

# Kurdistan Chronicle



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## Celebrating March Milestones



March represents a momentous month for the Kurds, a time to commemorate both triumphs and tribulations. This year, there has been an unprecedented surge of foreign diplomatic visits to the Kurdistan Region's capital city of Erbil. In recent weeks, delegations from Europe, the United States, and Asia have all traveled to Erbil to meet with government officials – a clear sign that Kurdistan's strategic importance on the global stage is growing.

March also marks the anniversaries of both the birth and passing of the legendary Mustafa Barzani. Barzani was an iconic and beloved figure who led his people to unprecedented victories in the 20th century. His legacy lives on through his most significant accomplishment - the March 11 Agreement of 1970, which secured important rights for Kurdish citizens. It clearly has been one of Kurdistan's greatest achievements in its history. Due to the Algiers March 1975 agreement between Iran's Reza Shah and Iraq's Saddam Hussein, the March 11 Agreement of 1970 agreement was discarded

Tragically, thirteen years later, on March 16, 1988, Hussein unleashed a deadly gas attack on the city of Halabja, killing over 5,000 civilians and leaving 10,000 others with lifelong injuries. Despite these painful memories, March also brings celebrations: the Newroz holiday – the Kurdish New Year – and the anniversary of the 1991 uprising that proved a turning point for Kurdish autonomy.

Some of the high-profile officials who have recently visited Erbil include the United Kingdom's Minister for Middle East and North Africa Affairs, the Secretary General of the United Nations, the US Secretary of Defense, the German Foreign Minister, delegation from the European Union and the Chinese Communist Party. The diplomatic activity in Erbil is indicative of a wider shift in global power dynamics, as nations seek to establish new alliances and forge strategic partnerships outside of the traditional agenda.

China is also making its presence felt by authorizing Chinese banks to provide support for investment projects in Iraq and the Kurdistan Region – an indication that Beijing seeks greater influence over the Middle East and North Africa. The recent developments in Erbil serve as a powerful reminder that “Kurdistan Still Matters” and cannot be overlooked as countries search for new partners in the region.

Visiting delegations to Erbil have expressed respect and admiration for the Kurdistan Region's progress, noting its leadership role in human rights, gender equality, reform initiatives, and social and economic development. This underscores why engagement between Kurdistan and international actors is essential to navigating an ever-changing geopolitical landscape. The Kurdistan Region's busy March calendar and the recent uptick in diplomatic visits, as well as the consistent message of support for “a strong Kurdistan within Iraq” offer hope for a brighter future. Ultimately, these positive developments could lead to greater stability and prosperity in the region, as well as improved relations between Kurds and other Iraqis. ■



Kurdistan News

# TIMELINE

MARCH 2023

- Mar. 01** This year marks 44th anniversary of the Kurdish leader's passing. Kurdistan honored Legendary Mulla Mustafa Barzani
- Mar. 01** Lord Ahmad, the Minister of State for the Middle East, North Africa, South Asia and United Nations at the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) met with top Kurdish officials in the Kurdistan Region Capital.
- Mar. 01** Top UK Delegation in Erbil
- Mar. 01** PM Masrour Barzani and Ambassador Elbrus Kutrashev discussed regional developments. Russian Ambassador Visited Erbil
- Mar. 02** UNSG António Guterres Visited in Erbil. "Kurdistan holds a special place in my heart," United Nations Secretary-General António Guterressaid during his visit to Erbil.
- Mar. 03** Major General Matthew McFarlane, the Commander of the International Coalition forces in Iraq and Syria, discussed Peshmerga reforms with the Kurdish officials in Erbil. US-led Coalition Commander Visited Erbil
- Mar. 05** People of Kurdistan Marked 32nd Anniversary of Kurdistan Uprising. In 1991, the people of Kurdistan united to rise up against Saddam Hussein's Baath regime.
- Mar. 08** Secretary Lloyd Austin reaffirmed Washington's support for the Kurdistan Region and called Peshmerga war against ISIS an "invaluable contribution". US Defense Secretary Visited Erbil
- Mar. 08** Kurdistan Celebrated International Women's Day. "Women in Kurdistan are leaders, trailblazers, and change-makers," PM Masrour Barzani said.
- Mar. 08** "I hope this MoU would be helpful for the data collected to identify the issues and hurdles of women," PM Masrour Barzani said. KRG and UN Women Agency Signed MoU.
- Mar. 08** Italian Ambassador Met with Kurdish Leaders. Ambassador Maurizio Greganti commended the KRG for its ongoing reforms.
- Mar. 08** PM Masrour Barzani requested the Kurdistan Region to be considered for an associate member status in UNESCO. UNESCO Top Delegation Visited Erbil
- Mar. 08** Top Delegation from EU Parliament Visit Kurdistan Capital. The delegation discussed with PM Barzani the bilateral ties, KRG reforms, upcoming elections, and Erbil-Baghdad relations.
- Mar. 11** On this date in 1970, Iraq finally agreed to grant the Kurds some degree of autonomy for the first time. Kurdistan Marks March 11 Agreement Anniversary
- Mar. 13** Swedish Ambassador Visited Erbil. Swedish Ambassador Jessica Svardstrom visited Erbil where she met with top Kurdish officials.
- Mar. 14** Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani arrived in Erbil and held separate meetings with top Kurdish officials. Iraqi Prime Minister Visited Kurdistan



