland thus far?"

This statement reminds us of the famous words that John F. Kennedy evoked 63 years later – "Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country" – which became a widely quoted slogan around the world and reveals Bedir Khan's vision.

### Appealing to the Sultan

From the earliest issues, including the third and fourth, Bedir Khan encountered challenges in publishing in Kurdistan itself. For the fifth issue, he penned an open letter to Sultan Abdul Hamid II, explaining the resistance that he was facing. The sultan did not reply favorably, so, in the following issue, Bedir Khan publicized that the sultan had not even permitted the princes of King Bedir Khan to publish Kurdistan newspaper from Istanbul.

Bedir Khan repeatedly wrote open letters to the sultan in several issues of the newspaper, including 6, 7, 10, 13, 20, and 26. These letters, written in Turkish, primarily addressed the publication of Kurdistan and criticized the oppressive situation for Kurdish people, as well as the corruption of Ottoman officials and authorities.

Bedir Khan also used the newspaper as a platform to highlight some negative behaviors within the Kurdish community, such as disunity. Similarly, Abdul Rahman Bedir Khan, who took over the responsibility for



Magded Sapan

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Dar al-Hilal, the publishing house of the Kurdistan Newspaper.

### Bedir Khan published the first five issues of Kurdistan in Cairo, targeting the Kurdish literate class and feudal lords

publishing the newspaper from issues 6 to 31, encouraged Kurdish nationalism, unity, and love of their homeland, most notably in an article in issue 9, at a time when people were increasingly disapproving of Sultan Abdul Hamid II in Istanbul and beyond.

#### A selfless prince

Bedir Khan consistently advocated for justice in the pages of Kurdistan. He recognized that true justice would not come from the sultan but must be won by the Kurdish people. His commitment to honesty and integrity earned him a loyal following among readers who were eager to engage with his thought-provoking articles. Unlike other writers of the time, he never used the newspaper to further his own interests, always writing with the goal of guiding and enlightening Kurdish society. As a result, readers eagerly awaited each new issue, eager to stay connected with him and his important message of justice for all.

Bedir Khan's goal in publishing Kurdistan was twofold: to promote the name of Kurdistan and to use the content



**“ Bedir Khan emerged as a beloved and devoted leader who inspired his people to demand reform, revolution, and equal educational opportunities for all Kurdish children regardless of their social status or gender ”**



Mikdad Midhat (top row, second from right) and other members of the Bedirkhan family (around 1880)

to advance Kurdish education in the Kurdish language. The newspaper also served as a platform to expose the injustices committed by the Ottoman Sultan and his officials, opening the eyes of the people to their plight. Through this four-page publication, Bedir Khan emerged as a beloved and devoted leader who inspired his people to demand reform, revolution, and equal educational opportunities

for all Kurdish children regardless of their social status or gender. Bedir Khan's writings reflected a Kurdish perspective and advocated for the freedom, justice, and prosperity of Kurdistan. Despite his position as a Kurdish prince with wealth and privilege within the Ottoman state, Bedir Khan remained selfless and sacrificed his own comfort for the sake of

his people's progress and aspirations. Kurdistan was not merely a small, four-page publication for amusement; instead, it served as a powerful tool for awakening a nation and inspiring them to turn their aspirations into achievements. Bedir Khan provided a masterpiece of journalism to future generations that Kurdish people can take pride in.

# MEMORY

## THE HAMILTON ROAD A STORY OF ONE MAN'S EFFORTS TO CONNECT KURDISTAN

**“It was a thrilling prospect from every point of view,” he wrote**



**Wladimir van Wilgenburg**

*Wladimir van Wilgenburg is a seasoned reporter and analyst who specializes in Kurdish affairs, and holds a Master's degree in Kurdish studies from Exeter University*

In the rugged terrain of Kurdistan, where mountains and valleys often separate villages and towns, transportation has always been a challenge. New Zealand's civil engineer Archibald Hamilton was tasked in 1928 by the British, who controlled and created Iraq after the fall of the Ottoman empire, to build a road from Erbil through the mountains and valleys of Kurdistan to the Iranian border in Haji Omeran.

In the book, *Road Through Kurdistan*, Hamilton describes how he was transferred to Kurdistan to build the 185-km road in four years, the aim of “pacification of the Kurdish tribes-people and for the introduction of (Iraqi) Government influence urgently demanded roadbuilding.”

“It was a thrilling prospect from every point of view,” he wrote. “The road would be a romantic one, for it would pass through mountains where roadbuilding has never been attempted by any past civilizations, owing partly due to technical difficulties, but mainly due to the intractable character of the inhabitants.”

Nevertheless, Hamilton felt sympathy for the Kurds since his own ancestors in Scotland “were little different in their customs and rules... We had built a road which, it was hoped, would not only assist in trade between Persia and Iraq, but would also carry peaceful administration into this most remote corner of the kingdom,” he wrote in his memoir.

The road was supposed to be known as the Rawanduz road, but was later named after Hamilton. Initially, when Hamilton arrived in Rawanduz, he wrote that he knew “little about the country or the people, and I could speak no Kurdish at all.” However, he “reveled in the mountain scenery and the invigorating air.”

In Rawanduz today, close to one of the stunning valleys where Hamilton once worked, stands a newly refurbished statue that commemorates his achievements.

The statue includes a quote from Hamilton, who acknowledged the Kurdish people's warmth and hospitality, stating that “you will not find people who

# The Hamilton Road in Kurdistan serves as a testament to Mr. Hamilton's commitment to uniting the region and improving the lives of its residents

love flowers and spring more than the Kurdish people."

During his four-year expedition, Hamilton triumphed over illness, local conflicts, and bureaucratic hurdles to construct one of the most vital roads in the region. With the aid of 1,000 laborers, hailing from diverse ethnic backgrounds and fluent in multiple languages, he accomplished this impressive feat.

Over time, Hamilton Road took shape, snaking its way through the mountains and valleys of Kurdistan

to the Iranian border. This was also done with the help of local Kurdish tribesmen and elites, including the Kurdish Chieftain Ismail Beg from Rawanduz, who helped him because he thought that Kurdistan would never prosper without roads.

Nonetheless, they held diverging opinions on the direction Iraq should take. Hamilton believed that the Kurds should be integrated into a democratic Iraq, whereas the Kurdish chieftain mistrusted Baghdad and advocated for Kurdistan to serve as a neutral, inviolable (and

independent) state, akin to Switzerland's position in Europe.

On the contrary, Ismail Beg complained that the Kurds were split among three countries - Arabs, Persians, and Turks - who had little concern for the Kurdish people's well-being. He cited instances of mistreatment of Kurds by Arabs, Persians, and Turks to support his claim. The distrust between Arabs and Kurds that existed during Hamilton's era persists to this day.

Despite their disagreements, the

Kurdish chieftain Ismail Beg shared his vision with Hamilton for Kurdistan to become one of Asia's most appealing tourist destinations. "They'd come afar for the scenery and the hunting and mountain-climbing and winter sports and they would love our spring flowers," he told Hamilton.

Today, this vision has become a reality in part. The stunning mountainous landscape of Kurdistan draws domestic tourists who traverse the Hamilton Road from Erbil and stay in nearby hotels.

