

A Picture of
The Future Iraq



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Translated by
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Preface

This little book contains a small number of the weekly columns I wrote for the Kurdistan News Agency (AKnews) between 2010-2012. AKnews has gone out of business and I have stopped analyzing the political developments of this country. With my free time I want to dedicate myself to writing some books on Kurdish language and culture.

These articles were translated by Raber Y. Aziz, the Managing Editor of AKnews at the time who, despite his workload, assumed the responsibility of translating them for the English branch of the agency.

What encouraged me to collect and publish these articles was the amount of feedback I received from my friends telling me that my opinions of 2-3 years ago about the current developments in Iraq have turned out to be very realistic. Of course I don't like it that my predictions have come true as most of them were negative ones. I wish my predictions never came true and that the political leaders never killed the ambitions of this nation.

Everybody asks why the Middle East is so devastated, why is it swirling with the whirlwind of meaningless struggles? Everyone is searching for the answer to this question, which I personally put this way:

If you take a close look at the history of the modern world, which is the West, you will see that it was the intellectuals, the thinkers, and the philosophers who built the new civilization. They set limits for their political leaders, allowing their societies to make progress, prosper and become what it is today. In our part of the world the role of the intellectuals, thinkers, and philosophers is absent.

It is the politicians who play one of two major roles, and who think with the mindset of erasing the other. And it is the clerics who play the second major role and who think with an even worse mindset than the politicians wanting to drown the world in bloodshed. Therefore, the future image of this region is blurry to people. To me, it is foggy and sad.

An agreement is beyond the realm of possibility in Iraq

Iraq's former Prime Minister Ayad Allawi is a politically complex person. He is a Shia, but is not pro-Iran; a Shia who leads the largest Sunni-dominated bloc, al-Iraqiya. To add to the complexity, he is a former Baathist. There are fears that if Allawi comes to power, he will become a bridge for the return of the ousted Baath Party. And the return of the Baath Party means the return to power of Sunnis, who unilaterally ruled Iraq for more than 80 years.

Iraq's Shias who form the majority of the country – around 60 percent – deem it their own right to rule the country hereafter. The outgoing prime minister, Nouri al-Maliki, the strongest Shia candidate in the country, is unwilling to concede and see Allawi and his al-Iraqiya form the government even though the Constitution gives them the right to do so.

Hence, five and a half months after the parliamentary elections, Iraqis' concerns continue to grow. They wonder whether their country is in labor of giving birth to a new era of democracy as they dreamed of; or in labor of delivering a new dictator, as the circumstances seem to point out. The disagreement among the leaders and their affiliation to external forces make one lean towards the second possibility.

Stating that his bid for prime minister's office was not supported by the Americans, Allawi said earlier this week that the U.S. wants to strike a deal with Iran regarding Iraq's new government. In any such "deal", the Iranians will no doubt support the Shia forces to take power in Iraq in return for contributing to Iraq's safety and security as U.S. troops are scheduled to pull out of the country by the end of 2011. A U.S.-Iran deal on Iraq's new government will indicate that democracy – or consensual democracy- can not take shape in Iraq and Iraqi leaders can not even agree on the lowest common denominators. The U.S. top commander in Iraq, Gen. Raymond Odierno, said in an interview with the New York Times that it will take a long time before Iraq can become a democratic.

The Kurdish involvement in Iraq's political games since the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003 has been guided more by emotions than thoughtful planning. After the war, the Kurds have been closer to Shias than Sunnis. But ironically, Shia leaders – who until Saddam's fall were side by side with the Kurds in prisons, under oppression and resistance – chose to forget about the Kurds in the first moments of post-Saddam Iraq.

Both Maliki and his predecessor, Ibrahim al-Jaafari, were no different in their positions toward Kurdish demands than the Sunni leaders. Article 140 of the Iraqi Constitution - that sets a plan to resolve territorial disputes between the Kurds and Arabs – has not been implemented in the past several years. Other sources of dispute between Baghdad and Erbil, such as the oil contracts, arms and the number of Peshmarga

forces have also remained unresolved. This, undoubtedly, is a result of emotion-dominated policies and the lack of thoughtful planned policies on the part of the Kurds.

On the one hand, the Kurds supported the "De-Baathification Policy" which was mostly an Iranian plan to weaken the Sunni Arabs in Iraq. While on the other hand, the Kurds helped some of the murderers in Saddam Hussein's regime – most of them were involved in atrocities against the Kurds – to flee the country and escape justice. Some of these individuals were Sunni Arabs, for instance Maj. Gen. Wafiq al-Samarrayi who was chief of Iraqi military intelligence during the genocidal Anfal operations against Kurds in 1988. Another case is the secret release of Tariq Ramadan al-Azzawi – a former pilot guilty of involvement in the chemical bombardment of Halabja – from a jail in Sulaimaniya. The opposite of this game would have been quite right for the Kurds to play. The Kurds, who are Sunni Muslims, should not have supported the weakening of the Iraqi Sunni Arabs in the interest of Iran no matter what the justifications or excuses were. And they should not have overlooked the criminals, in particular those involved in the Anfal and Halabja cases. This was a matter of morality for the (Kurdish) freedom fighters of yesterday that had encouraged a defenseless nation to confront an iron-fisted regime.

If Shiite parties unilaterally control power in Iraq, the Kurdish issue will no doubt become complicated compared to Saddam's era for some obvious reasons. First, Shias make up the majority of Iraq, which is three times the size of the Sunni Arabs who formerly ruled Iraq. Second, Shiites have

political and sectarian backup from a country like Iran which has the longest border with Iraq and the Kurdistan Region.

The policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran towards the Kurdistan Region are merciless. Iran's artillery continuously shells Iraqi Kurdish villages in the border areas. Iranians have been suspected of involvement in some security incidents in Kurdistan, including a recent fire in Hotel Soma in Sulaimaniya where 14 out of the 29 victims were foreign experts. Despite denial from local authorities, Iran is suspected to have been behind the incident.

I personally believe Kurdish authorities should not have shown any hesitation in forging an alliance with the al-Iraqiya bloc. It is true that there are some chauvinist figures in the bloc, in particular the Hadba group from Mosul, but progress on the disputed areas can be better achieved in a state of "alliance" than "hostility". In a country that will probably be ruled by Shias, the Kurds can not afford to be at odds with the Sunni Arabs. Most of the problems of the Kurds in Iraq are with Sunni Arabs who share a common border.

The sooner the Kurds enter an alliance with Sunni Arabs the better. This is because once a strong Iranian-backed Shia government comes to power, Kurds and Sunni Arabs, whether they like it or not, will be in the same boat. Americans can not be expected to defend democracy in Iraq. It is now obvious that the major priority of the U.S. government is not democracy but security "in agreement with the Islamic Republic of Iran". A kind of security which spares the blood of

American soldiers in a country where an agreement among
its leaders is beyond the realm of possibility.

Thursday, August 26th 2010

**Building a nation:
Nechirvan Barzani the statesman**

My fellow Kurds do not accept it when I say Kurds have no history. And my foreign friends look at me with astonishment when I say so! But I have proof for this view of mine. Kurds do not have history, because history means civilization and civilization is created by a state. The Kurds have not had a state for a very long time. The latest Kurdish state was established in 700 B.C. and only lasted for a century and a half. We know it was called Mediya but there is no remnant of that state on Kurdistan's land. We honor the Mediya state every year on March 21 by making fire.

Of course a lot of history has taken place on Kurdistan's land, but it has been the history of its occupiers not its own inhabitants. An occupying force not only attempts to erase your history but also tries to change the course of your history. For example, during the times of resistance, the occupying force makes you blow up the bridges on the rivers of your country. All the Kurdish uprisings in the 20th century started by attacking the police and army stations because these forces have been instruments of oppression against Kurds and not forces that ensured a secure and civic life.

The renowned Kurdish intellectual, Massoud Mohammed

said in 2000 that we Kurds have been living outside of history for the past 2700 years. Mohammed was making these remarks during a meeting with me and several other friends where we discussed the Kurdish self-rule experience that started in 1991. The Kurdish self-rule became a recognized reality after the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime at the hand of the U.S. troops. Iraqi Arab leaders reluctantly accepted the Kurdish self-rule and it was enshrined in the country's Constitution. Ever since that moment the Kurds have become part of history again. Instead of attacking police stations, they started building them, instead of destroying bridges, they started building them. And last but not least, instead of developing a feeling of alienation toward the neighboring peoples, the Kurds started establishing relations and friendship with them.

During the 18 years of Kurdish self-rule in Iraq, Nechirvan Barzani has served as its prime minister for 13 years. This relatively long period is enough for enabling one to assess his personality and performance. Certainly there have been mistakes and shortcomings in the ministries of his cabinets. While he was in office, I criticized him a lot, even to the degree of pissing him off sometimes. But now, ten months after he left office, it is time to make a general assessment of his track record and how his actions affected the Kurdish society.

A thorough examination of the 18 years of Kurdish autonomy demonstrates Nechirvan Barzani has been the best among Kurdish leaders. He has been the one who has step by step moved the Kurds toward the realization of their

long-standing dreams. The tensions between the two major ruling parties - the Kurdistan Democratic Party and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan - decreased to their lowest level during his time in office. The parties that were normally sidelined flourished. Freedoms of expression and press made significant strides. The Turkoman and Christian minorities were respected. Barzani listened to young people and intellectuals and met many of their demands regardless of their ideological backgrounds. Since the very beginning of his time in office, Nechirvan Barzani defended women and was behind many laws to protect their rights in matters like honor-killing and polygamy. In short, respecting the will of humans was the backbone of his government's agenda. To many people, Barzani is the head of the democracy movement in Kurdistan. Certainly in this era, creating a nation with a strong will and morale is the best basis for establishing a state protected from potential occupiers.

Prior to 2003, the Kurdistan Region of Iraq had limited revenues mostly from customs tariffs. Despite that the government managed to carry out projects that made people gain faith in the ability of the government and their future especially after the devastating Kurdish civil war from 1994 to 1998. Following the collapse of Saddam's regime, Kurdistan witnessed a major boom in all areas. For instance, thanks to the projects built under Barzani's watch, now electric power is available to a very good extent and is increasing. In a recent interview with the local press, Barzani said, "We could provide the fuel for operating power plants

in Kurdistan." This is the kind of strategic thinking that the Kurds have so often lacked.

Erbil has suffered from water shortage for ages. An Assyrian king, named Sanhareeb (682-704 B.C.) tried to bring water to Erbil by digging a canal from Bastora area, 10 km north of Erbil. But he died before he could finish the project. Erbil has suffered from water shortage ever since. Resolving water shortage in Erbil had taken on mythological proportions. During Barzani's premiership, Kurdistan's infrastructure was rebuilt at a rapid pace as roads, schools, hospitals and universities were constructed. The fast pace of reconstruction was shocking to all. Kurdistan has been experiencing a reconstruction boom with the private sector getting active indicating the confidence of local investors in Kurdistan's future. All this happened thanks to the internal peace among the Kurds and the style of running the government. And the statesman behind all this was Nechirvan Barzani for whom the Kurds have waited so long to enter the history.

Barzani also embarked on a flexible and transparent diplomacy with the neighboring countries to alleviate their fears about the "nightmare" of a Kurdish state. As we have seen, under this new diplomacy, the neighboring countries, in particular Turkey, have gradually become more receptive of the idea of a Kurdish state and are establishing warm ties with Kurdistan. Among Barzani's other achievements are making Kurdistan an active part of the world by building airports and putting Kurdistan on the world energy map

through signing oil and gas contracts with foreign firms which has taken the Kurds steps closer to their long-time dream. It is no secret that a people with a strong political will and economic foundation cannot be stopped in its march toward independence. Quite to the contrary, it will be welcomed to the community of nations even by those who opposed it until yesterday.

When Barzani left office, many citizens in Krudistan were worried. They were wondering if the projects he initiated will continue with the same rigor and pace after him. Are Kurds on the right path of history or will they be sidetracked again? Martin van Brunessen is a Dutch expert on the Kurds. In a speech on the anniversary of the birth of the legendary Kurdish leader, Mustafa Barzani, Brunessen says during Barzani's armed struggle from 1943 to 1979, Kurds were transformed from a bunch of tribes to a nation but turned into a group of tribes again after Mustafa Barzani's death.

The danger this time is the efforts under Nechirvan Barzani to transform Kurds into a nation that will develop allegiance to the government and not tribal parties might be unraveled again. This danger of moving backward again is a real fear that many citizens whisper about but one can hear it clearly.

Wednesday, September 1st 2010

A country forever in the Ogre's palm

Iraq has always been, and will always be, a country in the palm of the ogre. The Iraqis have the habit of fighting for the "others". There has never been a leader in Iraq who has thought of his country and his fellow citizens. Their dreams always go beyond the borders of their country but they always fall short of meeting what should have been. The former Iraqi president Saddam Hussein declared a devastating war against Iran in the fall of 1980. On the surface, the war was triggered by territorial disputes; however, it was a war of the Sunni Arab states which Hussein waged on their behalf against Shia Muslims who had just acceded to power one and a half years earlier when the Islamic revolution broke out in Iran in 1979. To Iraqis, the eight-year war was the most meaningless war in the world's history. Now that 30 years has passed since the war, Iraqi Shia leaders want to repeat history but "in reverse".

The U.S. forces withdrawal from Iraq will leave the door open for several crazy assumptions. The most likely is a civil war between the Sunnis and Shias, which as I said is a proxy war for the others. The regional and internal preconditions are there for such a war, and the United States has cleared the arena. Often, when this possibility circulates, gullible Kurds think the break-out of civil war between Ira-

qis will lead to a divided Iraq. They think the country will break into three parts; Shia, Sunni and Kurdish. But, as the Kurdish saying goes "Don't eat it, it is bitter" meaning "this is wishful thinking". If there were a civil war between Iraqis, the Kurds could not be part of it. In the two cities of Kirkuk and Mosul which are disputed by Kurdistan and Baghdad, Kurds can not take one single step forward, in Kirkuk for fear of Turkish intervention and in Mosul for fear of intervention by the Arab states. It is subject to mockery that these two Iraqi cities seem to be more the share of the regional countries than the Iraqis. These two cities are red lines, at least for us Kurds. Therefore the civil war in Iraq will not follow the scenario that the credulous imagine. This civil war will be the war of Iran's supporters and its foes. As we see, in Iraq not only Shia Arab leaders are loyal to Iran but also half of the Kurdish forces – though Sunnis – support Iran whether or not they be Islamic forces.