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**A 35-Year  
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# Erbil International Book Fair

8-18 March 2023

President Masoud Barzani at the Erbil International Book fair.

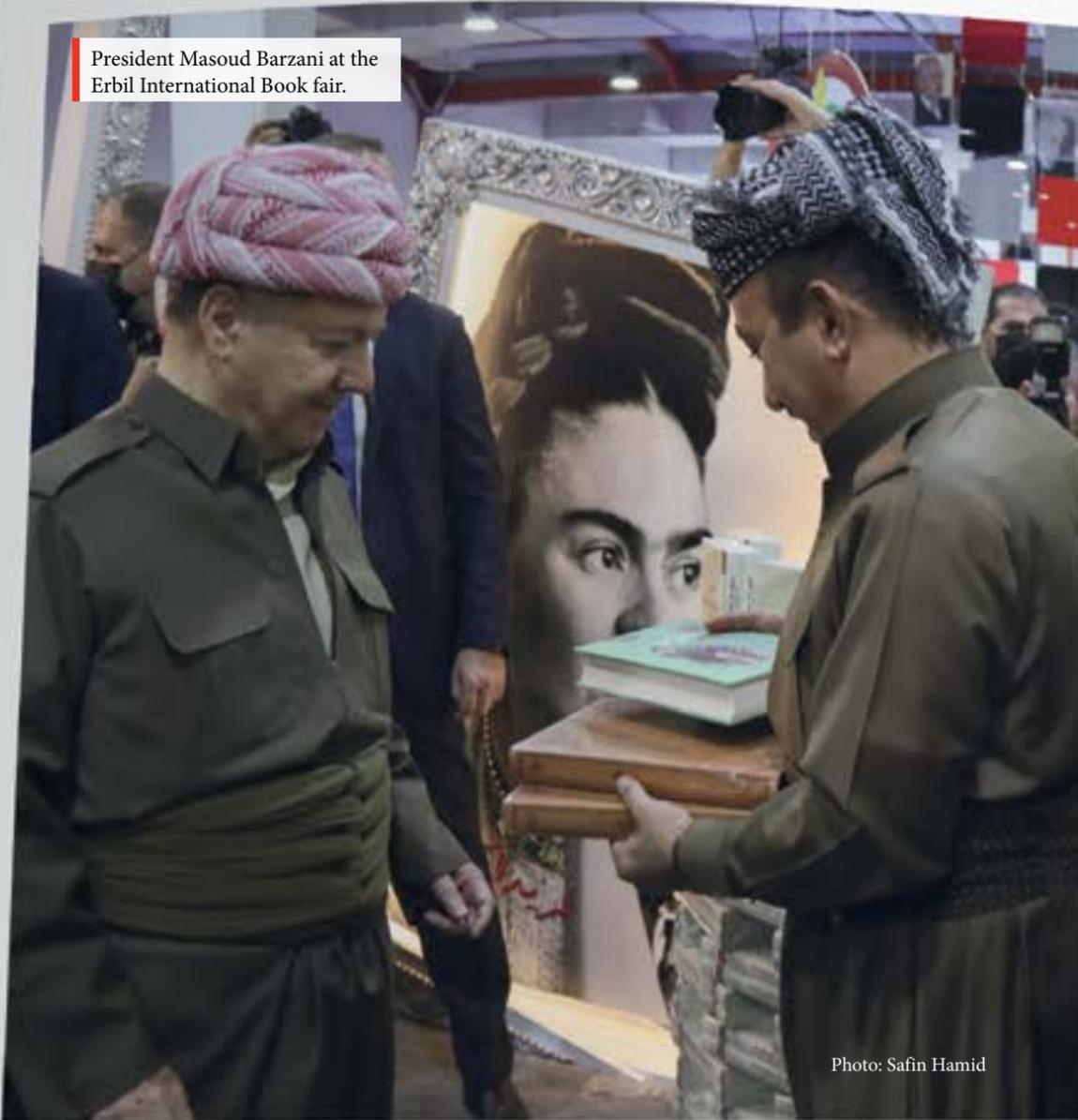
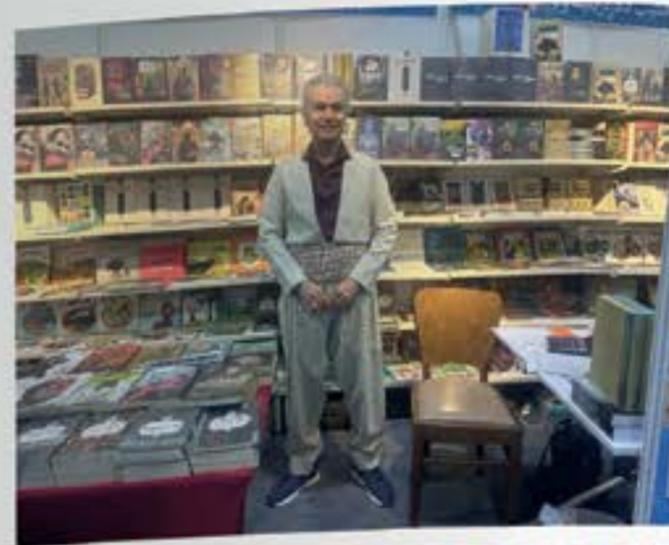