"Despite the limited tools available at that time, the road played a crucial role in trade between Iraq and Iran,



Photo archive: Halgord Jundiyani

falls, the section between Khalifan and Rawanduz has several caves that can serve as natural shelters for overnight camping for both tourists and locals, with easy access from all sides and safety. From the beginning of the road all the way to the Iranian border, there are numerous cabins, hotels, motels, and villas for rent, generating significant income for locals."

Ali Beg waterfall, where Hamilton established a camp and resided for two years, now captivates thousands of visitors from across Iraq, particularly during the scorching summer season and religious festival of Eid al-Fitr, which marks the end of Ramadan.

Moreover, tour guides often organize trips for foreign travelers along the Hamilton Road to Rawanduz, which has become a popular attraction.

During the spring of 2012, Aaron, a globetrotter, embarked on a journey along the Hamilton Road to appreciate the captivating valleys. In his travel blog, he expresses wonder at the road's impressive engineering and highlights that it not only serves a strategic purpose but also boasts a magnificent display of nature's beauty.

"Not only was it a strategic route but the mere fact that this road exists through such dramatic scenery is really an engineering marvel!" he wrote on his travel blog.

In addition, the Hamilton Road now facilitates the travel of sizable groups

of local mountain hikers to nearby peaks such as the Halgurd Mountains, which are among the tallest in Kurdistan.

To sum up, the Hamilton Road in Kurdistan serves as a testament to Mr. Hamilton's commitment to uniting the region and improving the lives of its residents. Despite the road's initial construction by the British to control Kurdish tribes, it has now become essential in facilitating transportation, commerce, and promoting local tourism, aligning with the vision of Hamilton's dear friend, Ismail Beg.

Sadik Dealzi, a resident of Choman, a town located near the Hamilton Road and the Iranian border, who lived abroad and is knowledgeable about the area, also recalled how Hamilton's grandson and daughter visited the Kurdistan Region in 2009 or 2010.

According to Dealzi, while it is true that Hamilton's construction of the road was intended to subdue the Kurdish people on behalf of the British Empire, it has also had positive effects.

"We (local people) have greatly benefited from this road as it has brought about positive changes. People situated on the road are now more educated and are able to strengthen their economy."

"The road is important; we will never forget what Hamilton did 100 years ago."



Photo archive: Halgord Jundiyani

as well as attracting tourists from all over the world today," said Rekan Rasoul, the founder of the hiking group Rock ur Bones, who frequently uses the Hamilton Road to bring hikers to the area.

"The waterfalls and hiking trails along the road make it easier to access the base or starting point. Moreover, the road provides access to archaeological and undiscovered sites on both sides, and its construction made it easier for geologists to study the area," he told the Kurdistan Chronicle.

"Besides the scenic views and water-

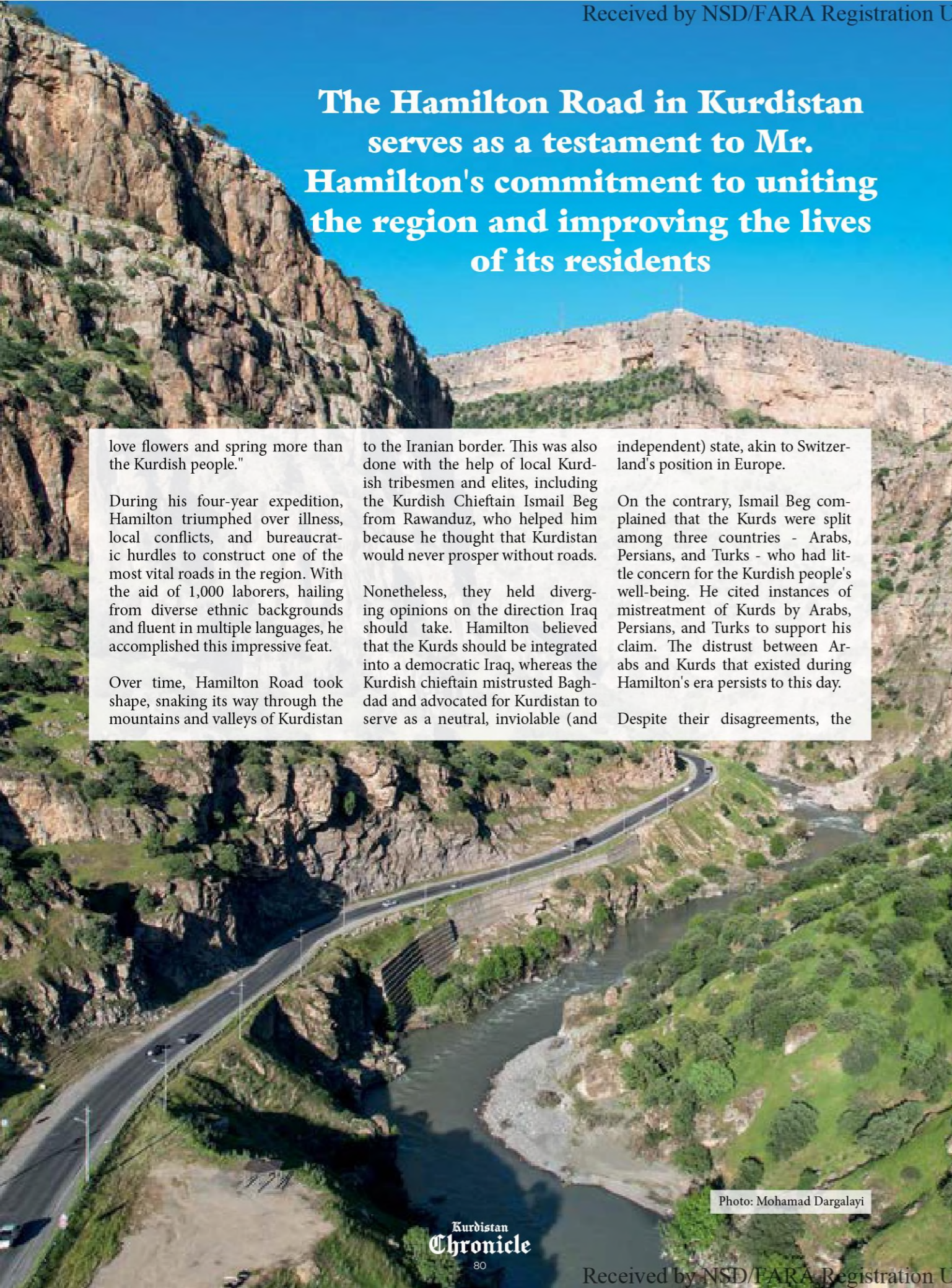
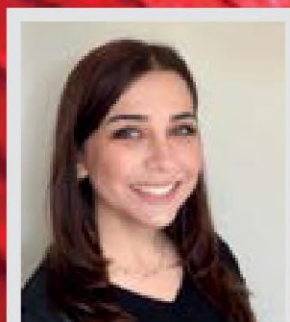


Photo: Mohamad Dargalayi

# CULTURE

## WHY 16 YEARS LATER, I STILL CALL KURDISTAN “MY NEST”?



**Sazan M. Mandalawi**

*Sazan M. Mandalawi is a consultant, pursuing her passion in youth education.*

**When you live in the diaspora, you are like a hummingbird who has migrated in early autumn and returned to realize that you may not be able to adapt to life in your original nest**

Photo: Safin Hamid



**Erbil is one of the only cities in the world where it never occurs to me to triple-check that my handbag is zipped, to place the shoulder strap forward instead of to the side, or to avoid wearing a piece of jewelry in a crowded public place**

I landed in Erbil for the first time in 2006. When you live in the diaspora, you are like a hummingbird who has migrated in early autumn and returned to realize that you may not be able to adapt to life in your original nest.