With the approach of the war, the heralds of which are beginning to appear, Iran's friends are pulling themselves together to root out their disputes. Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's bloc, and Ammar al-hakim's bloc, who were days ago at odds, are now tackling the final deal to form the new government which will eliminate all hope of the Sunni Arabs of returning to power – or at least keeping balance with the Shias – altogether. In the Kurdistan Region, the two wings of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), the PUK and Gorran (which is a splinter of the PUK) and which are known by the public as Iran's friends displaying very public relations with the Islamic Republic, are beginning to ap-

proach each other and they will probably reconcile.

These days, a war needs justification so that the war wager will be able to defend it later. The Iraqi Shia leaders see their being a majority, and their majority of seats in parliament, as sound justification to dominate power over the Sunnis, or their setback in any significant political decision about the present and future of Iraq. This in turn will invite the Sunnis to revolt and resort to violence. On August 26, Sunni insurgents committed a bloodbath in 12 major cities across Iraq in one day. On that day, 15 bombings were carried out which claimed the lives of more than 250 people.

The rapprochement between the two wings of the PUK which will undoubtedly, before anything else, rekindle their conflict with the old foe, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Barzani family, is what Iran wanted from the heavens. The union of the PUK and Gorran will push them towards a union in all aspects, and before anything else, uniting their power in parliament. They will then have 54 seats in contrast to the 29 of the KDP. Meanwhile, the Islamic parties will bring spice to the situation because their seats, as a matter of course, belong to the current that is loyal to Iran. These views expressed here are my own and only I am responsible for them. Please, I ask that nobody put pressure on any actor, and let them be sure that the actor to whom they point the finger will be unhappy rather than happy about these views.

The KDP has always been caught unawares of and later big allegations are brought against them. For instance, in

1996 (the civil war in Kurdistan) the PUK brought Iranian forces to deal a blow on the KDP in an attempt to resolve the conflict. And the KDP in response received support from Iraq. Basically, there is no difference between the Iranian army and Iraq's army who helped the two parties of the conflict. Iraq's army was an unforgotten iron-fisted blood-thirsty army for Iraqi Kurds, and the Iranian army on July 28, 1996 made headway with tanks and artillery to the Koya district (where a community of Iranian Kurds settled) to strike the Kurds of Iran. From a logical and legal point of view, "reaction" does not hold as much responsibility as "action", even if the reaction is more violent than the action, however, as we all witnessed, this did not work for the incidents of that year. The actor got away with that and the reactor is still stained with "August 31".

Therefore, we have to keep in mind that history is not necessarily what has happened, but is often what is told and re-told. Upon the union of the two wings of the PUK, the KDP will, once more, face another crisis like that of 1996; either accept a defeat which will cost it dearly and which is a price it has to pay without any reason, or reject defeat, which will again become a stain for the KDP in history. And then we will see how blusterers talk about the majority in the parliament and become the father and defender of democracy. I will not talk about the outcome and effects of these pessimistic scenarios any more, but my point is Kurds will not be part of the civil war in Iraq. Kurds will not be a party against the Arabs, they have their own proxy fights, and they will have to fight for the others in a bigger plan, but as I said, for a purpose smaller than it should have been.

This view of mine about another coup by the PUK against the KDP is not the product of pure imagination. There are many reasons to consider, for instance: the PUK is a friend of Iran but the KDP is not. And in the case of Iran, it is obvious what a friend or a non-friend is. Secondly, there is a giant media outlet which, under the cover of the private sector media and the freedom of journalism, publicly works to portray the KDP as a nightmare-monger to the people of Kurdistan and incites the public everyday to another round of conflict and civil war.

This media outlet is ready, from just a whistle from Iran, to make new allegations against the KDP. The clearest evidence of all is the publishing of many books in Iran, like the "memoirs of Jalal Talabani" which aims at undermining and insulting the history of the KDP and making it an easy mark for this civil war which is on the way. The book, though it upset the KDP, had but a temporary effect on the KDP and Talabani made the worries of the KDP vanish with a few sweet words.

The journalist's job is to indicate the dangers not to find solutions for them as well, as is often wanted from him. In this case, however, if one wants a solution from me, I will say that Iraqi citizens, Shias, Sunnis, Kurds, Turkmen, and Christians should look at each other as citizens and not be part of the agendas of the leaders whose dreams are not those of the Iraqis. The Iraqis' dream is the reconstruction of an Iraq that belongs equally to everyone.

Tuesday, September 7th 2010

The Iraqi Sunni, a losing player

The Sunni Arab leaders of Iraq are the worst players on the country's field. Ever since the day the democracy game began in this country under the supervision of the Americans, the Sunni Arab leaders, in comparison to their Kurdish and Shia counterparts, have been, and are still, unqualified players. There is no question that when a bad player plays he will harm himself more than his opponent. The bad playing of these Sunni leaders is grounded in the fact that they do not want to accept the change that occurred in Iraq on April 9, 2003. They don't want to admit that now there are second, third, and fourth partners in Iraq who together form more than 80 percent of the country's general population.

But this is only half of the error, the other half of the error resides in the political tools and means available to them; they are either Baathists or al-Qaeda, both of which have a despicable and cursed history besides their being outlawed in this country. This disqualification of Sunni leaders over the past seven years has as much harmed their credibility as the 35 years of Baath party rule did to them, both among Iraqi Kurds and Shias and among other countries in the region.

It is true that we have to differentiate between the Baath Party and the Baath regime which ruled Iraq between 1968 and 2003. The leaders of this regime were brought to justice

for the unspeakable crimes they committed against the people of Iraq and received their punishments. The Baath party however was something else. The Baath Party, in terms of ideology, had the largest platform for political and social reform which it could not implement due to the accession of hardline nationalists to its leadership and ultimately the founders of the party were also victimized by the nationalist leaders. But historical assessment is based on actions rather than ideologies, on history rather than what is in the pamphlets. The Baath party, as an ideology, whatever it had been, is today a nightmare in the memories of Iraqis; therefore, those who take pride in their associations with the Baath or the president of the former regime Saddam Hussein only harm themselves.

Nonetheless, there is worse than the Baath; the terrorist organization al-Qaeda. Since the fall of the Baath regime, al-Qaeda has been actively involved in terrorist acts in Iraq. The Iraqi government and the Kurdistan Regional Government KRG have spent substantial funds and huge human resources to confront the group and are working on rooting it out. But in the region called the "Sunni triangle", al-Qaeda can be said to be semi-free and totally active. Al-Qaeda uses the Sunni triangle as a launch pad to attack the other areas in Iraq. Though terrorist acts are carried out in the Sunni areas as well, the nature of its activities is different from that of the other areas. In the Sunni areas, the attacks are aimed at government institutions, while in the Shia and Kurdish areas they are aimed at everything.

Certainly, no one can deny the links between the Sunni

leaders and the al-Qaeda. We can see whenever there is tension between those leaders and the federal government of Iraq in Baghdad; al-Qaeda performs a show across the country with its merciless terrorist acts and threatens to do more. To put it in a nut shell, al-Qaeda is active not only as a terrorist organization in Iraq, but has become part of the political process through its terrorist acts in accordance with the needs of the Sunni leaders.

Contrary to the lack of skill of the Sunni players in Iraq in this new era, which despite its shortcomings, is still the era of democracy; we can see that Shias and Kurds play well. The goals of the Shias and Kurds are more clear and their tools more contemporary in the conflict. They have marked achievements and constantly make progress. Though the disqualification of their opponents substantially harms them, in the long run they are the winners.

In short, the Sunni leaders, by not understanding the current game in the country, not only harm Sunni involvement in governing the country, but also leave the door wide open for the threat coming from the east "Iran" which is becoming a more and more prominent issue and an imposition. In my personal view, aligning with a Baath Party that has fallen and will never return, or siding with a vicious terrorist organization which is fought all over the world can only result in loss and impotency, besides the historical responsibility they will have to bear because this will only give Iran further excuses to intervene in Iraqi affairs. Iran will do anything to prevent the Baath from coming back to power, and the Sunni Arab leaders all too easily provide them with this excuse.

Thursday, September 9th 2010

Kirkuk for Kurdistan - Part I

Kirkuk cannot be incorporated into the Kurdistan Region through fighting or violence. If it could, the largest Kurdish armed movement in 1961 through to 1975 led by the legendary leader Mustafa Barzani would have resolved the issue in favor of the Kurds. Kirkuk, and some other districts and towns like Khanaqin and Shingar, have kept the Kurds and Arabs in Iraq deadlocked for the past 50 years. Neither Kurds nor their opponents have been willing to give them up.

Fortunately, the Kurdish leadership is now convinced that war is not decisive in any political conflict in Iraq. The Kurds are now fully convinced that the only way is through dialogue and mutual understanding. The Kurdish leadership was intelligent enough during Operation Iraqi Freedom to liberate Iraq from the grip of Saddam Hussein by the U.S. and coalition forces in 2003 not to send their Peshmarga forces into Kirkuk lest it set off bloody clashes between the Kurds and the Arabs or between Kurds and Turkmen. This paved the way for the abstinence of the Kurds from the local clashes that came later between the different Iraqi groups which ended in a bloodbath. The Kurds announced that they reasoned with a different mentality in the new era, and behaved differently too.

In my view, it will not be long before the Kurds will reach a final and different understanding regarding their unconditional reliance on "talks, or efforts to make the other understand". This solution alone is impossible for the Kurds in their quest without help and the use of other means. As we all see, the new Iraqi government in which the Kurds have been heavily involved has failed to take one step forward in the the implementation of article 140 of the Iraqi Constitution which outlines a three-stage process to resolve the disputes over areas contested by the Kurdistan Regional Government and the central government in Baghdad. It should be kept in mind that even democracy is essentially a form of combat; the only difference is that the guns in this battle are silent. As a general rule, if a party is not ready to yield to your demands through fighting, then there is no doubt that it will not do so by peaceful means either. This is the danger I am addressing in this essay.

For instance: in one of the largest and most expansive battles in March 1974 through to March 1975, the Kurds managed to land heavy blows on the Iraqi army, and after the fight was finally over in favor of Iraq, Saddam Hussein admitted in a televised statement that the ability and energy of the army in the face of the Kurdish rebellion was on the verge of collapse. It was this inability of the Iraqi army that caused Iraq to give up land and water to its historical enemy, Iran, in return for cooperation to succumb the Kurdish rebellion in Iraq, and they succeeded. After nearly 15 years, Saddam Hussein said during talks with the Kurdish leaders in the early 1990s that the Iraqi government was ready to yield to the Kurdish demands after the fighting resumed in

1974. In other words "Iraq would give Kirkuk to the Kurds", if it were not for the Arab countries' pressure. The unveiling of this secret means that the Iraqi government, at that time, was ready to "return Kirkuk to Kurdistan". In a similar scenario, the current Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki blamed the procrastination in the implementation of article 140 on Iraq's three-person presidency. In essence it is the same old story.

Therefore, I believe the approach currently adopted by the Kurds to resolve the conflict through negotiations and making the other understand, or in other words holding a referendum and conducting a national census - which are the ultimate ways of democracy, are deficient solutions. Of course, all of these are necessary steps towards returning Kirkuk and other areas to Kurdistan. It is also true that Kirkuk is part of – and will never be disconnected from – Kurdistan, but there is no alternative to democracy and the Kurds can never back down from it. The accumulation of these factors alone however is not an adequate force to restore Kirkuk which will be more complicated the longer it is delayed and the Kurds will be more deeply entrenched. Logically speaking, even if all other factors are in favor of those wronged, the passage of time is not.

The Kurds in this historical bet have to deepen a developing economy and consolidate the democratic life in the Kurdish community of Kurdistan alongside the political struggle in Baghdad. A developed Kurdistan will dramatically weigh down the scale of conflicts in favor of the Kurds in these disputed areas. Kirkuk is only 85km from Er-

bil, the capital of the Kurdistan Region, but is 300km away from Baghdad. A prosperous Erbil with an economic infrastructure, democratic life, independent media, rights of the minorities and religious tolerance, will silently attract Kirkuk into its region.

The Kurds have been working, since the fall of Saddam in 2003, to reconstruct their region. The Kurdish provinces are striding towards high standards of living, prosperity, security, comfort and harmony day after day. There is no comparison between Kurdistan and the rest of Iraq. From now on, more reconstruction projects have to be implemented in Sulaimaniyah and Erbil, especially on the southern parts of the two cities towards Kirkuk so that step by step the city is more closely connected to Kurdistan.

In the contemporary world, people align with the circles rich with culture, democracy and with a developed economy. The Turkmen and Arabs of Kirkuk have to choose Kurdistan not to be forced to conduct a referendum. Prosperity and welfare in Kurdistan has to attract the Kirkuk population with all its ethnic and religious groups like a magnet.

Of course, I advocate the revival of the economy and luxury and democracy for Iraq as a whole without any discrimination before I advocate the Kurdish cause in the disputed areas as a Kurd. My insistence on annexing Kirkuk to Kurdistan is grounded on the fact that it is pivotal for Iraq to transcend to either democracy or to remain in the former, darker era.

Monday, October 25th 2010

Books feminize society

When I first read a book I was very young. Just a third-grader, it was the summer holidays and the book was for adults because at that time there were very few books for children written in Kurdish. In fact, it was not a real book, but a journal with a fictional story within which drew the path of my later life and turned me into a life-long book lover. Indeed, everybody looks at life from their own experience and in my experience books change destinies.

When grew older, I became fonder of books; everyday, like a crazy addict I was going back and forth in pursuit of them. It was not only me who had this habit; many of the teenagers of the 1970s were fond of books. Because there were few copies of a book, 10 people would read the same one; it would fall apart in the hands of its readers. Books in general were difficult to find, in particular in the Kurdish language. Only a few books would be published each year, perhaps one book per month which was worth reading. Therefore, the public library in the city was one of those places swarming with book-lovers during the mid-term and summer holidays.