Photo: Safin Hamid



[www.erbilbookfair.com](http://www.erbilbookfair.com)

## KRI's Global Engagement Highlights from MSC

### Kurdistan Chronicle

The participation of the Kurdistan Region President Nechirvan Barzani at the Munich Security Conference (MSC) was a timely opportunity to share the Kurdistan Region of Iraq's (KRI) perspective on compounding global threats, and to highlight the challenges and opportunities facing the KRI and Iraq.

The Kurdistan Region President Nechirvan Barzani's agenda included a number of topics but his three priority issues were security, climate change, and energy

### Security

One the sidelines of the MSC, the President reiterated to the KRI's partners, including the top American and British diplomats, his unequivocal commitment to tackle common security challenges as well as to advance and strengthen regional peace, stability and prosperity.

Five years ago, Iraq and the KRI's heroic Peshmerga forces along with their international partners, the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS, liberated territory controlled by ISIS in Iraq. Although the land was freed, and some of the displaced people have returned to their homes, the ISIS threat remains. The ideology that created ISIS survives and the root causes that led to the rise of the terrorist organization have yet to be addressed.

The Kurdistan Region President Nechirvan Barzani underscored the essential role of continued international engagement for the lasting defeat of ISIS, emphasizing in particular the need for a comprehensive strategy to counter the ideology behind violent extremism and radicalization.

The President emphasized that the KRI will always remain a factor for stability and will continue to work with likeminded partners to make the world a safer place for all.

### Climate change and its impact on Iraq

The President of the Kurdistan Region repeated concerns over the worsening climate crisis in Iraq. Iraq is the fifth most vulnerable nation



Kurdistan Region's delegation, led by President Nechirvan Barzani, in Munich, Germany.

Photo: Jamal Penjweny

to climate change and climate-induced migration has become a reality for the country. The KRI and Iraq have been particularly impacted by rising temperatures, frequent dust storms, low levels of rainfall, and reduced water reserves. The International Organization for Migration reported that at the end of 2021 approximately 20,000 people in Iraq were internally displaced due to water scarcity. The President warned that climate migration is currently within Iraq's borders, but if left unchecked, there is a strong risk for outward climate migration from Iraq.

The KRI and Iraq are rich in oil and gas, yet gas-flaring wastes valuable energy that could be used to meet the country's growing power demands and economic development. The President underlined Iraq's need to access smart technology in order to reduce gas flaring, build a green economy and a more sustainable energy system.

President Nechirvan Barzani stressed that the climate crisis is a shared responsibility and asked for collective action to implement climate adaptation and mitigation strategies.