A bird can flutter its wings across skies to anywhere it wants to venture, but it creates a nest for its offspring in a place it believes is best.

Over the years, I have explored the means of what the idea of 'home' meant to a young girl who grew up oceans and continents away.

A 17-year-old at the time, today, I am a mother of two. A lot has changed. Yet My Nest in Kurdistan has not. Still, the meaning of home is a frequent thought knocking on the doors of my mind.

In My Nest, two birds hatched. Here they realized their wings, learning to sing, and when the season comes, they may or may not choose to soar the skies. I decided to hatch them here because values, morals, and ethics in relationships and social life still exist, because we have not lost the fundamentals of life, family, respect, and appreciation for one another, and because love is not just a word we see in books, it is felt and seen as soon as we step outside our homes.

How can I not call this place a nest when I do not need to schedule a time to meet a friend when I most need her? There is never a two-week or a three-month notice for lunch or dinner with family and friends. An average Kurdish family has something of a thanksgiving-dinner-like gathering once every week on a Friday usually at the home of the parents or grandparents. In some parts of the world,

this blessing only occurs for two hours once a year after months of planning.

My Nest does not start when I am in Kurdistan. It begins at the gate of any airport with flights directly to Erbil and during the moments when strangers offer to carry my hand luggage, fold my child's stroller, and place my bags in the overhead storage compartment (you know, that's an issue when you're under five feet tall).

The ring roads around the citadel ring the welcome home bells in my heart as the plane descends over My Nest. It must be the same feeling that migratory songbirds have as they flock back to the blooming spring season.

It is the sentiment of having tea in the bazaar in the morning and a caramel latte with cream in Diamond Square when you realize there is something for everyone. It is the blend of the old and new, Empire World and the Citadel being 12 minutes apart. The rich history, culture, and heritage exist as colors and values of the past with a sprinkle of modernization and globalization. For me, it's the perfect mixture of ingredients.

You know a place is a nest when you stroll the streets alone under the moonlight without having to be a parrot with eyes on its sides pondering the cues of a looming predator.

The only matter that worries me after any event ending in late hours of the night is being harassed by someone functioning on something between an unconscious and subconscious mind, or for that matter, the smell of methamphetamine.

Erbil is one of the only cities

in the world where it never occurs to me to triple-check that my handbag is zipped, to place the shoulder strap forward instead of to the side, or to avoid wearing a piece of jewelry in a crowded public place.

It is the feeling of sitting in a public place and hearing the mingling in Kurdish that tickles my emotions.

It is here that you can capture a mosque's dome and a church's spire in one photo. Here, I receive Eid greeting messages as well as calls from my Christian friends before hearing from my Muslim friends.

I live in a nest where we offer parts of our meal to others before we take the first bite, only because they have smelled our food and maybe, just maybe, they crave what we are about to have.

They say a person forgets what you say and what you do but always remembers how you made them feel. Over the past decade and a half, how some moments made me feel is impossible to forget.

How can I forget, for instance, that day my car stopped, and strangers fixed it while I just stood on the side of the road. To this day, I still do not know what it was that malfunctioned. Or that time when strangers gathered to see if I was okay after a minor accident. How about all the times I received calls from people who had found my lost purse and phone?

For every bird, a nest, and here is My Nest... in Kurdistan.

Note: I acknowledge and appreciate that my work in the private sector means that I have a higher level of privilege than other members of my community.

# CULTURE

## STREET PHOTOGRAPHY PERSPECTIVES FROM KURDISTAN

Kurdistan Chronicle - Sulaymaniyah

Street photography is all about seizing the moment.

**D**aroon Qaradaghi, a 38-year-old street photographer from the city of Sulaymaniyah, has a distinct approach to capturing life through his lens. Daroon prefers black-and-white photography because he believes it conveys the raw and authentic nature of his subjects. His goal is to highlight the intricate details of everyday life that go unnoticed by passersby.

He believes that street photography is all about seizing the moment. Unlike landscape photography, where one can take their time to set up the perfect shot, timing is everything on the streets. He emphasizes the importance of acting quickly in street photography, saying: "In street photography, you shoot first and think later."

While most street pho-



Photo: Aso Karim



Photo: Daroon Qaradaghi



“ People should not  
feel that you are  
there to harm them ”

Photo: Aso Karim

tographers always carry a camera when they walk the streets, Daroon willfully leaves his camera at home at times. Going out without a camera encourages him to train his eyes and notice the types of photographs he might be missing. This method teaches him to be more observant and attentive, allowing him to better understand and appreciate the world around him.

sence of a place and its people. However, the art raises important ethical and privacy concerns.

Daroon understands the importance of gaining people's trust in order to capture compelling and authentic moments. To achieve this, he said he always obtains consent from his subjects. After snapping a shot, he will show the photo to the person. If they give their consent, he will publish it. However, if they decline, he will delete it immediately.

In addition to ethical considerations, Daroon emphasizes the importance of patience and courage for any aspiring street photographer. Waiting for the right moment to capture a meaningful image requires a great deal of patience, while having the courage to approach and interact with strangers on the street is necessary for building trust. Finally, he stressed the importance of not taking photos out of pity. "A photographer should approach their

**Aso Kareem**, a renowned street photographer at the age of 36, likes to take photos with long exposure and slow shutter, as he shared his experience of capturing a unique photo in the bustling Erbil Bazaar. The photograph depicts a scene where everything is in motion, except for a clock that remains still.

Speaking about his journey in photography, Aso published a book titled *Walking Toward Candid* last year, where he advises street photographers

to harm them." Aso's words offer valuable insights for aspiring photographers who wish to capture candid street moments while being considerate of their subjects and surroundings.

**“When I see a photo, I have to take it immediately”**

rather than a mere photograph.

Sharing his approach to street photography, Mohammed explains that he does not always have the luxury of taking people's consent before clicking their picture. "When I see a photo, I have to take it immediately," he said.

For aspiring street photographers, Mohammed recommends observing the streets daily to discover new perspectives and angles. "Looking at street photography every day can be a



Photo: Aso Karim



Photo: Hama Sur



Photo: Aso Karim

**“Building trust with my subjects is paramount”**

Street photography is a type of photography that focuses on capturing candid and spontaneous moments of daily life in public places. It can be a powerful tool for documenting our surroundings and capturing the es-

“Building trust with my subjects is paramount. I believe a photographer cannot simply rely on their right to take photos in public spaces, as this does not necessarily guarantee trust. Instead, it is essential to establish a relationship with those being photographed, using body language and behavior to convey respect and professionalism,” he told Kurdistan Chronicle.

subjects with respect and dignity, avoiding any suggestion that the photo is being taken simply because the subject is pitiable,” he concluded.

**“People should not feel that you are there to harm them”**

to focus less on their camera and more on the present moment. "What you have now is the best thing," he said.

He also emphasizes the importance of taking numerous photos but refraining from sharing them on social media.