Now, everything is in reverse. Instead of faint lights and lamps, homes are lit with electricity, and of course bigger

and more comfortable than the small houses of the time I am talking about. Also, instead of borrowing books due to lack of financial support to afford buying one, now students have thousands of job opportunities and have their own budgets, and more important is the flow of Kurdish language books in all fields of knowledge. Students and young people however are not that fond of books. I have met students in recent years who have not picked up a single book in their lives.

Whatever the reason behind it, this has to be resolved. Freedom and liberty were not only won to provide the Kurdish individual with the means to eat and dress well, or drive luxury cars or build big and decorative houses. The future that we want to draw in this country requires thought and contemplation, at least by society's elite. If you blame the cause of not reading books on the emergence of the internet, then I will not support you by any means. Because in our society digital reading has not crystallized as a culture, while in the countries like the United States and Europe, reading print books is as popular as ever alongside digital reading. If you tell me that formerly reading books was part of the national or political struggle or confronting the oppressing regime and is no longer needed, again I will not support you because the new generation meddles with politics and is more discontent than the previous generation.

In my opinion neither the internet nor politics can be blamed, it is the lack of libraries in the schools. To blame

for this is the indifference of educational institutions. Formerly, teachers urged pupils in primary schools to read extra-curriculum books to gain more awareness than the education program provided. In 1975, when I first found out that our school – Azadi High School in Erbil – had a library that we could borrow books from, I was delighted. Now 35 years later, the same school has no library. Everything is in reverse. Then, the environment – school or society – encouraged children to read more. Reading was part of contemporary and civilized education to develop better qualified people. I can think of only one person who did not encourage me to read – one of my uncles. And of course he looked at books from his narrow tribal point of view. He thought reading books would feminize me, and of course he thought this would not become me. He was right; not reading would not make one more macho.

There are 673 high schools in the Kurdistan Region that, by regulation, need to have libraries. There are more than 104 colleges and institutes; those too, need to have libraries under the regulations. There are 70 libraries in the cities and towns of Kurdistan that have to provide all books for readers. All together, that adds up to make 847 libraries, in addition to hundreds of libraries in the centers that belong to political parties and youth centers and intellectuals. I however have a copy of the best book, 2,500 copies of which have been published for two and half years yet 500 of them have not been sold so far. In the late 1970s and early 1980s many books would sell some 20,000 cop-

ies in weeks. Today, the best book will not sell 1,000 copies in years.

In this miserable market of books it is not only the education system to blame, though it is the number one responsible. There are many others to blame, first and foremost the media organizations that do not advertise or promote Kurdish books. A stupid video clip of some girls shaking their bodies would be replayed a thousand times on TV channels, but a few seconds will not be dedicated to the release of a book, albeit a Kurdish work of enlightenment. It is very unfortunate that currently there is no in-depth plan to feminize Kurdish society which is an important step for the tribal society towards contemporary life. In contrast, all the meaningless emphasis on displaying girls dancing and shaking on Kurdish TV will simply deepen the masculinity of our society.

Ahmedi Khani - a prominent Kurdish poet of the 17th century - in his work *Mam u Zin*, highly evaluates his work saying: "The value of my work and myself is no less than the intellectuals of other nations and their literary works. The difference is only that they have such kings, shahs and princes, who buy their works and respect them, but what should I do, there is a Kurdish prince in this area called Mirza who doesn't know what books are".

The more I think of the humiliation of Kurdish books I recall the illiterate Mirza of the 17th century of Bayazid city. Similarly, the Kurdish media and institutions concerned with books are aware of everything but books. This

year, 111 books have been printed by the Aras Printing House, but die due to the lack of a publishing company; the majority of them could not reach the public. In the two cities of Erbil and Sulaimaniyah, we have been trying to find a hall to hold a book fair all year long. The year is nearing an end and we still have not managed to find one.

Saturday, November 6th 2010

Kirkuk for Kurdistan – Part II

Since the early days of the Iraqi state, Kurds have not been desperate for a law to resolve their conflict with Baghdad. Iraq's post-1958 revolution constitution made provisions that Iraq is shared by Arabs and Kurds. Partnership means equality in decision-making and in harvesting the fruits. If Iraqi Kurds were given equal rights as their Arab counterparts, they would not have suffered the agony the Iraqi state inflicted on them after that date.

There is no question that even before that date there were laws in favor of Kurds in Iraq, for instance; the general population census of 1957 gives Kirkuk to Kurdistan if it is a matter of majority of Kurds in the city. Now that half a century has passed since the general population census of 1957 and 1959 and the constitution of that time, Kurds should have clearly seen that their dependence on article 140 of the current Iraqi Constitution – which is a roadmap to solving the issues in Kirkuk and other disputed areas – or the result of the next population census (scheduled for Dec. 5) in the hope of resolving the Kirkuk issue will make no difference if the counterpart "the Iraqi Arab Leadership" does not believe in the principle of change in their mentality and reasoning in the new Iraq. There are a thousand and one pieces of evidence that the counterpart has not believed and is the same old person.

The Kurdish actors, whether the political leadership, the Kurdish media or civil societies, are muted and do not guard themselves from accusations. Tens of thousands of those Arab families that Saddam Hussein brought from southern and central Iraq to settle in Kirkuk in a bid to change the demographics of the city, are still there seven years after Saddam and his regime were toppled in 2003, even though laws have been issued that oblige those Arabs to go back to their original regions. And tens of thousands of Kurdish families that Saddam Hussein forced to leave Kirkuk have not returned to the city yet we hear from the media that some Arab and Turkmen politicians complain about the Kurds trying to change the demographics of the city.

Certainly, many Kurds have returned to their places in Kirkuk without receiving remarkable help for the years of suffering of being displaced and being expelled from their economic life, but there are many who have not returned because they lack the motivation to return to Kirkuk. Those who have returned might represent a big number, however they are only the poor and helpless who lived for years in Erbil and Sulaimaniyah and were not able to build their own lives in those two cities so they went back to their home in Kirkuk. A small shake-up in the city will once again dislodge those families.

The Kurdish elite of Kirkuk, the bourgeois and the capitalists, the bureaucratic officials, intellectuals, artists, journalists, academics, judges and engineers - all expelled from Kirkuk by Saddam Hussein's regime - are still in Erbil and Sulaimaniyah, and a large number of them are abroad.

This elite is very little inclined to return to Kirkuk. Even those who held high ranks in the city in recent years are based in Erbil and Sulaimaniyah and go to work in Kirkuk during the day, returning home at night on a daily basis. The Kurdish dependence on large numbers of Kurds in their plans to win Kirkuk and their neglect of this elite is a danger with binding responsibilities.

Now, the civil circles of Kirkuk are not in the hands of Kurds. Oil companies, the banking sector, trade and industry, government offices, education, courts or any other sectors of a contemporary city are not in the hands of the Kurds. In some of those institutions, not even a single Kurdish individual is found, except for the security services whose role is contingent on the status of violence in the city. Once security is stable, they have to go back into their stations, if not home.

The Kurdish policy regarding Kirkuk is a macho policy but not an intelligent one. We have to see that no matter how big the number of common Kurdish people in Kirkuk, it is of no use in weighing down the scale in favor of the Kurds. The destiny of the city is going towards loss if the Kurdish Kirkuki intellectual elite are adamant not to return to Kirkuk.

The result of this macho policy by Kurds in the past seven years is that they have not been able to open civil institutions, say for instance, hospitals, education centers, civil society organizations, tourist and trade centers, or even playgrounds for children, in the city. Relying on the large number of helpless and rural returnees who will be swept away

with a gust of a wind, is a bet whose result is already clear: Kirkuk will be lost.

The longer the annexation of Kirkuk to the Kurdistan Region is delayed, the further it slows down the economic and popular development of the city. It is not only Baghdad which is to blame in this issue for adopting unilateral policies, but also the Kurdish side. The Kurds are to blame in terms of not adopting lenient and intelligent policies. What excuse do the Kurdish authorities or even the Kurdish Kirkuki elite have for not going back and associating their homes, lives and fates to Kirkuk while most of them have made sacrifices for the city and the harvesting of their efforts is near? Besides, who says the fears of Arabs and Turkmen have about the Kurds is not essentially a cultural difference between urban and rural people rather than an ethnic conflict as it appears to be? I have an instinct, as an Iraqi, and believe that upon the return of this Kurdish elite to Kirkuk, it will, to a great extent, defuse the current outrage of the representatives of Turkmen and Arabs and will make them feel secure in their coexistence and the building a civil life for everyone's future. Meanwhile, the fate of the city – which has been the mother of all calamities and a deadlock for all Iraqis for half a century - will be won for the Kurds.

Monday, November 1st 2010

Muslims scandalize Islam

The terrorist assault on the Our Lady of Salvation church in Baghdad for which the terrorist organization al-Qaeda claimed responsibility was an incident that did not achieve any goal except bringing shame to Islam. The Christian minority in Iraq is not an active group in politics or the economy of Iraq inciting terrorists to undermine their role with this heinous act. They are a peaceful and non-violent community which has done nothing to be avenged for and are not responsible for any negative development in the ancient or modern history of Iraq. They can not even have any reaction to this aggression so that they could be dragged into a game or plot that an external force might want to lure them into. Therefore, al-Qaeda and those behind the attack took the issue of terrorism to a new level which only holds scandal, embarrassment and shame for us Muslims whether or not we want it.

A few years ago, I did not care what Islam was or what the Islamists did. In absolutely no plan in my life has Islam, as a religion, been involved, though I respect it as a peculiar culture and have no problem with it. But in recent years I have realized that we intellectuals have to behave differently. If we decide not to belong to this religion and the culture of our community and decide not to defend it, the irresponsible

and irrational tendency of these empty-headed men will drag us into big troubles.

In the past ten years, the re-emergence of Islam with its current radicalism in the Muslim world is the fault of the hypocrisy of those groups who govern the Islamic and Arab countries. They flatter religious figures and give them chances while they "the authorities" have nothing to do with religion. This religious revival is also to be blamed on the cowardice and double-stranded attitude of the media organizations and the intelligentsia of Muslims altogether who always flatter clerics without themselves holding religious convictions. They never once ask themselves the ethical question of what brings all this hypocrisy and unethical play together with the work of the intellectual – which must, by nature, be ethical.

Culture descends from above downwards. The culture and customs of any nation reflects the culture of those in power. Society does not produce a different culture from that of the officials; even if it does it will not be an active culture. I saw images of a university in Yemen on TV, the girls in the university – who were around 20 years old – revealed only the holes of their eyes from their whole body, they were all in black from head to toe, while all the contemporary means of communication in that country like the internet, TV and satellite are available to the people. The regime of the country wants to keep the nation as backwarded as possible so that it can keep governing them, on the one hand, while it shows the outer world a modern picture and opens the country to the advanced technological means that show the image of a

breath-taking and fascinating life there on the other. In this medium, only the culture of hate shoots out its roots. As a general habit, when a man can not reach a purpose he will get upset and this keeps eating away at him. The Islamic community, thanks to this hypocrisy, has become the hub of terrorist thoughts, hatred and violence for which first the educated authorities and the media are to blame.

In his last years in power Saddam Hussein, who led a secular regime for 35 years, launched a return to faith campaign as a last means of fooling the Iraqi community. Hussein's successors, which America brought to power thinking they would establish democracy and equality, dragged al-Qaeda into Iraq. As a result, there are cities in Iraq – possibly the majority of Iraqi cities except for the Kurdish ones – where you can not find one woman in the entire city's market places who is not in black with a head scarf. I am citing this example because the freedom of women is an example of the openness of the society. In the general elections, all the Iraqi votes go to the Shia Islamic parties loyal to Iran and the Sunni parties, friends of al-Qaeda. I wonder what culture of tolerance can grow in such a society. What future is ahead of us while we yawn, waiting for democracy and a bright future? I wonder who might, in this country, have shed some tears for the Christians a few days ago. I believe only in the Kurdistan Region there was some kind of sympathy. I can not think of any other place in Iraq.

This is a comprehensive situation in our country and all the Arab and Muslim world. Even in the Kurdistan Region, this hypocrisy of power, the intellectuals and the media in

the face of the clergy and the Islamic parties can not be hidden, while both the clergy and the Islamic parties are originally one and the same. These two are not different in their thinking and culture, which originated 1,500 years ago, being cultivated again today in a fertile land to produce a tendency towards religion. To belong to this time and to be an active element in the life of mankind, we first have to respect ourselves before asking others to respect us. We must first put an end to the role of those empty-headed individuals in the direction of the society in contemporary life. What I am saying is not anti-religion, all the better way to respect Islam, in my opinion, is to remove the clergy and religious parties or restrain them completely.

Otherwise, leaving them free rein will provide them with the opportunity to bring us more shame and finish us altogether. So, there is no alternative but to maintain the reputation of Islam because we are Muslims (like it or not) no matter what non-religious system we establish, and however we pretend to be or whatever picture of ours we present.

Thursday, November 4th 2010

Kurdistan's reputation marred

Though we are surrounded by collaborators and supporters of the terrorist al-Qaeda organization, the group does not have an absolutely free rein in the Kurdistan Region and there are many obstacles in its way. As the poet says, "its hands and feet are limp and defective" and can not undermine Kurdistan. The credit of this al-Qaeda limpness in Kurdistan is not only to be attributed to the security services of Kurdistan – which are no doubt qualified and active in countering terrorism and are appreciated by the people of Kurdistan in the depth of their hearts – but also to the lack of fertile ground in the Kurdish community to the growth of radical religious thought.

So far, things are going well, but maintaining this is not easy, especially with the ongoing efforts to change it. Some of the Islamic organizations, including some of the mullahs, want to fill the minds of the Kurdish community with religious intolerance by amplifying little things lest the Kurdish society should lag behind other Muslim nations' "pride" in and obsession for bloodshed. Often, these people see that there are no shortcomings in the Kurdistan Region so that they can hype it up; they turn to fabricating events, for instance a war they declared on an elementary school where the bible has ostensibly been seen or taught there.