Kurdistan Region President and US Secretary of State on the sidelines of MSC 2023.



Kurdistan Region President and the President of the European Commission on the sidelines of the MSC 2023.



Kurdistan Region President and the UK Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs on the sidelines of the MSC 2023.



Kurdistan Region President and President of Azerbaijan on the sidelines of the MSC 2023.

Photo: Jamal Penjweny

### Energy

This year's Munich Security Conference, which like previous years brought together world leaders, and foreign policy and intelligence experts, took place in the midst of a global energy crisis of unprecedented depth and complexity. Ways to address the energy situation were widely discussed.

For decades, Baghdad and Erbil have failed to resolve outstanding issues. While there have been difficulties in the past, the Kurdistan Region's President said he is cautiously optimistic that both sides could reach a lasting resolution on the basis of the Iraqi Constitution on most outstanding issues including oil and gas. Today, KRI's oil sector is not only meeting local demand but is also contributing to the international market. In addition to meeting local needs, the Kurdistan Region's gas fields have the potential to contribute to international demand.

President Nechirvan Barzani reiterated to friends in the international community that resolving outstanding issues in the country will bring about political and economic stability and improve security for all Iraqis.

This will also allow Baghdad and Erbil to work together so that all the people of Iraq, regardless of their ethnic or religious background, will benefit from the country's vast natural resources. ■

## KRI President's Meetings on the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference 2023



Mohammed Shia' Al Sudani, Prime Minister of Iraq



Mateusz Morawiecki, Prime Minister, Poland



Antony Blinken, US Secretary of State



Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission, Brussels



Mohamed bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Qatar



Salem A. Al Jaber Al Sabah, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Kuwait



Ayman H. A. Al Safadi, Deputy Prime Minister & Minister of Foreign Affairs, Jordan



Two Congressional Delegations from the US Congress



Ilham Aliyev, President, Azerbaijan



Nikol Pashinyan, Prime Minister, Armenia



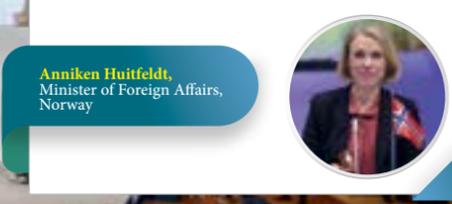
James Cleverly, Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, UK



Josep Borrell Fontelles, Vice-President and High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, EU Commission, Brussels



Paul Richard Gallagher, Archbishop, Secretary for Relations with States, Holy See, Vatican



Anniken Huitfeldt, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Norway



Antonio Tajani, Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Italy



Celeste Wallander, Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs, Department of Defense, USA



Ali Dolamari

*Ali Dolamari is the Kurdistan Regional Government's representative to France. He holds a Ph.D in geopolitics from Sorbonne University.*

## PM Barzani's Visit to Paris Bolsters French-Kurdish Ties

**T**he people and governments of the Kurdistan Region and France have enjoyed a long, prosperous, and strong relationship over many decades.

The French-Kurdish relationship can be divided into three stages. The first stage started after the division of greater Kurdistan into four parts and continued to the 1990s. During this time, the relationships between French and Kurdish leaders and people were primarily of an individual and personal nature.

The second stage began thereafter with the formation of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and extended to

French President Emmanuel Macron receives Kurdistan Region Prime Minister Masrour Barzani in Paris

2003, during which time the relationships evolved in the domains of human security and welfare and economic development. Kurdistan faced major challenges during this period as it had no internationally recognized frameworks for it to interact with the world and suffered from the imposition of two periods of economic sanctions.

The last stage began in 2003, after which the KRG and France have an official and internationally recognized relationship, concretized after the Kurdistan Region was recognized as a federal entity in the new constitution of

Iraq adopted in September 2005.

France is a significant and strategic country playing a key role in decision making and setting international policy; thus, having a good relationship with France is in the interest and advantage of the Kurdistan Region.

France has assisted the Kurds and the region throughout history, especially during the hardest and the most difficult times. In 1991, it was France that exhorted the United Nations to adopt Security Council Resolution 688 to protect the people in Iraqi Kurdistan. Again,

in 2014, when ISIS launched its attacks on the region, France was the first country to provide practical support to the peshmerga, with then French president Francois Hollande visiting Erbil at a time when ISIS was only a few kilometers outside the city. In addition, after the 2017 Iraqi-Kurdish conflict, or Kirkuk crisis, French president Emmanuel Macron was instrumental in lifting the political and diplomatic sanctions imposed on Kurdistan.