Furthermore, Aso stressed the importance of being respectful towards the people and environment while shooting on the streets. "On the street, people should not feel that you are there

**Mohammed Saleh**, a 38-year-old street photographer, prefers to capture images that resemble paintings. He recently shared his experience of taking a remarkable photograph during winter when the streets were blanketed in snow. The photograph features a fruit vendor, his cart, his umbrella, and tomatoes – all in vibrant red color. Adding to the visual appeal, three people wearing red pass by the cart. Mohammed cherishes this photo as it resembles artwork

part of your training," he added.

Mohammed's unique approach to street photography and his advice for upcoming photographers can inspire many to explore new ways of capturing the essence of everyday life on the streets.

## LEGACY

## Remembering the Great



Ayad Namik Majid

*Ayad Namik Majid is Former Secretary General of the Iraqi Council of Representatives.*

I had the pleasure of meeting the renowned architect Zaha Hadid on several occasions, including at the opening ceremony of the Heydar Aliyev Center in Baku, Azerbaijan, in the presence of the President of Azerbaijan and many international dignitaries, and at the London Exhibition. Witnessing the beauty and elegance of Hadid's architectural masterpieces and designs firsthand was an unforgettable experience. Her innovative approach to architecture made an indelible impression on me.

Hadid was a lady in every way: she had gentle manners and a smiling face, and was modest, gorgeous, large, nostalgic, and fluent in Baghdadi dialect. She adored her country and had a special affection for Baghdad, the city of her childhood memories.

When I invited her to sign the design contract for the new Iraqi House of Representatives (HOR) building in Baghdad with Mr. Osama Al-Nujaifi, the former speaker of the House of Representatives, she said, "I will not be able to, but

if I come, I will stay in Baghdad for two weeks and meet my friends and relatives. I also want to go to Erbil and spend more than two weeks in Kurdistan. I'd like to visit its lovely cities, resorts, and mountains."

Zaha Hadid was a renowned Iraqi-British architect whose avant-garde designs had a significant impact on the field of architecture. She was born in Baghdad in 1950 and attended the American University of Beirut before moving to London to study architecture at the Architectural Association School of Architecture.

She became known for her bold and futuristic designs that frequently challenged traditional architectural forms after establishing her own firm, Zaha Hadid Architects, in 1980. Among her most famous works are the MAXXI Museum in Rome, the Guangzhou Opera House in China, and the Heydar Aliyev Center in Baku.

My acquaintance with Hadid began when it was determined that the current build-

ZAHA  
HADID

ing for the Iraqi HOR no longer suited the needs of the country's highest federal legislative institution, and a high committee was formed to oversee the construction of a new building.

The committee set technical standards for the evaluation and selection of foreign companies who might bid and invited international design engineering firms to enter the competition. Out of the 100 companies and engineering

consulting firms that applied, 37 were selected after meeting the aforementioned standards. Following this stage, 12 firms submitted bids, and the Royal Institute of British Architects was asked to serve as a neutral international evaluator and arbitrator to help with the selection process.

In the end, Zaha Hadid's firm was chosen as the top winner, for which it received a \$100,000 prize.



A 200-acre plot of land in Baghdad was designated in 2011 for the construction of a new HOR building, as well as other sub-buildings and facilities. A contract was then signed in 2014 with Hadid for a design aimed at creating a landmark for Baghdad.

The building would have been the largest project by Zaha Hadid Company and would have been environmentally friendly, relying entirely on renewable solar energy and using 75% recycled water. The \$50 million contract was signed in London in 2014 in the presence of the Iraqi Ambassador to Britain and representatives from Hadid's office, following negotiations and price reductions from the original price of \$80 million.

Zaha also designed the new building of the Central Bank of Iraq. Located on the Tigris River, its construction will be completed in less than two years and will add more beauty to the city of Baghdad.

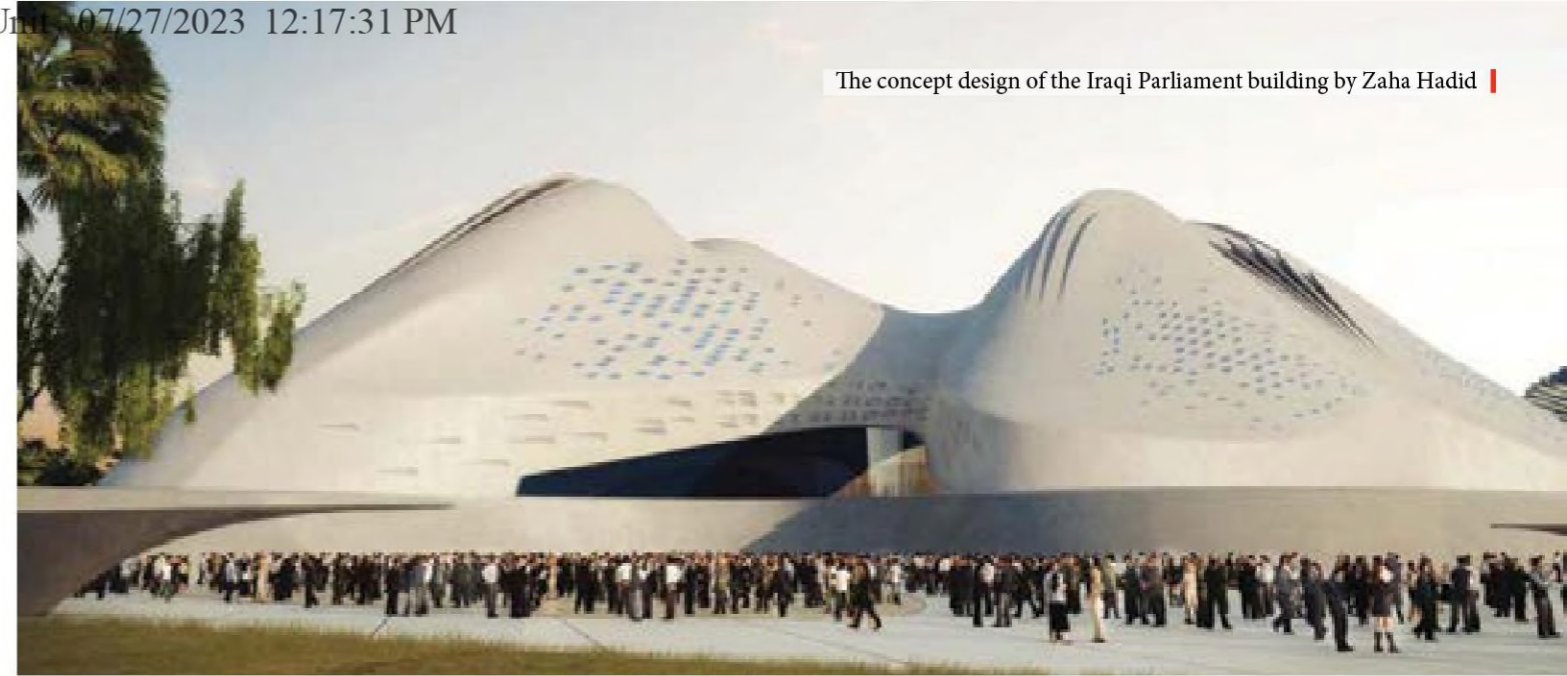
Unfortunately, the contract for the new building of the Iraqi HOR has yet to be implemented. I can only hope that this project will come to light, adding yet another unique imprint of Hadid on Iraqi architecture.