I met 37-year-old Nahla Georgis – the school principal in Erbil city's Midya elementary school. She has been living in fear for three weeks because the union of the mullahs issued several statements claiming that a program of Christianity or the Bible has been taught to the children in her school. Ms Georgis told me that: "We don't have a place in our curriculum to teach Christianity. What the children study is the history of the world's religions, including Islam". It is crystal clear that the story of the Bible-teaching as the Mullahs advocate it is a baseless and fabricated fiction aimed at filling the brains of people with hatred against the poor Christian minority.

That is right; the Bible is not taught in the school, just as the Quran is not taught in other schools. The Bible and the Quran are read in churches, mosques and people's homes. The school master, a Christian, is afraid that the terrorists will exploit the statements of the union of mullahs and deal a blow on her, as it is "well known" that statements issued by the mullahs are calls to murder. If the mullahs really cared about religion, and if there was a problem in that school, they would seek a solution in another way instead of making noise and incitements, thus terrifying the headmaster and teachers. This attempt, without a doubt, is a prelude to call al-Qaeda to the rescue of the Kurdistan Region from this "shame" of security and peace in which it lives.

Another question: why hate the Bible? Is Christianity not a religion sent down by God? Does Islam, with Quranic provisions, not recognize it as so?

"Indeed, those who have believed [in Prophet Muhammad] and those [before Him] who were Jews or Sabeans or Christians - those [among them] who believed in Allah and the Last Day and did righteousness - no fear will there be concerning them, nor will they grieve." (The Quran, Al-Maidah: 69)

On October 31, when terrorists killed children in the church of Our Lady of Salvation in Baghdad in front of their mothers without justification which was nothing but their blind hatred and one-thousand-year-old inherent ignorance, the same day in Erbil the union of the mullahs for a second time issued a statement against the board and the headmaster of Midya – the students of which are half Muslims and half Christians who go to the school of their own free will and none of them had any complaints about the curriculum before the Mullahs' statement filled their lives with fear and worries.

Mullah-phobia is a real danger that the Kurdish community leaders have to take into account. When they see that they have fallen behind scientific advances, the mullahs suffer, when seeing the community is moving forward, fear grows in their hearts lest tomorrow's generations should not listen to their advice and instructions and thus the doors of their livelihood be closed. For this, they want to fill the vacuum in their hearts with this noise and fuss. Of course nobody minds their clamor, when a man is afraid of something he must be screaming about it, let them be as they please and then some, provided that they do not play a dangerous game. Mullahs in the Islamic parties, as we note, are less restrained

in their sermons and discourses. They do not hesitate to make any statement even if it leads to a helpless citizen's panic and fear, or even if it draws terrorists.

Failure to comply with any limits when talking or acting will expose the country to danger, or at least harms the good reputation. Kurdistan is barely standing on its feet amid a myriad of threats, and the only positive thing that keeps the region afloat is its internal security which has prompted reconstruction, economic growth, and all other things. There is no doubt that moving the religious feelings of impaired consciousness and pulling on the sensitive chord of religion will open the door for all kinds of undesired incidents. Kurdistan is a multi-religious, multi-ethnic, and multi-sectarian region, and in particular Erbil city which is the hub of variety and harmony. If however these irresponsible mouths are not reined in, then the reputation of Kurdistan will be damaged, and of course lives will be ruined, too.

Saturday, November 13th 2010

Please read something

The history of the world is full of names and stories of fierce and arrogant rulers and dictators. You need not go far to find an example; as an Iraqi, it is enough to remember Saddam Hussein in recent history. If you are an Arab, then Omar Hassan al-Bashir is a unique example of a man who kills defenseless and innocent people in his country. If you want to go back into the history of the Arabs and Islam you will find dictators like Hajjaj ibn Yusuf, who built castles from the skulls of Arabs and Muslims.

Whether you are a Sunni or Shia Muslim, you have to know that Baghdad turned into a pool of blood four times in the reign of Shah Ismail, Sultan Suleiman, Nadir Shah and Sultan Murad IV. Amateur Islamic writers and mullahs in Kurdistan, when facing intellectuals, can think only of Stalin as an example of dictatorship not only as a shameful stain on left-wing ideology, but also on secularism.

States and civilizations do not fall because of the lack of change within, or the suppression of an ideology even if the ideology has shortcomings, but because of the failure of those in power to meet the requirements of the time. The Abbasid state lasted for 500 years but the governing system became corrupt in the end and progress ceased, therefore the state could not continue to change and finally collapsed. Ar-

abs and Muslims still, and forever after, will take pride in the intellectual and cultural creativity of the Abbasid era in thought and philosophy, and thus regard it as immortal alongside the Greek and Roman civilizations. If the fall of a state is proof of the collapse of an ideology, then after the Abbasid era, as after the fall of the Soviet Union – as they think – Islam had to vanish. If those so-called intellectuals at the forefront of the Islamic movements had a minimum of worldly awareness, they would have to criticize the course of their own organizations because their structures are the same as that of the Soviet Union.

The Islamic Group of Kurdistan (KIG) and the Kurdistan Islamic Union (KIU) for instance, are both Leninist parties whose actions conform to the ideology with a hierarchical structure, which goes from the top to the bottom. Candidates, the organs, cells, the regulations, rules of procedure, meetings and membership dues, conferences, the central committee, the politburo, the democratic centralism and all details of the organization of these parties are the same as those developed by Lenin a hundred years ago, and that proved to be useless twenty years ago, becoming a thing of the past.

Democratic centralism was a shiny name for the dictatorships, adopted by not only the Soviet Union but also socialist countries, under which you could express your opinion, and criticism (of course in clandestine meetings) but it is ultimately up to those at the top to take decisions, binding all members to follow them; this is dictatorship, loud and clear. This method, which failed in socialist countries, is still

followed in Kurdistan by the Islamic parties and all democratic and left-wing parties. Non-religious thought is considered a disgrace by the mullahs and their writers. This results from a lack of reading and a lack of familiarity with what is going on in the world.

I believe that the Islamists should stop talking about Karl Marx and Marxist thought. Because logically speaking, this way of thinking is closer to their own; Marxism, like all religions, promises its followers Paradise. All prophets throughout history have been addressing their critique to those in power; in a desire to convince them to have mercy on their poor and miserable people. The Philosophers, in contrast to prophets, do not usually address the poor and helpless to urge them shake the ground for change. Among the philosophers however, Marx was the only one who followed the example of the prophets. He calls on the poor to unite and take to the streets to bring about change, and in return he promises them the paradise of milk and honey in the future, the only difference is that it is in this world, while that of the prophets is in the hereafter.

I believe that Marx tried to imitate the Islamic religion and the Prophet of Islam, but in a mundane way. This imitation indicates Marx's belief in the philosophy of religion which is: rewards for struggle and hard work. I do not invite anyone to the faith of Marxism, nor do I call anyone to religious thought, but I introduce to the reader what I think about it, and my thinking is for the sake of the welfare of the people. And I cite the similarity between Marx and the prophets to deter the mullah writers from their endless efforts to fool the

community.

Dullness of mind can not bring about a bright future, neither can refusing to learn from the experience of other nations. What is not humanistic and which led to the fall of the Soviet Union (the Leninist form of governing) is still in operation in Kurdistan under the Islamic parties, while what is immortal and humanistic (Marxism) is being ridiculed.

Let me return to Stalin who I cited as an example at the beginning of my essay and who Islamists in the course of their writings talk about as if he were my kinsman when they write an essay against me. Stalin was a big dictator in the history of socialism in the 20th century. But he was not the only dictator, Chuchesku, Kim Il Song, Mao Zedong and Castro were all dictators who soaked their people for decades in the pool of injustices and persecution. Even Che Guevara would have become a dictator if he came to power, because the system and the methodology of their work - a Leninist approach - were wrong and inhumane only capable of producing dictators.

The system was not suitable for man of the age of awareness and literacy. However, the history of dictators is not entirely dark from beginning to end. Saddam Hussein – if there are no other positive achievements - did not allow Iran to move one single stone in Iraq for 20 years, and Stalin defeated the greatest inhumane strength in history, namely, Nazi Germany. Had Hitler won World War II, the history of mankind would have taken a very dangerous course. Before anything else, I am sure that Islam would have been swept

away, therefore, I appeal to those "scholars" (mullahs), please read something before putting your mouths and your pens to work.

Sunday, November 14th 2010

A picture of the future Iraq

The Kurds play their role in Iraq well, and look confidently upon that role and advocate it. In the Arab and Iraqi media however, we hear voices – most of which are childish – aiming their criticisms and accusatory remarks at the Kurds, accusing them of indifference and turning their backs on their duties. Some even go further, talking about the suspected relations of the Kurdish authority in Iraq. Of course, these are all empty words which - when put to the test of truth - will burst like bubbles on the surface of water, and nobody will claim them. Some days ago, we saw with our own eyes the contrary of these talks. To be quite honest, the history of the Kurdish liberation movement has never been in need of evidence to prove its patriotism to Iraq. From Mustafa Barzani down to his son Massoud Barzani, the Kurds have never strayed from the higher interests of this country no matter how they have been subjected to internal and external pressures.

The latest initiative by Barzani to bring together all the Iraqi political leaders at one table to negotiate in a bid to break the eight-month political deadlock is direct proof of this. During the prolonged impasse, the Iraqi political actors never once gave up their narrow-minded personal, sectarian party interests or their suspicious external relations; each one of

them was pulling the rope to their own side of the field.

The lack of national will to make the decision to form the new government in that period was a major problem. Things were pretty desperate on the Iraqi streets and too often the language of discourse between Iraqis was limited to bombings and terrorist atrocities. That is until the initiative of President Barzani appeared, reviving the national will and gathering the Iraqis under the umbrella of their country. The deadlocks dissolved to some extent and hope returned to the Iraqi streets. The Iraqi people had been waiting for a long time for the Kurds to play a leading role, particularly Masoud Barzani. The man is, in the eyes of the Iraqis, an unparalleled leader in patriotism, honesty and integrity.

This clearly shows the honest role of the Kurds in their greater homeland, Iraq. It is the other parties and their quest to save the country from the dangerous crisis it got into after the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime in 2003 that deserve suspicion, not the part the Kurds played. Those parties, as it appears to us, are alienated from one another and ultimately hostile. Although the agreement between them is only days old, you find on the television channels that they draw swords and spears at each other just like the characters do in adolescent movies. This situation is not reassuring for the months and years ahead and we can already discern the features of horrific conditions that the eyes of our imaginations read.

It is well known that in critical circumstances solutions are fragile, hardly sufficient to prevent more blasts from taking

place and provide an opportunity for the parties to reflect and review if they so wish. Critical circumstances do not allow for the achievement of definitive solutions to complex problems, and no one is to be blamed for this, but temporary solutions such as "the current agreement" paves the way for two different possibilities: the good possibility, where there is real goodwill in mind, and the bad possibility, if the mind fails to change towards the good. The possibility that is more likely to be observed by anyone watching Iraq today is unfortunately of the second type imposed by a lack of change in the visions and ideas adopted by the existing political actors.

Above all, the invention of a new authority in Iraq called "the National Council for Strategic Policies" is like a pain-killer for the pain that has been eating away at the country for years; it is also a weight to balance power between feuding Shia and Sunni leaders. Balance is of course good if used properly. The real problem is lack of balance. Balance and equality in power between some authorities can however sometimes hinder the progress of things, especially the progress of democracy, which is the only glimmer of hope for the Iraqis. Any democracy is managed by three authorities not four which are; the legislative, executive and the judicial powers. But this new invention "the National Council of the Strategic Policies" will undoubtedly embezzle something from each of the three powers, especially the executive, the Prime Minister's, and this means, whether we like it or not, creating another crisis and escaping one tunnel simply to enter another. Nouri al-Maliki is already ex-

pressing his dissatisfaction with reductions in the powers of the Prime Minister. This is the beginning of a conflict between him and the new power.

Another risk is the return of the Baathists to power. These Baathists with their complex psychology following their downfall in 2003 can not be positive and open to the others. Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, who is leader of the largest parliamentary bloc, is horrified by the idea of their return. For these reasons, it transpires from the current political appearance that Iraq will not be able to get out of its turning in circles and this may well last for years, paralyzing or at least hindering the progress of democratic life and the application of the Constitution.

In this misty picture of Iraq in the coming years, there is only one positive side; the Sunni involvement in political power which has been manifesting itself as "resistance" in the Iraqi arena using violence. The change in the manifestation of the Sunnis gives us hope to expect the level of terrorism and violence will hit low and that the nightmare of bombings in Baghdad and other cities will stop disturbing the minds of citizens. But we do not find hope on the horizon promising the progress of the political process, the mentality of those who have been out of power for several years now does not appear to have changed. Formerly, they used to catch the feet of authority to prevent stepping forward towards change and progress, now they will definitely strangle it. And this is the new challenge of the Iraqis, not let the infant of democracy be strangled in its cradle.

Saturday, November 20th 2010

Kirkuk for Kurdistan – Part III

The Kurdistan Region is a safe and stable area. It could be argued that it is the only region in Iraq which does not suffer from problems of security or stability. This stability is no doubt the fruit of a successful local administration – the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). As we can see, the region has turned into a suitable site for economic growth and other aspects of Kurdish social life. To put it in a nut shell, the region has become the most prosperous, secure and comfortable of all of Iraq. Iraqis now are dreaming of living in, or at least visiting, the Kurdistan Region. It is clear that a stable area will turn into an attraction for the people of other regions, especially those whose sons live in unstable conditions.

Since the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003, the Iraqi elite have been fleeing the country in search of a safe haven. The Kurdistan Region was the closest area to these elite and so they attempted to enter. This was impossible in the past due to the strict embargo imposed by the authorities in charge of the procedures at the gateways to the provinces of the region, which prevented the entry of many who fled the violence in other Iraqi areas, especially during the years 2006 and 2007.

Many times, I asked KRG officials about the reason be-

hind the strict procedures and closing of the doors in the face of the victims who are leaving other parts of Iraq for the Kurdistan Region, but I never received a convincing answer. Some of them invoked the concern that terrorists and infiltrators were among those fleeing, which is not a convincing argument to justify closing the doors. After all, they are Iraqis and it is their legitimate right to take refuge in days of adversity in other areas of their homeland, as they bring at the same time benefits to the areas they head to. The majority of those from the elite are economically self-dependent. There are among them capitalists, engineers, doctors, judges, academics and intellectuals, who would no doubt contribute to enriching the Kurdistan Region. To be quite honest, the Kurdistan community is in dire need of them. There are dozens of them who have entered the Kurdistan Region and have subsequently become an effective part of the community. If access was possible, the number of these elite would be doubled, especially in the city of Erbil which is naturally a welcoming city to whoever knocks at its doors.