## Significance of Paris visit

The first official visit of KRG Prime Minister Masrour Barzani to Paris marks a significant milestone in French-Kurdish relations.

During the visit, Barzani held several important meetings, including with French president Emmanuel Macron, but also with the President of the French Senate, the Mayor of Paris, and the Movement of the Enterprises of France (MEDEF), the leading organizational network of business enterprise in France. Thus, it can be said that France is the first country to have robust ties with the Kurdistan Region across all sectors and is a real friend of the region and its people.

The official announcement describing the outcomes of Barzani's visit was posted on the website of the Elysee Palace. It discussed the meeting between the two heads of state, highlighting the strong and friendly relationship between France and Kurdistan and the ways that the two can deepen ties while also reconfirming the significance of the Kurdistan Region's political and security stability. The

French president also praised the efficient and dynamic role that the Kurds have played, in parallel to France, in confronting terrorism.

Barzani's visit coincided with a delicate period for the region and the world and reflects the care that France is taking to address these challenges with all the region's states. It was noteworthy both that Macron invited Barzani three weeks after the visit of the Iraqi Prime Minister to Paris and that he was a guest at the Elysee Palace.

The purpose of the visit was to discuss the most recent progress made in Kurdistan and the region, but also to update the French president on the latest progress in Baghdad-Erbil relations and to strengthen bilateral relations between Paris and Erbil. France realizes that the Kurdistan Region is an critical factor in Iraq, without which no positive steps can be taken.

## Kurdistan's regional role

The Kurdistan Region can serve as a role model for the whole of Iraq, as it provides security and stability for its people and is an exemplar of cultural coexistence, freedom, and human rights. Economically, the region has made a notable recovery and is advancing its development goals, especially in carrying out the reforms initiated by the KRG's Ninth Cabinet – led and supported by Prime Minister Barzani – across various economic sectors and government institutions. These reforms have augmented Kurdistan's role as a vital neighbor and regional partner, not least for its capacity to provide energy and food security both in the region and in the world.

The prime minister's visit also fell within the framework of the goals that he outlined in the speech that he gave announcing the formation of his cabinet in 2019, which included strengthening Kurdistan's diplomatic and economic relations with the world. Barzani has advanced this vision by holding many important and strategic meetings with world leaders and participating in critical international events and ceremonies and has thus expanded and consolidated the position of Kurdistan in the region and world.

That said, further critical steps remain to further strengthen exiting relations and forge new relationships with other countries. ■



PM Barzani arriving at Mouvement des Entreprises de France in Paris.

Photo: Sabr Dri

## Barzani Charity Foundation Bringing Hope, Building Pride



Sardar Sattar

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

**O**n February 6, 2023, a massive earthquake hit south of Turkey and northwest of Syria, killing over 55,000 people, and injuring more than 130,000, and many more homeless and desperate for help. As the world watched in shock, one organization quickly sprang into action to provide aid and support to the affected people. The Barzani Charity Foundation (BCF), a non-profit humanitarian organization based in the Kurdistan Region, immediately mobilized its resources to respond to the disaster and help its neighbors.

The BCF has a long history of providing humanitarian aid to those in need. Established in 2005, the foundation's mission is to provide assistance to vulnerable groups, such as orphans, widows, and people affected by natural disasters. The BCF has an impressive track record of delivering aid quickly and efficiently, and its response to the earthquake in Turkey and Syria was no exception.

In the early morning hours of February 6th, Kurdistan Region Prime Minister Masrour Barzani, also the founder and chairman of Board of Trustees of the Kurdish aid organization, ordered government institutions and the BCF to mobilize all their resources and deliver immediate humanitarian assistance to those affected by the quake. The BCF teams, composed of doctors, nurses, engineers and rescuers, joined large convoys of ambulances and trucks carrying goods to Turkey and Syria.

According to the BCF, as of March 23rd,

the foundation has provided aid to more than 339,136 people affected by the earthquake. This included the distribution of 54,000 food packages, 49,000 blankets and mattresses, 12,000 medical packages, 7,000 pieces of clothes, 4,000 tents, 9,500 formula milk, and thousands of hygiene kits.

The BCF also set up mobile medical clinics to provide healthcare services to those in need while its rescuers joined local and international teams to save those trapped under the rubbles for days. Additionally, the foundation provided financial assistance to families who lost their homes or livelihoods in the earthquake.