Throughout her career, Hadid received numerous awards and honors, including winning the Pritzker Architecture Prize in 2004 and becoming the first woman to receive the Royal Gold Medal from the Royal Institute of British Architects in 2016. She passed away in 2016 at the age of 65, leaving behind a legacy of boundary-pushing architecture and a lasting impact on the field.

Hadid was laid to rest alongside her father Mohammed Hussein Hadid and brother Foladh in London's Brookwood Cemetery. Her beautiful touches, however, remain as a refreshing spring breeze on a Baghdad morning, and her legacy lives on in the 950 buildings she designed in 44 countries.

How great she was and how much she loved her country. Most of us, when we are on our deathbeds, reach for our families, sisters, brothers, or even close friends. Yet Hadid said to her personal secretary: "Inform the people of Iraq that I will die."

The concept design of the Iraqi Parliament building by Zaha Hadid



Ayad Namik Majid, the former Secretary General of the Iraqi Parliament, signed a contract for architectural designs of the Iraqi Parliament with Zaha Hadid at the Iraqi Embassy in London.

# INNOVATION

## KURDISH INNOVATOR CREATES GROUND-BREAKING ROBOT IN KURDISTAN



**Nabaz Ismael  
Hamad**

*Nabaz Ismael HAMAD is a senior university lecturer at Salahaddin University-Erbil. He holds PhD in English Language and Linguistics. He is a writer, researcher and a certified legal translator.*



Bahar Sulaiman, a Kurdish woman hailing from the Duhok governorate, has made history by becoming the first person in Kurdistan and Iraq to build a distinctive robot.

In an exclusive interview with Kurdistan Chronicle, Bahar shares the story of her remarkable accomplishment, explores the potential of robotics, and discusses her aspirations for the future.

Bahar began by recounting her journey into the realm of robot development: "Originally from the Amedi district

and now settled in Duhok, I graduated from the University of Duhok with degrees in computer science and computers and accounting. In 2014, I began my career as a computer science teacher at Ishik International Private School, which allowed me to enhance my proficiency in the English language."

During her teaching tenure, Bahar recognized a significant gap in coding skills among students across various schools. Utilizing the opportunity presented by the Covid-19 pandemic and the shift to online learning, she proposed the implementation of programming, coding, application development, and website construction to her school. Upon receiving approval, she embarked on a coding journey with her students, resulting in the creation of over 400 programs. Through self-learning and trial and error, Bahar proudly facilitated her students' coding education throughout her nine years of teaching.

Bahar then delved into the inception of her first robot: "The idea came to me in 2021. Together with my students, we acquired the necessary parts and components from China and dedicated six to seven months to build it. With some experience under our belts, we decided to participate in the International Schools Robots Exhibition in Suleimani in 2022. Despite the uniqueness of our robot in terms of quality and programming, my students completed the competition's task in just seven minutes. As a result, we won first place, with my students receiving the gold medal from the international judging committee. Meanwhile, I was honored with the Certificate of Merit as the best teacher and expert."

To date, Bahar has successfully constructed six robots, consisting of four

small robots and two large ones. These achievements opened up new avenues of opportunity, with multiple job offers from various companies as well as a request from the American School of Duhok to develop a coding system and teach their students. However, due to time constraints, she has not yet been able to pursue these prospects.

Recognizing the importance of computer science education, Bahar emphasized the necessity of integrating it into the Kurdish curriculum: "I firmly believe that computer science should be an essential component of our



curriculum at all levels and ages. Consequently, I proposed to the KRG Ministry of Education that a computer science module be incorporated into the curriculum of all public schools. Currently, due to a

**In the course of my work, I realized that there was a huge gap in the field of coding across all the schools in relation to benefiting from the computer and gaining more experience with it**

lack of proper modules and qualified teachers, computer programs have not been utilized to their full potential, especially in terms of benefiting students."

While Bahar acknowledged the possibility of programming robots to understand and communicate in the Kurdish language, she stressed the need for financial support to undertake such a substantial project. She envisions developing task-specific and sector-specific robots, including those tailored for industrial applications and healthcare. For individuals with physical disabilities, she believes robots can serve as functional replacements.

She further explained: "While many computer science and technology schools and universities have robots, they are often purchased as final products or built using imported parts without the ability to add necessary programming. I take pride in having built distinctive robots and developing their programming."

"I have the capability to make robots move in various ways and directions and can enhance them further by incorporating features like a touch

screen. However, this requires additional financial resources."

Regarding the programming languages that she employs for robot development, Bahar provided insights into her latest creation, stating: "I have utilized C, C Plus, and Python programs. For my most recent robot, I dedicated more than 13 hours on some days to its construction and programming. Standing at a height of 25 cm, it possesses the ability to move, perform exercises, and execute commands sent to it. The robot operates in three different modes and includes a power button at the back. Additionally, it features an electronic handle equipped with a remote device and a computer application for seamless control."

When discussing the possibility of programming robots to understand and communicate in the Kurdish language, Bahar expressed that while it is an achievable task, it requires financial support. She expressed her eagerness to undertake this significant project and outlined her plans for developing task-specific and sector-specific robots. She highlighted the potential for industrial robots used in large warehouses, which can be charged for an hour and work autonomously for the remaining 23 hours. She also mentioned building robots tailored for specific industrial applications and healthcare. For individuals with physical disabilities,



Bahar Sulaiman, giving a presentation at the TedxNishtiman in Erbil. |

Photo: TedxNishtiman



## **I proposed to the KRG Ministry of Education that we insert a computer science module into the curriculum of all grades of the public schools**

she believes robots can serve as functional replacements.

"I possess the ability to build robots specializing in addressing health and medical problems. Such robots play a vital role in assisting individuals with physical disabilities, as I can create

robotic replacements for lost body parts," Bahar explained.

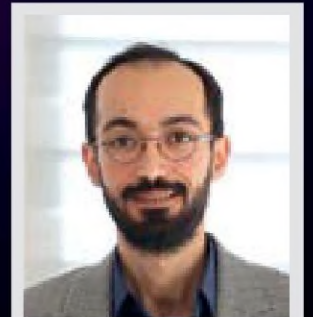
Looking ahead to the future, Bahar shared: "If I receive financial support, my first goal is to establish a restaurant where robots handle all aspects of food preparation and service, elim-

inating the need for human involvement. This idea stems from my childhood dream inspired by cartoons and robotic devices. Additionally, I aspire to build a special robot designed for household chores and cleaning, aiming to assist individuals, particularly women, in their domestic tasks."