Had it not been for the security situation in Iraq, Kurdistan would have been the tourist attraction of Iraqis due to its spectacular nature. The tourism sector can not be neglected or overlooked for its importance in the economy of Kurdistan. In a summer visit to Dohuk city two years ago, the Zhiyan Hotel – which is one of the most prominent tourist hotels in Kurdistan, was empty of guests, while dozens, or better yet hundreds of, Mosul and Baghdad families behind the lines of Peshmarga checkpoints, were dreaming of vis-

iting Dohuk. This is part of the faulty policy which has negatively affected everything in Kurdistan, and in particularly the Kirkuk issue.

Building a wall isolating Iraq and the Iraqis from the Kurdistan Region is not a rational venture, neither is it logical and it will not serve the political or security agenda if that is a viable justification. The Kurdistan Region does not have any separatist plans. Even if it did, this region would not have a noteworthy success without strong relations and mixing with the Iraqis. No matter how deeply I think about it, I cannot find an excuse to prevent the arrival of the Arabs from the rest of Iraq to the stability of Kurdistan. If it is about the housing crisis, it could be solved in one year by implementing an urgent and short-term housing plan. Kurdistan will not be successful through isolation or stand-offishness with the surrounding nations. Erbil city, the capital of the Kurdistan Region, will be fortified against the dreams of occupiers when it has a multi-million strong multi-cultural, multi-religious and multi-ethnic populace. Such a metropolis will be a fortress of Kurdish democracy.

Four years ago, when Baghdad began to swim in its pool of blood and the Iraqis headed to the Kurdistan Region in search of a safe haven, often I read in the Kurdish newspapers articles of teenagers or irresponsible, inexperienced writers, who worked in the Kurdish media, like "prevent them from coming!" or "Kurdistan is subjected to Arabization again!". Maybe the childish and vain thoughts of the Kurdish media persuaded the security forces to intercept

Arab families fleeing from the hell of Baghdad and the rest of Iraq. But we have to realize that the Iraq of today is a new Iraq. And that the Iraq of Saddam Hussein, where Kurdistan was under threat, is gone. The Peshmargas of the Qandil Mountains are now sitting on chairs in the Iraqi republican palace boasting and the Kurdish flag has been raised in the remote south of Iraq.

An example of attempts to remove the isolating wall between the Iraqis was the role of the Kurds in solving the political impasse that Iraq was undergoing. The Iraqis were looking forward to this fraternal initiative from the Kurds especially from the Kurdish President Massoud Barzani. The flying of a thousand Kurdish flags in Basra province for a day was evidence of the aspiration of the Iraqis to the Kurdish leadership and the Kurdistan Region. And obviously, this will not only open new pages in the new life of Iraq and a real partnership between the Kurds, Arabs and other minorities like the Turkmen and the Christians, but also will pave the way for the incorporation of Kirkuk into the Kurdistan Region – an incorporation that all Iraqis will welcome. No Kurdish pressure, no hard feelings from others.

Years ago, accompanied by a delegation of Iraqi intellectuals, I visited the shrine of the leader Mustafa Barzani. One of the members of the delegation said, referring to Barzani, that "this man is not only a symbol of the Kurds, but of all Iraqis". "Yes" I replied. "When I come back the next time, I will bring four palm plants with me to this shrine" he said, but I replied "No - because palms do not

grow in cold weather. It would be better to erect a statue of Barzani in the south, in a palm grove". Everybody echoed my idea. We still hope for the erection of this statue in Basra or any other spot in southern Iraq, and to see a breath-taking Iraqi flag flying over the mountain peaks of Kurdistan.

Wednesday, December 1st 2010

How do we build a state?

The Kurds are a lazy, non-working people. This is no slander, no story that I am making up about my own people. I am a Kurd and I love Kurds. But just go out there and ask around to find out for yourself, you will see that the Kurds are notorious among other nations for their helplessness and laziness. In Kurdistan, we experience day and night this reluctance to work, and we can see the Kurds waiting for their Indonesian, Filipino and Thai servants to cook their food and clean their homes. The same thing is true abroad; immigrants from all parts of the third world in Europe are working tirelessly like ants, while the Kurds are celebrating their rest, and yet are discontent with their conditions.

This habit of not working is not a new one for the Kurds brought about by the influx of oil wealth in recent years. We cannot pass the buck on to this to evade responsibility. No, these people have been non-workers since the day they came into being. Indifference and an unwillingness to work have deep roots among the Kurds. Long ago in this country's rural existence, the agriculture, cattle-breeding and crop-growing on land devoid of irrigation, everything depended on rainfall. This changed man from a dynamic, lively creature into a heinously lazy and sky-dependent one.

Reluctance to work, as it has negative effects on the econ-

omy and makes poverty and hunger the share of the people, also humiliates the people in the face of its merciless, occupying neighbors.

In the history of this region, the Kurds and the Jews are very much alike. Both nations lost their sovereignty hundreds of years BC. That of the Jews was much worse, because despite losing their sovereignty, they were scattered all over the world. But look how ultimately, thanks to hard work, they jumped back into history, and how the Kurds, thanks to their laziness and lethargy, became such a miserable people.

Once I read a quote by an Armenian writer: "The Armenian people became diamonds under the pressure of history" the writer had written. A diamond is metal formed under high pressure. I wished that history would have made the Kurds, like the Armenians, diamonds instead of Libad (a Kurdish word for a mat made of sheep's wool by pressing it over and over again).

Formerly, what made the Kurds glorious was their persecution, but they soon lost their glory after gaining freedom. I never saw a foreigner in recent times impressed by Kurdish efficiency in any particular skill. A while ago, I met a Lebanese intellectual who was invited to a modest and disappointing Kurdish cultural event; shameful like all other cultural events in the Kurdistan Region. The Lebanese intellectual, out of his concern for the Kurdish issue, interrogated me, "is this how you plan to build a state?" he queried.

Another example of Kurdish laziness: a group of shepherds from a neighboring village of ours had assaulted a farmer in our village. The police failed to investigate the case of the shepherds because they were also Peshmargas (Kurdish security forces). As an intellectual close to the authorities, I was at loss for an answer to the villagers, "is this how you plan to build a state?" they asked.

Reluctance to work and lethargy are not only Kurdish habits, but also Iraqi ones. The Iraqis, as they are themselves unwilling to toil, hate anyone who works. In 1948, when the Jews migrated to the Promised Land, the Iraqis looted them. It was not hatred of the Jews or of their religion which drove them to do this, because the Jews had been living in this country for thousands of years without any problems. They were looted for working hard and caring for their businesses. The Iraqis hated their capitals, not them. Saddam Hussein did the same thing to the Feyli Kurds in 1980. He looted them, stripped them of all their wealth and deported them. These two events in Iraq's modern history reversed the progress of Baghdad and all the Iraqi cities in terms of urban life.

The Feylis are the only Kurdish group who are good at business, just like the Jews. They are an urban group, while Saddam Hussein was an arrogant countryman who had no respect for work. Dozens of thousands of Kurdish Feyli families were forced out of Iraq. Those families did not return to Iraq even after the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003 because they found no real incentive.

In all the countries I have visited, I have seen Feyli Kurds doing business, whether small or big. Though the Iraqi regime stripped them of their wealth, they started from scratch and became capitalists once more. These Feyli Kurds are also a patriotic group. Though the Iraqi government and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) refused to compensate them for their losses, they continued to back the progress of the Kurdish government.

I have thought long and hard about how to turn Kurdish cities into real cities; how to establish and manage professional Kurdish businesses, factories, restaurants, and shops; how the Kurds should drive their country towards reconstruction and prosperity, shake off the dust of laziness and take over from those unqualified foreign companies that have exploited the laziness of the Kurds to loot the country's wealth. In the end, I could find no other solution than bringing back the Feyli Kurds to the Kurdistan Region.

Wednesday, December 8th 2010

The second wife is a feminist

Rights and freedoms can mostly be granted through political decisions. For instance, the national right: Whenever, a ruling nation decides to stop persecuting a subject nation, or when the subject nation, thanks to a historical opportunity, is freed from the rule of another nation, the violated rights of the subject nation are then restored in the blink of an eye. The same is true for other rights. For instance, the freedom of expression, or a child's right to education instead of being put to work. Human rights all follow the same rule except for one set of rights which can only be brought about by history rather than an over night political decision - the rights of women.

Some 30 or 40 years ago, in Kurdish society, the man beat his woman as a show of his manhood, and the woman may not have been guilty of any shortcomings to deserve the beating. The woman would accept it to show her lady-like attitude. When I was a child, I heard Kurdish woman reporting proudly that her husband beat her such that she had to remain in bed for a week and nobody knew it from her that she had been beaten by her husband. Today, this is out of fashion. I will cite an example of extreme modernization in Kurdish society: There are young men and women in Kurdistan who have been living together as girlfriend and boy-

friend to later decide about getting married, and their families have accepted it, well-done. If the Kurdistan Region is subject to criticism in all aspects, it can boast of taking giant steps in the area of the rights of women.

The Kurdish elite of politicians and intellectuals are eagerly pursuing solutions to the shortcomings in the way women are involved in contemporary life to the extent that even some formerly-rural-and-uneducated women are now in positions of power. Of course I am not saying that everything is just fine. Maybe the Kurdish community still has hundreds of years to go to achieve equality between the genders before it can claim that all is fine.

Advocacy of rights and freedoms has to be a principal issue rather than a pretentious one. The Kurdish community has to be criticized for its vices rather than making it an object of scandal for the world. If compared to the neighboring nations, the Kurds are much better regarding the question of women. The immature Kurdish media creates a fuss whenever a stove catches fire in a house resulting in a woman being burnt, alleging it was an intentional self-burning in protest against the men, without the merest investigation into the details of the incident. The solution is not acquired in such a superficial and childish manner, because dozens more men die in car accidents than there are women dying in domestic fires. Well, if women are said to burn themselves in protest of men, then we can say the men who die in car accidents have been speeding to intentionally flip over and die – in anger against their women.

In the Kurdish community, the women are also to be blamed for their own persecution, not only men, because they are part of their own persecution. The demonizing of the Kurdish man when it comes to women's rights is not fair. If the Kurdish man is not willing to change and is adamant to reject the rights of his wife, sisters and daughters, then who has given women all the freedoms they enjoy in Kurdistan?

One may often hear from the Kurdish media terms like Shirbayi (money paid to a bride's family), Gawra ba Bchuk (a form of arranged marriage where a woman is married off to a man, in return for a younger sister of the man, to be married off to a young brother of the woman when they grow up), and Bin Pishk (a young girl who is paired off with a boy to get married when they grow up). This case differs from Gawra ba Bchuk only in that the young girl is not necessarily given to the boy to get married in the future in return for a current grown up sister of the boy to be married off to the girl's brother). Such strange things no longer have a place in Kurdish culture, even if they still exist, they are so rare that there is no need for anyone to be concerned about them. They will gradually die out and disappear. Even polygamy is so rare that it can not be called a phenomenon. One in a thousand Kurdish men may be involved in polygamy. If the general population census – which is to be held soon – includes such information, then it will come to full view just how far the truth is from the claims.

The reason behind polygamy was something different in the past than it is today. To be quite honest, polygamy, as "desire for polygamy", has never been a tradition among the

Kurds, but the outcome of another tradition. According to the Kurdish culture, women had to be married off in return for women. A family would have as many women as the number of daughters they had, so if a man had two sisters, he would have two wives in return for his sisters. And here I am not talking about the polygamy of the Sheiks, landlords, but that of the commoners. I have seen a Mullah saying that Shirbayi is forbidden in Islam, and as a result the father or brother of a woman wanting a woman in return for their daughter.

Nowadays, polygamy is more for pleasure and the individual's indulgence in which the tradition and religion do not play any role, though they do not obstruct it. The polygamy talked about in the Kurdish media in recent years is one of the following types: A man who was a Peshmarga in the mountains during the Kurdish revolutions and now is a government official with a second wife, or someone who was poor and is now well-off therefore has got a second wife, or a man who has got married according to the traditional ways and now wants to have a wife in accordance with the modern ways. People are no longer tempted to get married more than once for more children, or more male heads, but for pleasure. In short, the issue is no more a traditional one; it is become a personal issue for personal satisfaction and pleasure.

And the main and real factor behind the issue is the feminist woman. By feminist, I mean the contemporary, educated, modern-dressed woman who turns on the veteran Peshmargas, the wealthy, the powerful, the intellectuals, and the politicians. This woman, with her fashionable dress, her styl-

ish walk, and fascinating perfumes tempts men and is ready to become a second wife. A man's second wife is not a simple rural woman as the first wife. This feminist woman I talked about, who always calls for womens' rights and equality between women and men, who holds conferences, is the one who becomes the second wife. If it was only the illiterate rural woman, then all the blame would be put down on the man. Then he was the one to be given a lesson and attacked for the rights of women.

Saturday, December 11th 2010

WikiLeaks for a penny

Wikileaks has become the word of the moment all over the world. Politicians and people engaged in politics have been arguing for months about whether or not the release of secret documents has been a scandal for the U.S. Many people consider it a scandal because the documents prove that U.S. ambassadors and diplomats have been watching and spying on the affairs of other nations and sending their cables back to Washington. This, as some people think, is an ethical question when thinking that an ambassador is a diplomat and has no right to spy on and watch the country he works in.

Most of those talking about Wikileaks think that the release of thousands of secret cables has caused a problem for the U.S. in terms of diplomatic relations, and this view is of course wrong, stemming from a lack of understanding. They are not aware that the major advances in the world in all areas transform ethics and principles along with them. America, as it is the source of economic development and political decision-making in the world, has at the same time cultural and ethical decision-making powers as well. A country with that super power and capability can not be said to fear and worry about these events. And we should not perceive the contemporary developments with old ethical principles and deceive ourselves. The United States has ethics that we just can not understand.