The BCF's response to the earthquake in Turkey and Syria highlights the foundation's commitment to humanitarianism and the welfare of people in need. Despite the ongoing military conflicts and political tensions in the region, the BCF did not hesitate to provide aid to its neighbors.

In fact, according to BCF President Musa Ahmad, the arrival of the Kurdish rescuers in Turkey and Syria as the first responders was because "the Kurdistan Region did not waste time on calculations so to donate only what exceeds its needs, but it reacted quickly to share what was already needed at home."

In the face of this tragedy, the BCF's response was a shining example of how individuals and organizations can make a positive difference in times of crisis. The BCF's commitment to providing aid and support to vulnerable groups, regardless of nationality or political affiliation, is a

testament to the organization's values and principles. But that's not all. A government-led campaign across the Kurdistan Region was well received by people who did not hesitate to donate everything within their means, from their own jackets to food, blankets, and cash. Kurds are known for their hospitality and generosity towards others. It is not uncommon for Kurdish families to open their homes to others and provide them with food, shelter, and warm hospitality. This culture of kindness and hospitality has now extended beyond the Kurdish borders and is evident in the BCF's response to the earthquakes in Turkey and Syria.

What made these massive campaigns unique is that they were not influenced by political agendas, but rather driven by a genuine desire to help people in need. This kind of compassion and selflessness is what makes the Kurdish people a truly exceptional nation.

It is also important to note that the Kurds themselves have faced many challenges and struggles throughout their history. They have been subject to discrimination, oppression, and violence, yet they have always maintained a sense of resilience and determination. Despite their own struggles, the Kurds have always been quick to help others in need.

Welcoming the first responders home after weeks of humanitarian work in Turkey, Prime Minister Masrour Barzani pointed out that while the Kurds have received many generous assistances in the past, they were familiar with the sense of bliss a giver feels, but it was felt firsthand this time through the BCF's campaign.

"There have been many times we were in need, too. Other people opened their doors for us. We knew how blissful their works were. And now that we helped other people, it showed that we will never forget their help at those difficult times."

The BCF's response to the earthquake in Turkey is a reminder of the importance of humanitarianism and the need for people to come together in times of crisis. The BCF's efforts to provide aid and support to those affected by the earthquake are an inspiration to all of us, and a testament to the resilience and compassion of the Kurdish people. While the world may have misconceptions about the relationship between Turkey and Kurdistan, the BCF's response to the earthquake serves as a reminder that when it comes to helping those in need, political affiliations and national borders are irrelevant. ■





Till "Baz" Paasche

Till "Baz" Paasche, is a German security expert and has a PhD in geography. He lived in the Kurdistan Region between 2013 and 2017. His recent books *Transecting Security* and *Capes with the University of Georgia Press* and *America's War in Syria with Casemate* both discuss the ongoing geopolitical reshuffling in the Middle East.

## Kurdistan (Still) Matters From the War on Terror to Great Power Competition

With the War on Terror having been phased out in Iraq in 2017 after the Battle for Mosul, it seemed that the Kurdistan Region faded from the West's collective geopolitical attention. The focus shifted to NATO's eastern flank and Taiwan, with US foreign policy makers seemingly relieved to have finally left Iraq and its complicated legacy behind. Arguably, this was a mistake.

the United States' only success story in Iraq after decades of failed foreign policies and thousands of US and British combat deaths. Yet, given the indecisiveness of the United States and Europe towards the Kurdistan Region, it is on the verge of sliding beyond Western political influence, with Russia, Iran and Turkey all competing to control Kurdistan.

The Kurdistan Region in Iraq and beyond remains of geostrategic importance in the new age of great power competition. It is here that Russian/Iranian proxies and US patrols meet face-to-face with loosely defined rules of engagement. It is here where largely untapped oil- and gas fields lie that can contribute to Europe's ongoing energy-diversification project. It is here where the United States can still block a complete Iranian Shia Crescent and contribute to regional security.

As it stands, the Kurdistan Region is also

Right now, the United States and Europe are at a crossroads. Either the Kurdistan Region is declared a vital partner and stabilized with political and economic deals or the emerging Russian-Iranian axis will increase its hold over the region and ultimately replace the United States as its hegemon. If the United States and Europe decide to hold up their end of a long, historically grounded deal and acknowledge their responsibilities towards the Kurds, there is a simple solution for

how it can be accomplished without a large military footprint.