# INNOVATION

## ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE MEETS KURDISTAN

### INTERACTIVE DOOH



Sardar Sattar

*Sardar Sattar is a translator and journalist based in the Kurdistan Region. He has an MA in English Studies from the University of Lodz, Poland. He has translated several books and political literature into Kurdish and English. He writes regularly for local and international newspapers and journals.*

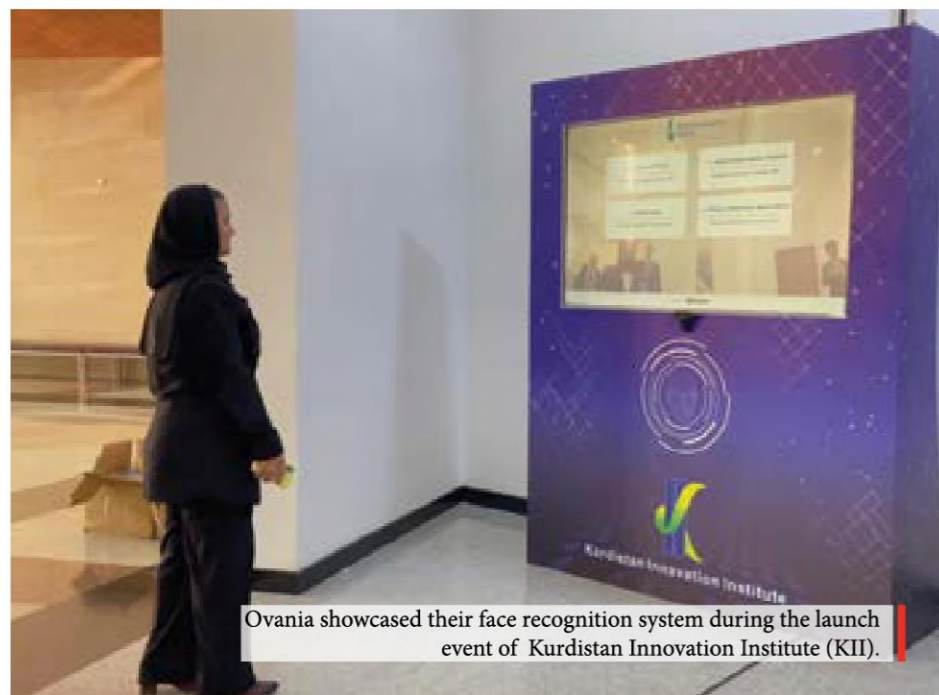
SkyMarketing

OVANYA

# HOW THREE KURDISH YOUTH ARE CHANGING THE GAME?

Three enterprising young minds, graduates of Salahaddin University's College of Software Engineering, decided one day to take matters into their own hands in a world where artificial intelligence (AI) is becoming ubiquitous.

Yehya Chali (23), Abdubasit Zahir (25), and Ebdulmomen Ahmed (23) were all determined to mark a name for themselves in the tech industry. Despite their impressive



talents, they were confronted with a daunting reality: no companies were willing to support their dream of developing cutting-edge AI programming.

Undaunted by this lack of interest, the trio formed their own tech hub firm, Ovanya.

Abdulbasit revealed the hidden meaning behind the company's name. According to him, ovanya is an old Kurdish word that translates to "gathering" and can be traced back to Zoroastrianism's Avesta scripture, one of the oldest religions in the world.

The word itself is etched into the curves of Mount Bestun, part of the Zagros Mountains range in the Kermanshah Province of western Iran. This area is primarily inhabited

by Kurds, lending it an air of ancient wisdom and history.

The trio set out to develop several groundbreaking programs, including an AI-powered Kurdish-language spell checker and a resourceful engine that automatically recommends similar web articles for Kurdish mainstream media.

Today, Ovanya is trying to transform the future of marketing in the Kurdistan region.

"The days of static images and repetitive videos that fail to capture the attention of modern consumers are long gone," Ebdulmomen said, adding that advertising agencies are now interested in interactive ads that not only captivate audiences but also provide valuable insights and data to businesses for targeted marketing campaigns.

Ovanya recently made headlines in the advertising industry by developing software and technology for Iraqi marketing firm Sky Marketing's outdoor billboards that collect data such as views, gender, age groups, and attention tracking. With built-in sensors that detect how many people are looking at the advertisement, for how long, and even their gender and approximate age, these billboards are revolutionizing the way that ads are displayed and measured in the Kurdistan region.

But Ovanya isn't stopping there. The company is now taking interactivity to the next level by developing a program that reacts to gender, body movements, hand gestures, facial expressions, clothing, age, general movement, and voice. As people pass by a billboard, the program detects their gender and displays advertisements for products that are specifically tailored to them. If a woman passes by the billboard, only women's products will be displayed, and vice versa for men.

Abdulbasit noted what Ovanya is doing is not new; it has been around for a while in Western and developed countries. But Ovanya has taken it to new heights by developing an algorithm specifically designed to identify Iraqi faces of both genders.

## Concerns

As AI continues to evolve, so do concerns about privacy.



However, Ovanya CEO Yehya Chali is adamant that his company is completely transparent when it comes to data gathering and protecting personal privacy and identity.

"We do not gather personal identities and images, only digits," Yehya stated, addressing privacy concerns. He also added that the company is always

ready to disclose its data whenever requested by the court.

Yehya further explained that it's better for a transparent local company like his to gather data than a foreign company. "If you bring a foreign company to do facial recognition and gather data, you don't know where all this data goes and how it is used," he

warned.

While some may worry about the impact of AI on human labor, Yehya doesn't think that's an issue in Iraq. "In Iraq, AI is used only for training and entertainment. It's not used to replace human labor, only for tasks that humans can't do," he reassured.

## CINEMA

## THE WIND WILL CARRY US A REALISTIC PORTRAYAL OF KURDISH VILLAGE LIFE IN IRANIAN CINEMA



Tala Rostami

*Tala Rostami is a researcher and has an MA in sociology.*

Throughout the history of Iranian cinema, Kurdish people have been portrayed alongside other ethnic groups, but unfortunately their depiction has usually favored the dominant culture in Iran as well as its prevailing ideology. This portrayal has often attached specific and stereotypical attributes to Kurds. For instance, in movies relating to the Iran-Iraq War, the "good" Kurd is the one who follows the revolutionary ide-

Darreh, a village located in Kermanshah, a place I am familiar with.

### An anthropologist's lens

One notable aspect of Kiarostami's movies, which pertains to *The Wind Will Carry Us*, was the lack of judgment in his observations of the villagers. The camera lens functioned as