Modern cultures and ethics are produced in the United States from where they are exported all over the world. The United States is in such an ethical position that the rest of the world has no clue of, or has not absorbed. I know many people will reject this considering themselves ethical and the US unethical. This too is a lack of understanding. Because as a logical principal, it is the powerful that produce cultures and impose them on the weak not the other way around. The world today is divided on culture: On one side is the United States which is the leading economic power giving it the leading role in the development of culture as an alpha actor. On the other side is the rest of the world which has become subordinate to US culture, sometimes to the degree of slavery.

Therefore, those who believe that the U.S. is worried about the release of secret cables and war logs do not know the United States, or they weigh new matters with old scales. It is unquestionable that every day people around the world are unconsciously taking new cultures, values and ethics from the United States. Globalization is a U.S. output by which they control the whole world like a small village. This Wikileaks fuss is a new twist which will change conventions and ethics. For instance it will lay the foundation for the culture of indifference to the disclosure of secrets.

In our part of the world, the disclosure of a secret, no matter how small, will cause concerns, but the important question is: Whose secret is it and does that person give a damn? Of course, if it is a powerful actor like the U.S. then the answer is NO. A European friend of mine, a businessman, said

in an argument between us about whether the U.S. is the pioneer of the world regarding culture. He was so upset about my views that he said the United States was a country with no culture, and I said "what you refer to as cultureless is a culture in itself, and that's the way the United States is". After all, whether we like it or not, this will become the culture of all mankind. After the Wikileaks disclosed the cables and classified documents, the disclosure of a secret no longer sets off worries for the one the secret belongs to, not even on a personal scale. In short, Wikileaks is another twist in a cultural transformation and the principles of ethics. But why is America the leading power in culture and ethics? There are many reasons:

First: the United States is a country which maintains its military technological edge; it is the most powerful economy. And technology changes in America on daily basis. America is the number one exporter of scientific advances in the world.

Second: The United States boasts of its cultural advances in fashion, music, cinema and literature which are exported to the world. The U.S. remains on top of the advances in all those areas because of their outstanding governance. History shows that civilizations collapsed in the world when their systems ceased changing. Governance in the U.S. undergoes change and is updated on a daily basis alongside the ongoing advances in technology.

Another reason for American culture's dominance is its distance from the rest of the world. First of all, this distance

has protected it from intervention and external dangers. Had America been close to this region of ours, for instance in place of Lebanon or Yemen, it would have had serious issues with Iran every day. Secondly, this distance has made it think of developing up-to-date far-range missiles to assert its dominance and power. The powerful subdues all others and paralyzes them. The powerful takes the rein of power from everybody else and monopolizes the arena for itself. This is the America that we know.

Just to conclude and prove that America does not give a damn about anything: Seven years ago the U.S. gathered its own and world's forces to topple Saddam Hussein. It had been circulating on the media for years that after Iraq, it would topple the Iranian regime because it considered them the axis of evil. Surprisingly, the U.S. left Iraq for the Islamic Republic of Iran after a seven-year stay in Iraq! And nobody asked what happened to the plan to topple other dictatorships in the region to build democracies for their peoples. The bottom-line is: Which is more concerning, this or Wikileaks? Therefore take it easy, WikiLeaks does not provide a penny's worth of concerns, but a new set of ethics and conventions begin from here on in.

Wednesday, December 15th 2010

World War III

The election of Iran's Ahmedinejad on June 12, 2009 created a fuss in the country and abroad when rivals accused the newly elected president of tampering with the electoral results. For a while, demonstrations and protests spanned across all over the country. Ahmedinejad was widely considered a fake president marking the beginning of a transformation of politics in Iran and the Middle East. It is unfortunately true that the regimes of the region cannot be expected to be democratic and hold fair, free and transparent elections, however, the manipulation of Iran's presidential election results, the way local and foreign observers talked about, strangled for good the hope of reform in the regime.

Nearly one and a half years after the polls, the parliamentary elections in Egypt were held on November 28 this year. The ruling National Democratic Party of President Hosni Mubarak won all the seats in parliament setting off outrage in the country. The opposition refused to acknowledge the results and considered the parliament to be a fake and imposed body. The protest by the opposition is proof that the ruling party's influence is not 100 percent in the country.

Among all the nations of the Middle East, Egypt and Iran regimes were held to be those somewhat open to reform, but

with the elections in the two countries, they lost the "somewhat openness" to reform and joined the other countries of the region where there is no ray of hope for democracy. It seems that the nations in the region will not be able to taste democracy for a long time.

What will happen next after the elections is even worse than tampering with the electoral results. Of course, good things will not happen. In the case of the Islamic Republic of Iran, we saw how the policies of the country and the president's attitude shifted altogether to absolute radicalism and stubbornness after the elections. As a rule, when a political system has big internal issues it is unable to address, it will externalize them. After the fuss over Iran's elections – which were described as stolen and fake – the country took to intervention in other nations' affairs in the region and heightening the level of tension with the United States by carrying on development of its nuclear program. This policy of sending out trouble is of course different from that of exporting the Islamic revolution – one of the principals of Ayatollah Khomeini in early 1980s. What is happening now is not the export of the revolution, but tensions and political crisis which are the outcome; reactions and fear of the future rather than having a brave political program. The policy of sending troubles abroad is one step back compared to the export of revolution.

History shows that development is not always a forward movement; it is sometimes a backward one. For instance, the winning of Germany's social party in 1932 which later paved the way for the accession to power of the Nazis thus

leading to World War II. Or the winning of the Islamists in the general elections in Algeria and the ensuing fighting in 1992 that continued for several years. Democracy and revolutions pave the way for the emergence of new forces that drive the country to destruction and hell. The policy of exporting revolution by Iran in 1979 was one step back in the political movements of the nations of the Middle East, and the establishment of an Islamic regime another step back. Unfortunately, this region of ours is too good at taking steps backwards in politics!

In the 1950s and 1960s, the political movements of the nations in the region were transformed from national movements to left-wing and democratic movements - more advanced levels of political movement than the national movement which in turn is a more advanced level than the religious movement. As we saw, the accession of Islam to power in Iran was a major step backward in politics that reversed and destroyed all the aspects of political life, not only in Iran but in the whole region.

The religious movement is also a more advanced level of political movement than the sectarian movement. What happened in the 2009 elections in Iran was a sectarian movement coming to power, the result and purpose of which was only to reverse the political movement of the Middle East. Now the Islamic republic of Iran is busy exporting crises rather than with revolution and is carelessly meddling with the internal affairs of the countries in the region. Two months ago, Ahmedinejad went on a trip to Lebanon which no official would do if he was not looking to create trouble.

Or take for example what is happening in Yemen, Bahrain, Kuwait or Saudi Arabia with its small community of 4 million Shias, sitting on a volcano which might erupt at any moment.

As I said earlier, this so-called Islamic revolution in Iran has twice marred the political movement of the nations of the area: First it changed the movement from left-wing and democratic to a religious movement, and in the second stage it changed the religious movement to a sectarian one.

If you visit Egypt for several days, you will see clearly that there are two extremes there: a despotic power controlling security, media and government led by the ruling party, and a fiery public full of pessimistic ignorant Muslim Brotherhood adherents. "If those people get to power, what a disaster it would be" I thought to myself when I saw that. Of course the manipulations in the general elections in Egypt prevented radical Sunni extremists from holding their grip on power in contrast to the radical Shia Muslims in power in Iran, or otherwise a new crisis would have popped up and the tension in this region would narrow down to one point: the long-rooted dispute between Shias and Sunnis.

The United States has planned for the conflict of the Shias and Sunnis in the region so that the Arab-Israel issue, which is the biggest issue of the region, is replaced by a second issue between the Sunni and Shia Muslims. Of course, in the coming years the question of "who killed Hussein (Prophet Mohammed's grandson)?" will come into the spotlight more sharply than questions of nationalism or democracy and will

spark World War III, the count down for which was only temporarily delayed by Egypt's manipulation of the election results.

Wednesday, December 22nd 2010

Freedom is responsibility

Law is the organization of the relationship between two parties to be able to continue to coexist, without allowing either of them to exceed the limits of their powers and encroach on the powers of the other, or to allow one to evade their duties and responsibilities regarding the rights of the other. This is one of the definitions of the law. There is also another definition: law is the product of the social and economic reality of a historical period, and a mirror reflecting the image of society. There is no doubt that the law of a particular time in a particular society is not appropriate for the same society in a different time. Laws must be reformed to adapt to the changes required by a new life in society. The law of a democratic society is more just than that of another society where the powerful and the ordinary are not equal in duties and rights. Even in a democratic society, where there is transition of power from time to time, laws constantly change to meet new needs.

Kurdistan is not an independent state that can be careless about its neighbors and act on its own free will, as it does not have a Kurdish army or armed forces that can stand in the line of attacks or even threats or harassments. Moreover, Kurdistan does not have a strong economy. The political situation of Kurdistan is like a freshly laid egg with a fragile

shell. Acting in an irresponsible manner could disrupt the current stability or even cause a major crisis with too high a price to pay. This situation is obvious to any citizen in Kurdistan, but what is astonishing is that the Kurdish media and opposition are calling for that which is out of this framework or that would impose upon the region that which is beyond its capacity.

Whatever law that has been passed by the parliament of the Kurdistan Region is the outcome of the political, economical and social situations of our society not those of another society living in a different situation. Of course, the principles of human freedoms are the same everywhere, there is no compromise on this, but each country's circumstances must be reflected in its own laws or else the situation will be much like the case of the hen that tries to lay an egg the size of a goose egg, the result of which is nothing but self-harm. Besides, the political powers of Kurdistan - the parliament, the government and the president of the region - came to power through general elections. In such a society, the basis of the relationship between the people and power is confidence which, if lost, means that the ruling parties can not expect to win again in the next elections. Therefore, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) is obliged to take into account, in all its laws and guidelines, the balance between its own rights and the rights of its people in order to maintain that trust.

Today, I read the first page of a daily newspaper stating that the Kurdistan parliament rejected by a majority vote to discuss a law that prohibits prostitution in Kurdistan. This is

what is expected from the parliament elected by the people, and it must pass laws aiming at a bright future for the region rather than returning it to underdevelopment. The same is true for the demonstrations law recently passed by the parliament. It is both trusted and approved. Demonstrations and rallies are constitutional rights and fundamental freedoms in any society, but this right must be regulated by a law. The demo law, in the opinion of many that I have met, has been carefully drafted without detracting from the right to demonstrate.

The opposition in Kurdistan is complaining that the law states that demonstrations can occur only after prior permission is granted by the authorities, describing it as a restriction of freedom. It says the right of the authorities should only be restricted to prior notice of any demonstrations, without having the right to reject them. The request of the opposition parties and the Kurdish media is irresponsible. They should be rejoicing at the fact that some freedoms, and especially political freedom, in our country are bound by conditions. Kurdistan is not swimming in space so that we no longer care what is happening on the ground. We are surrounded by Iran, Turkey and a number of Arab countries, where there are hundreds of differences. A demonstration of several hundred people in support of Kurdish demands in another part of greater Kurdistan, where the burning of Iranian or Turkish flags or any symbol of those countries like pictures of Imam Khomeini, or Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, for example, or raising pictures of Abdullah Öcalan (the imprisoned PKK leader), may cause headaches

for the KRG and for all of those freedoms with which we live.

The authorities in Kurdistan will not reject a request to demonstrate for the rights of factory workers, or the rights of farmers in disaster-hit villages, or to defend the rights of shanty town residents on the suburbs of a city, or even a demonstration against the instructions or the laws of a government that is opposed by the people. So I think opposing the demo law in the Kurdistan Region signed less than a month ago by the president is not what it appears to be. The Kurdish opposition should be ashamed of pushing the government into a crisis over such a matter. The government faces many shortcomings that the opposition and the free media should be pressing for solutions to, and I suspect that some of them, perhaps the majority of them, require demonstrations that may lead to acts of violence.

It is the opposition's right to struggle by all means to undermine the ruling party and take hold of the seat of power, but that should not be through exposing the country to danger. Freedom should be specific, especially political freedoms, and particularly in the case of the Kurdish community and the government of the Kurdistan Region, where thousands of threats lie in wait for them. America, despite its size and strength, prevented a few months ago a priest from burning the Quran for fear of entering a confrontation with Islam and the escalating terrorism in the world. How is it that a local government such as the KRG can be requested to lift all limitations and constraints on the freedom to demonstrate?

Tuesday, January 4th 2011

Kirkuk for Kurdistan – Part IV

In the eighties, whenever we came back from Baghdad to Kurdistan, all feelings of alienation would vanish when we saw the Hamrin mountain ranges, some 100km south of Kirkuk, where we felt at home. We would even imagine that the weather and the nature of the soil immediately changed. Here started the Kurdistan Region. Hamrin marks the boundaries of Kurdistan from the rest of Iraq, and from there begin the Kurdish villages and Kurdish life. Kurdish drivers working in the line of Baghdad, whenever passing from there at night and whenever they had the opportunity, would make piles of stone-like border markers. Those were brave drivers and they were risking their lives by doing so when Saddam Hussein's Baath Party was at the height of its power.

Those days, the struggle for Kirkuk was general among the Kurds, so was the issue of Kirkuk throughout history. All Kurdish citizens considered themselves responsible for the fate of Kirkuk and struggled in the process whenever they had the opportunity. Nowadays, many feelings and ideas have changed. How abhorrent it is to me when the Kirkuki Kurds express their thanks to me on an article I write for the sake of Kirkuk, saying you are working for our city, but I do not think of Kirkuk out of charity for the Kirkukis. Kirkuk is my concern and it should be everybody's concern.

The most beautiful thing I heard about Kirkuk was what Jalal Talabani (now President of Iraq) said about the city after the 1991 uprising: "Even if we give away Kirkuk, the Kurds in other parts (of greater Kurdistan) will not abandon it." This is true, because Kirkuk must be a public issue for all Kurds. This theme was echoed by young people back then in the slogan: "Hamrin or death."

But Kirkuk is no longer a public concern today. A few years ago, one of the magazines published by our organization (the Erbil-based Aras Publishers) did not sell the target number. And when we inquired into the reason for this, we found that it was because the cover article was about Kirkuk and nobody was interested in Kirkuk any more.