While Western loyalties are often fleeting, many Kurds still have a genuinely positive attitude towards the United States, the UK, and their armed forces. In all three US-led interventions in Iraq in 1991, 2003, and 2014, Kurdish peshmerga forces were exceptionally loyal partners on the ground. Again, unlike in other theaters, no US soldiers died in combat in the Kurdistan Region.

In recent history, the bond between the Kurds and the US military goes back to the 1990s, when Saddam Hussain took revenge on the Kurds and Shia Arabs for their uprising in the aftermath of the Gulf War, during which a US-led alliance had liberated Kuwait from aggressive Iraqi forces. With Saddam's army weakened by US and British jets and inspired by President George W. Bush's call for a

his country. The lightly armored Kurdish fighters could not hold the lines against Iraq's tanks and helicopter gunships, and soon hundreds of thousands of civilians were fleeing the cities into the mountains, their historic haven.

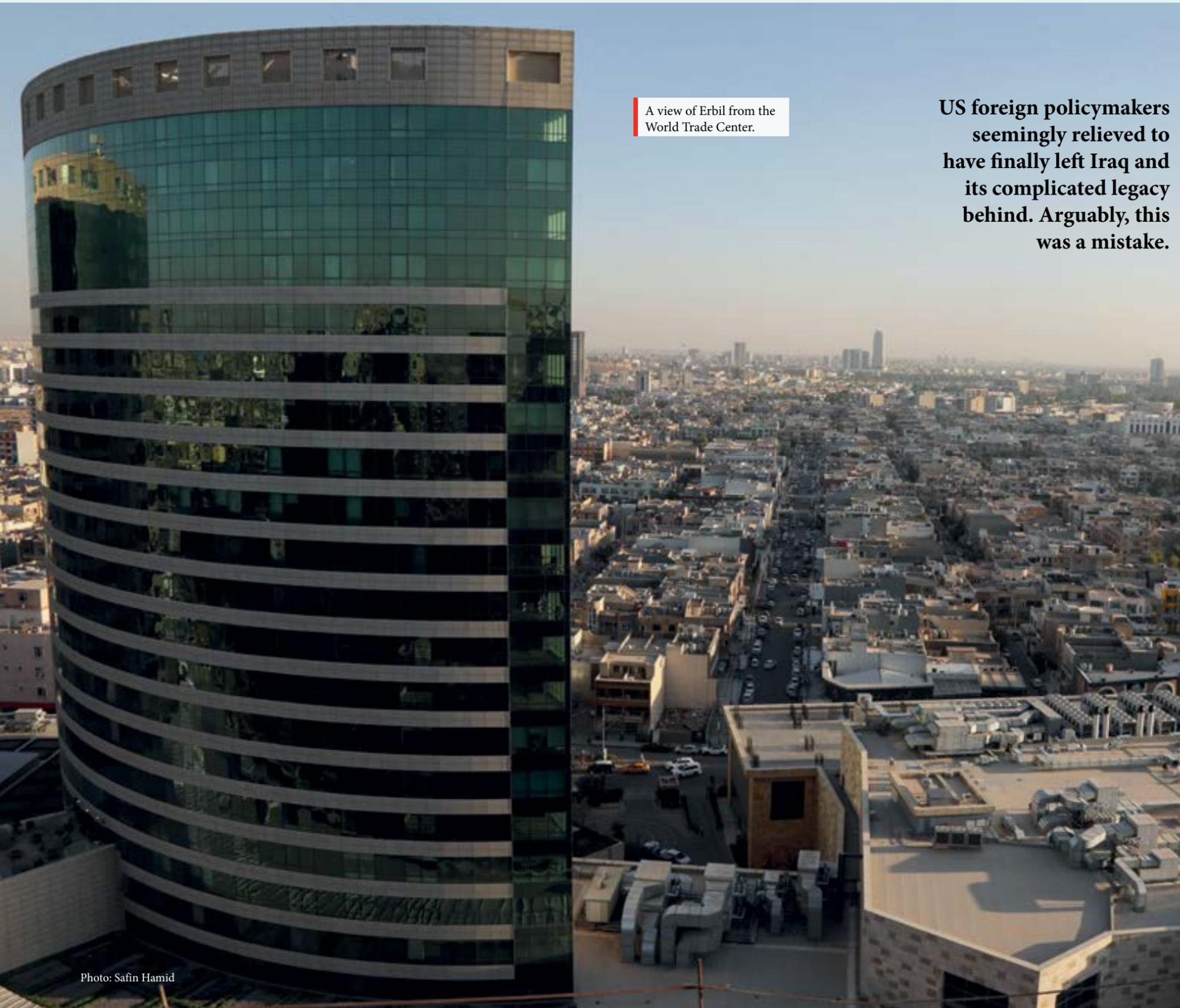
Responding to the quickly escalating humanitarian crisis in 1991, the United States, Britain and France introduced a no-fly zone that kept Saddam's helicopter gunships grounded. Using shoulder-held anti-tank weapons and mines, the peshmerga were able to close the first mountain passes for the Iraqi tanks, which then had to advance without aircover. Thus, enabled by the patrolling US and British jets, the peshmerga liberated the Zagros mountains without asking the West for any charity or ground forces. All the Kurds needed was for