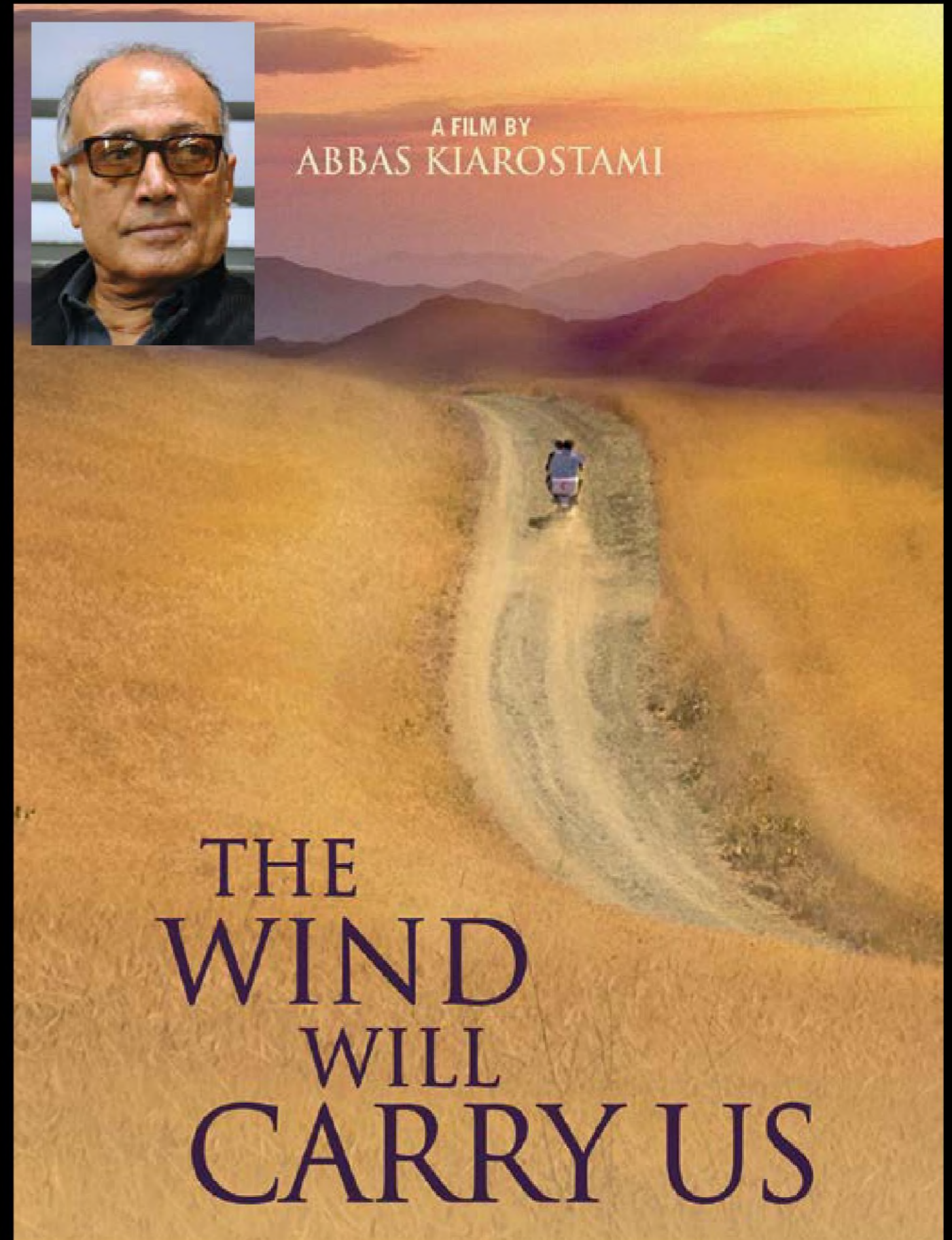


ology obediently, while others are depicted as evil and vicious.

However, there have been some attempts to portray Kurds more realistically, including Abbas Kiarostami's well-known and critically acclaimed *The Wind Will Carry Us* (1999), whose representation of the way of life in a Kurdish village speaks to me because of my personal experience growing up in a rural Kurdish community. The movie is set in Siah

my eyes, allowing me to observe the villagers without any sense of superiority or outside influence. It was as if I were an anthropologist studying the field. The portrayal of everything in the horizon helped create a sense of equality with my surroundings, and there was no sense of omniscience.

In addition to the main actor, the villagers were also depicted in their real locations and





habitats without any external intervention. For instance, villagers who spoke Persian made typical Kurdish language mistakes, such as saying "man inja payde shodam" instead of "man inja motavald shodam." They also used "to" (singular you) to refer to the main actor, which is common in Kurdish but not in Persian. This

The movie also realistically portrayed different groups in the Kurdish village. Children were shown studying, working, and playing, while the elderly were depicted socializing, resting, or helping with household tasks. However, men were not shown as often due to their work on the farm during the summer, which they did

promptly after pregnancy, while men had more limited roles and seemed marginalized.

The movie also highlighted the openness between men and women in Kurdish culture. Women freely talked to the male protagonist, worked under his observation, challenged him, and



attention to detail showed how much care was taken in accurately representing Kurdish village life and its people.

alongside their wives and children. In contrast, women were shown performing various tasks and appeared to be the central figures. They had multiple roles and started working

refused to meet all his demands. This was especially evident in the character of the Ghavachi woman, who asked probing questions about gender roles. Despite the patriarchal nature of the

culture, the movie showed women as strong, independent figures who were not afraid to assert themselves.

The interdependence among individuals and their approach towards caring for the sick was also considered. In this region where the movie was made, it was customary for the extended family and neighbors to take responsibility for the ill, and they communicated with one another without hesitation through windows, alleys, rooftops, and yards. The region's landscape and architecture provided ample public space, making it effortless and convenient for people to maintain these connections, as demonstrated by their actions.

The villagers' curiosity towards the stranger was similar as I remembered

it from my childhood. They would peek at him from behind their windows, roofs, or alleys. However, I was slightly disappointed that music, an integral part of Kurdish culture, was only heard from the Ghahvakhneh's cassette player. The cassette player had great choices of songs by Hassan Zirak and Abas Kamandi, as well as the worker at the cemetery singing a song by Homar Dezaei. In terms of clothing, the movie accurately depicted the traditional clothing of the Kurdish region, with women covering their bodies.

The movie also portrayed the traditional hospitality of Kurdish people. The protagonist was invited to dine with the villagers, who served him a traditional Kurdish meal, including bread, cheese, and tea. The way the food was served and the atmosphere that it created gave a sense of the warmth and closeness of Kurdish

“

## The movie also highlighted the openness between men and women in Kurdish culture

people.

### An observer, not an intruder

Overall, *The Wind Will Carry Us* provided a realistic representation of Kurdish village life, with careful attention to cultural nuances and details. It avoided stereotypes and judgments and allowed viewers to observe

may have come from a disillusioned local or a teacher trying to show off, rather than from a fair and objective perspective. While the financial aspect was not the main point of the ritual, the way it was presented in the dialogue was crucial, and the movie was not intended to be judgmental about the ritual.

Another aspect that appeared both surprising and potentially judgmental was the explicit reference to sex, particularly from the perspective of the old man who referred to it as "man's great honor." The main actor also mentioned it as "man's job in the winter," which could be interpreted as another reference to sexual activity.

The main character in the film was an observer rather than an intruder, and

the villagers went about their daily lives without paying him much attention. Overall, the main actor was an observer, rather than an intruder, and was not given undue attention by the villagers, who went about living their lives as usual.

The use of language was skillfully employed to



and experience the culture through the camera's lens. As a Kurdish person who grew up in a rural area, I found the movie to be a genuine reflection of my cultural background.

The movie does contain a few judgmental scenes, specifically regarding the Chamr ritual. The portrayal of the ritual as being solely based on economic considerations was oversimplified by the teacher, rather than to the main actor who did not comment on it. This raises the question of whether this judgment was acceptable, as it

facilitate communication, with each person understanding based on their knowledge of Persian or Kurdish. If we see the movie as a descriptive documentary, it succeeds in showing the lives of the villagers without imposing a particular viewpoint. However, if viewed through other lenses, it may fail to fully capture why they live in poor conditions. Nonetheless, there remains a contradiction in this last statement, as it is judgmental from the observant point of view about what is better or worse.

## LITERATURE

Translated by Nahro Zagros



Abdulrehman Belaf

Abdulrehman Belaf is widely recognized as a master of modern lyrical artistry and has an extensive collection of over 1,500 poems to his credit. Many of his poems have been set to music and gained great acclaim.