Intellectuals and ordinary citizens, even the Kirkuki Kurds themselves and Jalal Talabani have left this issue for one person: The President of the Kurdistan Region Massoud Barzani. There is no doubt that Barzani is proud of such a responsibility, and will be the last to give up Kirkuk, but when I look into the matter, I find that this is an erroneous way to deal with the issue, for the issue of Kirkuk must be a public responsibility, not a personal one. It must also be a social responsibility rather than just a political one.

In 1971, the former Iraqi regime hatched a plot to assassinate Idris Barzani, one of the talented sons of Mullah Mustafa Barzani. The plot failed by accident. Again in 1973, the Baath regime plotted to assassinate Barzani himself by sending a number of so-called mullahs, under the guidance of the expedition that also failed. The Peshmergas said at the

time: "That is it; the path of peace with the Baath is blocked" calling on Barzani to break the ceasefire and go to war with the Baath regime again. But he said: "I know we will not get to anything with these, and fighting will resume, but I do not want us to be fighting for me or for my son, but for a public cause such as Kirkuk." It seemed then that the Baath Party would not give Kirkuk back to Kurdistan, in any form, and that it was preparing to resume fighting. In the negotiations that followed the uprising in 1991, between the representatives of Kurdistan and the Iraqi government, it was Tariq Aziz, Saddam's deputy at the time, who told Kurdish negotiators that: "Kirkuk is gone, and you can not do anything for it. All you can do is cry when you pass it by on your way to Baghdad."

In 1974, fighting resumed between the Kurds and the Iraqi government and the 1970 Convention between them was broken. What ensued is well known; the tragedy of setback in the revolution, and then the departure of its leader. The disasters of the eighties all came as a result of the Kurds' unwillingness to give up Kirkuk. Kurds from across Iraq, even Christians and Turkmen who were involved in the revolution for the restoration of Kirkuk, were all aware that Kirkuk was the reason. Back then, Kirkuk was a public issue and it must be so today or otherwise it will go unheeded. Making Kirkuk the responsibility of everybody rather than the president alone has to be a mutual endeavor. I am sure that the dream of Barzani and his quest in life is to regain Kirkuk, but it is known that a public dream can not be made true by just one person.

In 1985, I met a young Kirkuki man in Baghdad. The young man had a fiancée from Erbil city. He was a florist, and visited Baghdad once every two weeks to buy flowers for his shop. We were young, and he was telling me about his fiancée; how they were constantly on the verge of building a married life. Once, he did not speak about his fiancée and when I asked him what had happened he replied, "we broke apart". "Why?!" I asked surprised. It was because the girl had to move her register of civil status to the Kirkuk Registry Office, which was impossible for a Kurd in those days even if it was for marriage. The Baath had planned to deport all Kurds from the city slowly. Entry was not allowed into Kirkuk; only leaving the city was permitted for them. That young man, whose name I have forgotten, abandoned his fiancée. I was astonished that "Kirkuk is dearer than the beloved!" To this day, I am still impressed by the sincerity and the struggle of that young Kurdish man. I wanted to talk to him about his fiancée but he did not allow me. Apparently, he had abandoned his sweetheart for good for the sake of Kirkuk.

The Kurds have not been able to achieve anything, neither in ancient or modern history. Its part has always been one of subjugation to the extent that one feels a collapse within all that fruitlessness. Today, this nation has had the chance to enter the track of contemporary life; it can not be nervous or start to build a modern history by giving up or such setbacks. Even if Kirkuk were not important, or its oil were not valuable, the blood that was shed and the days of our lives that passed struggling for Kirkuk should not have been in vain.

The Kurds generally arise quickly and calm down quickly. This is a tribal nature of short-sightedness. Many times, angered by this fact, I say to myself that the history of other nations is like a carving on stone which will not fade away, while the history of my people, unfortunately, is like a drawing on water which will wash away before any mark is made.

Saturday, January 8th 2011

Kirkuk for Kurdistan – V

The protests in Tunisia have finally managed to oust a regime in which no light of democracy could be perceived. There is an ongoing vote in southern Sudan for secession from an iron-fisted regime that destroys life in the name of Islam. I wish to see the same for us Kurds to liberate us from those who show no light of democracy and from those who want to thwart our newborn freedom. I have always supported coexistence and prefer a democratic Iraq to a secluded Kurdistan under sanctions. This is what we sacrificed for, but unfortunately this dream of mine and thousands of my generation is dying out. Democracy can not be established by a bunch of leaders who every day take away from us some more of the freedoms that people had even during the time of Saddam Hussein. The latest news from Iraq indicates that those leaders are planning to establish a country copied on the Islamic model of Iran.

Experience has shown that democracy for multiethnic nations in this part of the world is not viable. After the fall of the socialist bloc in the 1990s, the multiethnic nations broke apart and were divided into their ethnic groups. Some countries were divided into two, some into more parts. The Soviet Union was divided into several nations based on different ethnicities. We can not live in a dream and imagine that

the Arabs and Kurds of Iraq can provide an exception.

The secession of the Kurds from Iraq is not so impossible to be afraid of. The new world order now tolerates secession without any problems. It is no longer the time of the cold war to measure everything on an international scale. Today, nations can decide to separate if they have the will to do so. In our case, there is only one problem – separation from Kirkuk. Kirkuk is still part of the federal Iraq and not Kurdistan, both geographically and constitutionally. For Kurdistan, to be able to secede from Iraq – with Kirkuk as part of it – we can not think of a solution other than peaceful or political means. Kurds no longer have the chance of winning Kirkuk by fighting, and an independent Kurdistan is worth nothing without Kirkuk. The issue of Kirkuk is not only that it is in the palm of the ogre; the real issue is that there are many ogres in Kurdistan who prevent the Kurdish government and the people of Kurdistan from taking on the restoration of Kirkuk.

The Kurdish public is not united. The will of the people of Kurdistan is divided and chaotic. The Sulaimaniyah region can be said to be separate from the Kurdistan Region in terms of administration and willpower. The opposition which has laid eggs in this city has twisted the public opinion of the city from the strategic issues to some marginal and secondary issues. A chaotic media in the name of the free press is filling the minds of the people day and night with tales that drive them away from the main issue of Kirkuk.

Meanwhile, the political Islamic movement is busy with

undermining the current state of Kurdistan. They waste not even a second to destroy the current situation. A few days ago, I learned that the former Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) Minister of Justice, from the Kurdistan Islamic Union (KIU), had appointed during his term many prosecutor generals from his party adherents so that they can emphasize all Islamic and KIU-related causes. Words can not express the situation of the media and mosques associated with these groups. They have developed a new generation like an army ready to revolt against Kurdistan at any moment. Besides, there is some sort of anarchy in our administration that makes Erbil no less dangerous for the future than Sulaimaniyah. The publication of some pages of poetry in Erbil recently provoked mullahs like wasps, some of whom have the power to do anything. If permitted they will repeat the role of the "Mullah of Khate" – a historical figure known for advising the ruler of a Kurdish emirate to surrender to the Ottoman Empire because they should not fight Muslims, but the ruler was executed upon surrender. In short, Erbil is in the hands of the mullahs. Contrary to real mullahs who care about the concerns of society, these mullahs serve foreign agendas alien to Kurdish society and destroy Kurdish unity.

Alongside all this anarchy, the mess in our government institutions just adds to the chaos. In these conditions, Kirkuk will never be restored to Kurdistan. Today, Kurdistan is bleeding like a wounded body. Not only Kirkuk but all that has been achieved so far is in danger. I can not fight on all fronts for all these issues. My duty is to analyze the situation

and leave it for the officials above.

The demonstrations in Tunisia for freedom and the vote in Sudan for secession are happy dreams, but wishful thinking for us Kurds with this weak government which can not solve the merest issue. For the Kurds, it is totally impossible to restore Kirkuk in the current circumstances. The problem in this country is that it is not clear who is the one to turn to when problems arise. The region's president can not be consulted for every issue, large or small.

Another problem is that the common slate of society is being pounded by an aggressive and irresponsible media in Sulaimaniyah supported by a chaotic opposition in addition to a bunch of ignorant preachers in Erbil who are all part of the remnants of the former Iraqi regime. Every day, this common slate is breaking apart. And the party-affiliated media never reports any truth. It is like someone being paralyzed by a brain stroke whose brain and thought is dead and only his stomach is working. It is all obvious where the journey will end among these ignorant and aggressive people.

The dream of an independent Kurdistan and liberation from despotism and oppression, for anyone who cares about this dream, starts with the liberation of Sulaimaniyah and the restoration of Kirkuk. This is not an agenda for anybody or any actor, let nobody fear, this is just for those like me who happily dream. But before this happy dream can come true, there is another step to take: the healing of the wound that the ignorant have made in the hearts of the people of Erbil.

Wednesday, January 19th 2011

Sacrificing for memory

I will enjoin my voice to that of the Libyan leader Muammar Qaddafi who said the Tunisian people were too hasty in toppling the dictator Zainal Abidin Ben Ali. I too think they were too hasty, but the difference between my view and his is that he is concerned for his own fate fearing that the fire of the demonstrations in Tunisia may reach his tent and he too will be toppled in a popular uprising. But my concern is for the Tunisian people, lest their revolution should miscarry in this haste and be in vain.

The Tunisian uprising raised two points for the nations of the region: the dictatorship systems of Arab and Muslim nations are founded on very weak basis which can easily be toppled by the smallest movement if someday the people will do so. These systems are maintained by the economic interests of a bunch of family members and relatives of the president and are not founded on strong ideological and political plans difficult to be dislodged. The second fact is that dictators in this region have not allowed their people to create alternatives for the day they want to change the political system. This is the biggest sorrow and disease that the nations of the area will suffer from in the coming decades.

The Arab and Muslim nations from Morocco to Pakistan are now all ears to hear where the Tunisian people's revolu-

tion will lead, and they all wonder, what is next? Here the revolution has begun and there the president is ousted, but what is the alternative? Obviously, the undemocratic systems in the developing countries hide numerous alternatives in the heart of their country for the times when they face toppling. In these systems, the entire political, cultural movements of the country assimilate to the authorities and become a copy. The way of administration and the looting of the national resources becomes a generally accepted practice. The policies of unilateral rule become a formal culture, oppression and restriction of freedoms to mass killings and mass graves for the decedents will all be repeated. Did all these things not happen in the new Iraq after the Saddam era? Even our Kurdistan Region was no exception for some time after the 1991 uprising.

Therefore, I say, if the same revolution of Tunisia is repeated in Egypt, Jordan, Yemen, Algeria or Syria and the ruling families are ousted, the same questions and the same answers are repeated: Now what? What is next? As the Kurdish saying goes "the worse comes after". This will make man jolt at thinking of uprising and change. Alternatives to the toppled systems are worse. The leader of Libya is right; the ousting of Ben Ali was hasty, because there is no clear alternative. In the best conditions, in all the countries I mentioned, political Islamism in all its moderate, extremist and lenient forms is lying in wait with the same tools of oppression for an opportunity to restrict even the minor freedoms that there were during the former systems.

In this region of Arabs and Muslims, the party calling it-

self the opposition, in old and modern times, has been and is part of the dictatorship. It is no different from the ruling dictatorship in terms of ideology and forms of governance; in fact, it is much more destructive than the ruler. The only thing that distinguishes it from the ruling regime is that the ruling party is sitting in the seat of power while the opposition is on the ground. In this part of the world, the authorities and the opposition are like facing mirrors in a barber's shop, they reflect each other. If this so-called opposition accedes to power like the accession of the Baath Party to power twice, in 1963 and 1968, then we will have to say alas for the first ruler. Our Kurdistan is no exception to this. The Kurdish opposition stems from the heart of the Kurdish power and is the same case of the mirrors and the reflection, or it is the case of the Islamic movement which stems from a source alien to the history and will of the Kurdish people.

To put it in a nut shell, the nations of the region are backward in politics. They do not have alternatives to their previous regimes or at least alternatives not worse than their previous regimes, not only because the powers prepare their own alternatives for the times of difficulty, but also because the middle classes which are required to lead the lower slates of society, are a futile slate. The middle classes are either letting the sleeping dogs lie and are politically inactive, or in the best conditions of political involvement, are hypocrites and subject to the powerful slate and part of the oppression and persecution machine.

What is the solution then? Either the middle class has to engender suitable political alternatives to hold the power,

which in the current circumstances is far from our hopes and expectations, or the nations of this region have to carry on civil struggles to voice their daily demands: a piece of bread and some freedom. We should keep it in mind that civil struggle produces the best alternative. The experience of Iraq is more of an example than that of Tunisia to learn a lesson from. None of those leaders who lived abroad and are now in the republican palaces, or those who grew up with the former regime, are different from the old regime but much worse. The Iraqis have to start it all over to change and provide a better alternative through civilized struggle, not destruction.

The people of Tunisia, fueled by hunger and unemployment, took to the streets and drove the dictator out of the country without having a political plan. It all started from the self-immolation of a young man and quickly developed into rallies that led to dozens of deaths and hundreds of injuries. But what is the result? The former regime's leaders are now in power again and after two months you will see how they will climb back to power with a new look in the elections and it will all be the same old story of oppression and persecution once again. In my view, the people of the region, as Qaddafi says, should not make haste in changing their systems while they do not have alternatives. Demanding a piece of bread and some freedom is much better. Let them think a lot about alternatives, or else the memory of sacrifice will be all they gain.

Thursday, January 20th 2011

Kirkuk for Kurdistan – VI

Not only are the Turkmen wrong in their attitude towards the Kurdish issue in Iraqi Kurdistan, in particular concerning the issue of Kirkuk, but also the Kurds themselves. The Kurds reject the Turkmen in Iraq's political process and do not appreciate them truly. We should criticize ourselves before attacking others. And when calling for our rights, we should not overlook the rights of others. The Turkmen are the third major ethnic group in Iraq after the Kurds, and the second largest group in the Kurdistan Region. The lack of accurate statistics prevents me from citing a specific figure for the Turkmen population in Kurdistan. Iraqi regimes, since the establishment of the Iraqi state in the 1920s, have not paid any attention to the Turkmen. Throughout this period, the Iraqi regimes may have granted the Kurds some symbolic rights, but completely deprived the Turkmen even of those. When the regime of Saddam Hussein decided to change the demography of Kirkuk, like the Kurds, the Turkmen were also the victims of injustice. These are facts that can not be denied.

The largest ethnic group has to be open-minded and compassionate towards the smaller ethnic groups. The smaller groups are less broad-minded and have narrower perceptions, treating every single groan by the larger group with suspicion and doubt. Kurdistan's partisan media, when han-

dling the issue of Kirkuk, speaks only of the sacrifices and struggles of the Kurds for the sake of Kirkuk. There is no doubt that this raises the ire of the Turkmen. Even the Kurdistan identity of Kirkuk (Kirkuk being part of Kurdistan), which is frequently circulated (by the Kurdish media politicians), includes vague references to the fate of the Turkmen in the city. These terms must be given in-depth explanation and analysis that provides the Turkmen with assurances for their future. Principally, we must accept the Turkmen, and consider them as real partners and not just refer to them superficially in speeches. This is true democracy if we are serious about it. For the Turkmen, there is no clear image of the Kurdish political system in the case of secession from Iraq with Kirkuk as part of it.

Recently, in a meeting with students, the president of the Kurdistan Region suggested that the position of vice president to Kurdistan be an ethnic Turkman in the next presidential term if Kirkuk were to be incorporated back into the Kurdistan Region. I felt very comfortable about this openness and this transparency. It is true that the Turkmen in Kurdistan are no different from the Kurds in any respect, and they are involved in the administrative structure of the region at all levels, and they have cultural and media rights in addition to the right to education in their own language. If there are shortcomings, it is in a general context. But the rights of people can not be limited to participation in the management of the country and in their access to cultural rights; the real proof of the availability of national rights to the people is the extent of the people's participation in governance policy. Therefore, a Turkman vice president, or dep-

uty prime minister in Kurdistan, in addition to several other ministerial portfolios, would be a step in the right direction. We must not forget that small groups like to get a little more than they merit in order to guarantee their right of participation, and this psychological state can not be changed. This is true in our case, the case of the Iraqi Kurds.

With these views, I am not saying that Kirkuk would not be incorporated into Kurdistan without the Turkmen, neither is the recognition of their rights in Kurdistan designed to make them vote for the Kurdistan identity of Kirkuk, for that would be a naive way of dealing with the Turkmen. They are too wise to sell this historic position cheaply to the Kurds whom they do not trust. What I see is that a genuine democratic system in Kurdistan will not be achieved without the active participation of the Turkmen, as well as the active participation of Christians, Yazidis and all of the various groups. Not long ago, on the way to Sulaimaniyah with a number of friends, we came across the great Turkmen author Atta Terzi Bashi of Kirkuk. Terzi Bashi has written a book about Sheik Raza Talabani - a Kurdish poet - in the Turkmeneli language, and we wanted to request the right to translate the book into Kurdish. Bashi's tone was apparent acrimony in talking to us despite blessing us with his hospitality. I do not regret the visit; on the contrary, I was pleased to get to know the position of a Kirkuki Turkman, especially as Terzi Bashi felt at that meeting that he was engaged in a dialogue with an important Kurdish political party. Terzi Bashi talked to me a little, he spoke mostly in Turkmeneli language with my friends, but then turned to me and asked in Kurdish: "You want to annex Kirkuk to Erbil?".

"Yes", I answered, "what is wrong with that?". "But who will govern it?" he asked, and I replied "the one for whom the people vote" and we did not say any more about it.

Our dialogue was brief and descriptive. He wanted to voice the Turkmen concerns, and I assured him of the Kurdish guarantees. But this subject demands further discussion. I believe that the Turkmen are part of the people of Kurdistan. Wherever they are in Iraq, the Turkmen, like the Christians and Armenians, are part of the people of Kurdistan - which throughout history has been home to peoples and religions. This has to be cited in the preamble to every Kurdish policy. Whether Turkmen, Christian or whatever, they did not find in Iraq something to stick to, but Kurdistan was a historic home for all.

There is however another problem that is affecting the Turkmen. The areas where they live are divided and not connected. Therefore the return of Kirkuk to Kurdistan alone will not benefit the Turkmen. The Kurds' Turkmen policy has to be broader. There are many other areas we should struggle for side by side with the Turkmen to incorporate all the areas into the Kurdistan Region where the Turkmen can establish with the Kurds a system of coexistence no matter what the system be called. I have no doubt that the Turkmen will benefit from the future partnership with the Kurds, but that partnership must be clear from now. This would be the raising agent in this region for democracy – which is not a unique concern of the Turkmen, the Christians and others, but also the Kurds.

Saturday, February 12th 2011

Dictator Nouri al-Maliki

Any two people do not disagree that having issues with Baghdad is not good for the Kurdistan Region, in particular in these current risky circumstances that the Middle East is undergoing. And any two people do not disagree that for the first time in history the Kurdish issue in Iraq is heading towards a solution. A huge budget also flows in to the region, though the budget is the rightful entitlement of Kurdistan from the Iraqi budget. Part of the budget comes from the region's own sources of income. And thanks to the harmony and peace that we have in Kurdistan, we are building our region and are heading towards an advanced stage. Apart from all that, for the first time in history Kurds are part of the authority in Baghdad.

The above statements are true. But it is also true that the situations in Baghdad raise our concerns and worries day after day. Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's authorities in his two terms in office have not taken a single step towards democracy. On the contrary, it is quite obvious that the man has chosen dictatorship. We Iraqis know very well how a dictator rises: self-arm, control of income, neglecting the rights of others and not making efforts to provide basic services like water, electricity and other stuff, are all signs. During the Arab summit in Baghdad last month, we found out that if the authorities wanted to maintain security in Iraq

they would have long ago done that to prevent the bleeding of Iraq. Maliki is becoming a dictator in broad daylight. If he tried to control the Kurdistan Region's share of the budget today, he would definitely attack it with his army tomorrow.

No ethnic or religious group in Iraq benefits from the rise of a new dictator. Even the Shiite brothers, who form two thirds of Iraq - and Nouri al-Maliki is one of them - do not wish that. It was just yesterday that Saddam Hussein fell. Iraqi Sunni Arabs got nothing from or after his rule other than agony. The Sunni Arab areas in Iraq are considered to be the most backward areas in Iraq these days. Therefore, I emphasize that the rise of dictatorships in Iraq is not in the interest of anybody.

It is the Kurds' right to try to develop the democracy that was brought about after the fall of Saddam's regime in Iraq. It is also a duty on the Kurds to do so because the Kurdish political movement in Iraq throughout the 20th century has been leading the democracy movement in Iraq. President Massoud Barzani has spent most of his life in this Kurdish political movement and has more responsibility than any other Kurdish leader in facing dictatorship in Iraq. Despite being the president of the Kurdistan Region and someone who speaks and acts for all Kurds, Massoud Barzani has also gained the trust of Iraqis as one of the symbols of Iraqi patriotic struggle.

Barzani's defense of Vice President Tareq al-Hashemi is not protection of some accused man, as some people think. The issue is bigger than just the case of an accused person.

The president is responsible for the laws and a constitution that he has sworn to protect, and these laws and constitution have come for building a democratic country and society.

Nouri al-Maliki's authorities and the media close to him want to mispresent the issue to the Iraqis. It is regrettable that sometimes the Kurdish media, out of short-sightedness and ignorance, fall prey to them. Nobody will defend Tareq al-Hashemi if he is guilty, for which he will be punished someday. Saddam Hussein did not get away with his crimes, so who is Hashemi to get away? But the issue between Baghdad and Erbil is a bigger one and it has to be seen as it is. The re-emergence of dictatorship will take us back to the first point.

I hereby support Barzani's position. The president has to settle the issues with Maliki here and now before he becomes a dictator who is out of control. The budget that comes from Baghdad is Kurdistan's own rightful income. Baghdad does not recognize Kurdistan's oil and gas law, Baghdad does not approve of the Kurdistan Region having Peshmarga forces, it does not support the idea of Kurdistan having its own independent sources of income, it does not approve of the disputed areas, which Saddam Hussein occupied by force, being incorporated back into the Kurdistan Region. These rights of the Kurdistan Region have all been stated in the Iraqi Constitution. The Prime Minister behaves in a way as if all others beg at his door.

Maliki is buying weapons to build a large arsenal. For whom is he building it? Of course to use it against Iraqis, not

anyone else. We should remember that the Middle East is stepping into a very big conflict. The Iraq-Turkey conflict in this time of the weakness of the Arab forces is a conquest conflict for control of land and water of the region. This is a historic conflict between Shiite and Sunni Islam, the emergence of which dates back some 500 years.

Kurds are not part of the sectarian conflict. They have national and social issues. Kurds struggle for national rights and the removal of social injustice. As the region is heading towards sectarian conflict day after day, they will treat Kurds as Sunnis (being mainly followers of the Sunni faith) even if they do not want to behave like Sunnis in the conflict. This is a risky future for all the Iraqis who have been for decades oppressed by dictatorships from Erbil to Basra. Therefore, Iraqis from Erbil to Basra have to be standing behind Barzani in his efforts to block the rise of dictatorship again. The people of Iraq from Erbil to Basra need a contemporary life so that they can live in safety and prosperity on their land, rather than return to narrow nationalist slogans and sectarian mindsets.

Wednesday, April 18th 2012

The final story: Aknews stopped

AKnews is closing down. In fact, it has completely stopped publishing at this very moment that I am writing these words. This is the most important statement in this article, but please bear with me and give me a few minutes of your time to read it all.

I have worked in many cultural and media organizations in my life and established many of these organizations by myself. But among all the organizations I established, I was most pleased with Kurdistan News Agency (AKnews). I believed AKnews, more than any others, could serve the message that I carried since an early age: the liberation of my country from oppression, building a prosperous and free society. Of course this was not only my message, but of the political movement in which I spent my life, too.

AKnews was a completely independent news agency. During four years of operation, we at AKnews, never for a moment allowed bias towards a particular political actor – unless of course something slipped by mistake. In a country that is full of narrow minded political conflicts, where everything is measured against narrow political and partisan standards, it is very difficult if not impossible to work as independently as AKnews did. This is the best evidence of AKnews' success. Perhaps not now, but one day Kurdish

journalists will be very proud of the independence and professionalism of AKnews. Of course you could criticize the quality, the level of detail and information, of our news articles – and for this I might sometimes agree with you – but that's more of a general case in the country. No one had access to original sources of information and news as much as AKnews did. It was a great honor that AKnews decided, and stayed committed to it, that it would not run stories that did not have reliable sources even if their truth was beyond question, while there were tons of stories on the Kurdish media that had no sources, and even stories that were made up.

Those who had their own narrow interests other than the public good may claim that "AKnews was weak" as a media organization. But an honest man who does not have any interests in the media wouldn't say that. Besides, the closure of AKnews had nothing to do with weakness and it certainly did not have anything to do with lack of funds alone. There are other reasons that I can mention some here.

First: Apparently it is not time, yet, for an independent news agency for Kurdistan of today. None of the neighboring countries have one either, not even Turkey which is relatively the only country in this region of ours to be considered the most open and the most democratic country.

Second: The existence of an independent new agency was not in the interest of any party in Kurdistan Region. It has been a week now that AKnews has stopped publishing, but no parliamentarian, no minister, no intellectual, and no chief editor in this region bothered to ask what was going on.

Even four years ago when AKnews had just started publishing, the Kurdish media kept a distance from AKnews and did not give a damn about publishing AKnews' stories. After a while from launch, however, the Kurdish media was all over AKnews and they gave no credit to AKnews for the stories they looted and stole from it. I always asked our staff to "never mind it". " What is important is that independent news is accessible to the Kurdish media, now, even if they do not give us credit it is ok" I would say. There were days when one single news outlet would publish 15 AKnews stories without even giving AKnews credit for them and we did not care.

Third: Despite the dishonesty of the Kurdish media, a large number of the leaders of that media exerted all their efforts to blur the image of AKnews. I did not care about that either, nor did I try to guard AKnews against it. That was, to me, a test: will the officials in Kurdistan Region listen to only one side in order to conclude an independent and authentic evaluation? The answer to this was "Yes" and this is evidence enough that Kurdistan still has a long way to go to reach a professional level.

Four years ago, it was impossible for AKnews to immediately sell its services at the time it was established. Media organizations in this part of the world do not have their own income; all of them receive funds, especially when a respectable news agency is not ready to run baseless and made-up stories with which the majority of people are obsessed. Our goal was to provide as many independent and professional stories as possible for the local as well as inter-

national readers. We succeeded in that, no one could tell otherwise. Thousands of our stories were on the pages of foreign newspapers all over the world. We were the most truthful news outlet in Iraq where the voice of truth is scarcely heard.

I will get back to the main point that AKnews has stopped. For the record I want to say something here: It was I who decided to close down AKnews, because there was no contract between AKnews and the financier. And neither the parliament nor the government bothered to pass a law under which cultural and media organizations, among them AKnews and Aras Publishers, would be funded in a transparent way. I took this request everywhere over the past two years. I also met with the majority of the managers of the media channels in Kurdistan, shared views with them, and asked them to work together so that the government will allocate an annual budget for educational and media sectors in this way. Culture and media are no different, when it comes to public service, from health and education sectors. We are a country that has just recovered from a fallen social system into a free market system. We need a lot of time before the media can depend on its income to continue. Unfortunately, I said a lot about this over the past two years but received very little positive responses, even from chief editors. Never mind, let them never listen, today AKnews and Aras Publishers fall and tomorrow will come their turn.

The cutting of funds from AKnews and Aras Publishers is not a wrongdoing, please no one consider it that way. It was the correction of a wrong. A financial support that is not or-

ganized by law is wrong. Now I feel more comfortable, and am not sad about it. The image of the shutdown of AKnews and the Kurdish media to me is like that of a baby child who is just learning how to walk. The baby falls many times, but will eventually be able to walk straight. This is how I see the future of the Kurdish media.

Last words: hundreds of journalists, reporters or editors, were made at AKnews who learned how to work professionally. Most of them left AKnews with eyes full of tears. I thank them from the bottom of my heart for their loyalty for the honest job we did; professional journalism. I have no doubt that wherever these people go they will keep the experience they learned from AKnews and will build on that to preserve the memory and spirit of AKnews alive forever.

Saturday, September 30th 2012

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