Paintings by Hama Hashim

## A Glance

Your domain is laughter's reign,  
While my heart spills tears and pain.  
Who can discern these two seasons:  
Your springtime's hope, my summer's reasons?

## یهک نیگا

پێکه نین ئەفسوونی تۆیە  
گریانیشت هەلمی دلی من  
کئی ئەم دوو وەرزه دەناسی  
بەهاری تۆ  
هاوینی من



Paintings by Hama Hashim



## پرد

له نیوان من و تۆدا  
پردیك ههیه  
بۆ ژیان و خوڤه ویستی  
بۆ مهرگ و زیندوو بوونهوه  
بناریك ههیه له خهم و  
گری چاوی  
تهوره كانی سهرملی دار  
بهلام ناسمانیكیش ههیه  
پر پر له رووناکی هیوا

## Bridge

A bridge spans the distance between us two,  
A passageway for love and life anew.  
Through sorrows' veil and death's sting so dire,  
Hope shines bright, like stars that never tire.  
And though the sickles of time may take their toll,  
The sky above holds promise for the light and soul.

## SPORT

## THE STORY OF DALKURD FF AN INTERVIEW WITH FOUNDER RAMAZAN KIZIL



Ali Fikri Işık

Ali Fikri Işık is an experienced journalist and author who has written for different prominent newspapers, magazines, and news websites since 1985. He is the author of the book entitled "Amedspor: Chaos and Resistance".



### Ramazan Kızıl

was born in 1958 in the village of Girêmêra in the Nusaybin district of Mardin, Turkey. He served as the headman (mukhtar) of the same village for two terms, which is where his nickname "Mukhtar" comes from. In the early 1990s, he was forced to immigrate to Sweden for political reasons. He took an active role in Kurdish politics in Sweden for a long time. In 2004, he and his friends founded DalKurd FF in the Börlänge locality of the Dalarna region. His team completed the first five stages of the Swedish league as champions every season and was promoted to the Ettan (third division) in 2010 and then to the Superettan (second division) in 2014. In the 2016-2017 season, DalKurd played its way up to the Allsvenskan (first division) but was relegated that season. DalKurd currently continues to compete in the Ettan.



Ramazan Kızıl, Co-founder of DalKurd FF

DalKurd FF, commonly known as DalKurd, is a Swedish football club based in Uppsala. The club plays in the Ettan Norra, the third division of Swedish professional football. It was founded on September 26, 2004, by members of the Kurdish diaspora in Borlänge, Dalarna.

On November 24, 2017, DalKurd moved their senior team operations to Uppsala, some 140 kilometers southeast of Borlänge. DalKurd FF is affil-

iated with Upplands Fotbollförbund (Uppland Football Association).

The club started in 2004 as a social project that would offer activities for the youth of Borlänge. IK Brage helped finance the project. In the club's first season, the average age of the players was 17 years. At its founding, the club's chairman Ramazan Kızıl had high expectations for the players and an ultimate goal of taking the club to the professional levels of the Swedish league. DalKurd won

every division that they participated in from their inaugural season in 2005 to 2009. Owing to this success, the club received considerable media attention both in Sweden and abroad.

Ramazan Kızıl is the most iconic character of Kurdish football. In the purest and most precise sense of the word, Kızıl gave his character to DalKurd football club, which he founded and manages. He achieved all this in a country where the language, culture and traditions were



foreign to him. But there was no way that his story could have been formed any other way: he was a Kurd in Sweden, and DalKurd's fate depended on his character.

**Kurdistan Chronicle**

**Q:** I want to start with a classic question in reverse. Anybody would want to know "how" you did it. And you are not someone who keeps success a secret. Based on your experience, what did you find most difficult while trying to achieve this success?

**A:** We knew what we didn't know. This statement may be too Socratic, but when we were structuring DalKurd, that was exactly our situation. We didn't know, and we started out by making a decision that affirmed our state of not knowing. The first sentence that we wrote in the club's decision book was: "We, the DalKurd board of directors, do not know football." As the entire board of directors, without exception, we considered it our first duty and responsibility to learn and understand this game.

**Kurdistan Chronicle**

**Q:** This was quite exceptional, as the most prominent feature of the Kurdish national character is our ability to normalize even the things we don't know by saying "I know". You went beyond this character and even documented that your ignorance, right?

**A:** Right. We did what was necessary in this state of not knowing. For two years we participated in the training activities of the Swedish Football Association and addressed our need to know. We had a purpose and a belief. Our purpose was to protect Kurdish youth in Sweden from joining the criminal wave – and football offered an excellent solution. Our belief was that the confidence that Kurdish youth would acquire would help them achieve great things later, if given the opportunity.

**Kurdistan Chronicle**

**Q:** What do you think was the guarantee of success for the first six seasons?

**A:** Actually, this question has a very simple answer. We had to tire out

activities. Accompanied by a simple game plan, this situation naturally led to six years of uninterrupted success.

**Kurdistan Chronicle**

**Q:** If my memory serves me correctly, you remained stuck in Ettan (third division) for quite a while? Would you

success shook our balance a little. We had become a well-known club in the Swedish public. We were involved in social responsibility projects and new offers were coming in all the time. We started to appear in the Swedish press frequently. Of course, this situation was very interesting, and this interest, I must admit, did distract us. Everyone wanted a piece of this suc-

**Kurdistan Chronicle**

**Q:** Do you have any regrets?

**A:** I wish I hadn't accepted his request to move to Uppsala. After we moved, we had a disagreement and decided to go our separate ways. After this sepa-



these young people during the day to keep them away from the nightlife, so that when the training was over, none of them would want to go out. This understanding, which has no scientific value in terms of training techniques, produced results. The team was in seriously good shape while the players refrained from their nightlife

**like to say something about the reasons for this?**

**A:** We became popular after being champions for six seasons in a row. We had solved a series of problems, made a series of unknowns known, were much more experienced, and were working much harder. But the

cess. Of course, the success belonged to all of us, and we showed flexibility to make sure that everyone enjoyed feeling proud of it, but after a while, the distraction caused some problems. Nevertheless, we, as a club, were able to bounce back and make it to Superettan (second division) only a few years later.

ration, it became clearer what we had lost. The problems that DalKurd is experiencing today are mainly those still affected by the consequences of this story, and things are unfortunately getting worse.

Thank you.

**Ramazan Kizil DALKURD FF**



Sabr Dri

## Kurdistan's Brown Bear

**W**ildlife refers to the non-domesticated and uncultivated animals and plants inhabiting natural environments. The wildlife of Kurdistan is exceptionally diverse and unique, characterized by a wide range of species exclusive to the mountainous ecosystem of the region. These creatures are preserved with the utmost care

through strict laws, regulations, and culture.

Among the notable inhabitants of the Kurdistan wilderness is the "brown bear," a variety that appears lighter in color compared to other types of brown bears found elsewhere. Its hue is a mixture of brown and gray with a dark stripe running down its back and legs. The brown bears living in Kurdis-

tan have one especially unique trait: white claws.

The region's male brown bear is between 100 to 140 cm in height and can weigh nearly 250 kg. Notably, the Syrian brown bear is commonly associated with this type of bear but is predominantly in the Kurdish areas extending along the Zagros Mountain range in Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Turkey.

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