# KURDISTAN

popular uprising against the hated Iraqi dictator, the Kurds in the north of the country rolled out an armed insurgency.

Organized by two main Kurdish political parties, peshmerga forces quickly evicted Saddam's army first from the Kurdish mountain strongholds and then their cities. Humiliated globally after his defeat by the US air force, Saddam turned on the Kurds and brutally crushed the uprising in an attempt to re-consolidate power over

the United States to hold its promise and keep Saddam's feared helicopters on the ground. Free for the first time in decades, the refugee communities in the rugged Kurdish heartland became the nucleus for Kurdistan's first democratic structures, which later evolved into the current Kurdish parliament in Erbil.



A view of Erbil from the World Trade Center.

## US foreign policymakers seemingly relieved to have finally left Iraq and its complicated legacy behind. Arguably, this was a mistake.

Photo: Safin Hamid

US foreign policy makers seemingly relieved to have finally left Iraq and its complicated legacy behind. Arguably, this was a mistake. Either the Kurdistan Region is declared a vital partner and stabilized with political and economic deals or the emerging Russian-Iranian axis will increase its hold over the region and ultimately replace the United States as its hegemon. While Western loyalties are often fleeting, many Kurds still have a genuinely positive attitude towards the United States, the UK, and their armed forces

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In 2003, US ground forces and peshmerga eventually liberated Kurdish cities from Saddam's Iraqi rule, and continually holding its protective hand over Kurdistan, the United States helped to extend the space in which Kurdish democracy could grow. Acknowledging the value of its Kurdish allies, the US hegemon formalized Kurdish autonomy in the post-2003 Iraqi constitution, laying out steps to resolve tensions with the Iran-controlled central government in Baghdad that center around the status of oil-rich Kirkuk and the distribution of Iraq's oil revenue among the nation's different ethnic groups. The problem was, with America's premature withdrawal in 2011, those policies were never implemented and institutionalized. Consequently, the economic situation in the Kurdistan Region unraveled soon after the US withdrawal, and the Kurds have remained disenfranchised from Baghdad ever since.

Beginning in 2013, the central government in Baghdad withheld much of the Kurdish portion of Iraq's oil revenues. Suddenly left with no budget to provide services or pay salaries, the Kurdistan Region plummeted into a severe economic crisis that is leaving a generation without prospects and is making political progress impossible. Although the US military enabled the initiation of Kurdish democracy, its hasty withdrawal left this democratization project on life support.

The United States' and Europe's gateway to Kurdistan is their historic connection to Kurdish democracy and the discourse of political autonomy and federalism that the US helped craft in 2003. Instead of enforcing their own version of democracy, the United States simply created space in which the Kurds could launch their own organically grown democratization.

By committing to a partnership with the Kurdistan Region, the United States would not need to deploy a large military force. It only needs to keep the promises regarding Kurdish autonomy. If that is impossible because the United States has lost its influence in Baghdad, oil- and gas-based deals can make up for the lost budget, creating a win-win situation.

In return, the United States gets a sustainable partnership and keeps a strong foothold in the Middle East. With Iran and Turkey expanding aggressively and Saudi Arabia flirting with China, America does not have many such partners left in the Middle East. Yet, given the inevitable confrontation between Israel and Iran, it cannot ignore the Middle East quite yet. ■

## The Unforgettable Legacy of **Mustafa Barzani**

“Our fight is against the tyranny and brutality of the Iraqi regime, not the Iraqi people. Regimes come and go, but people live on.”

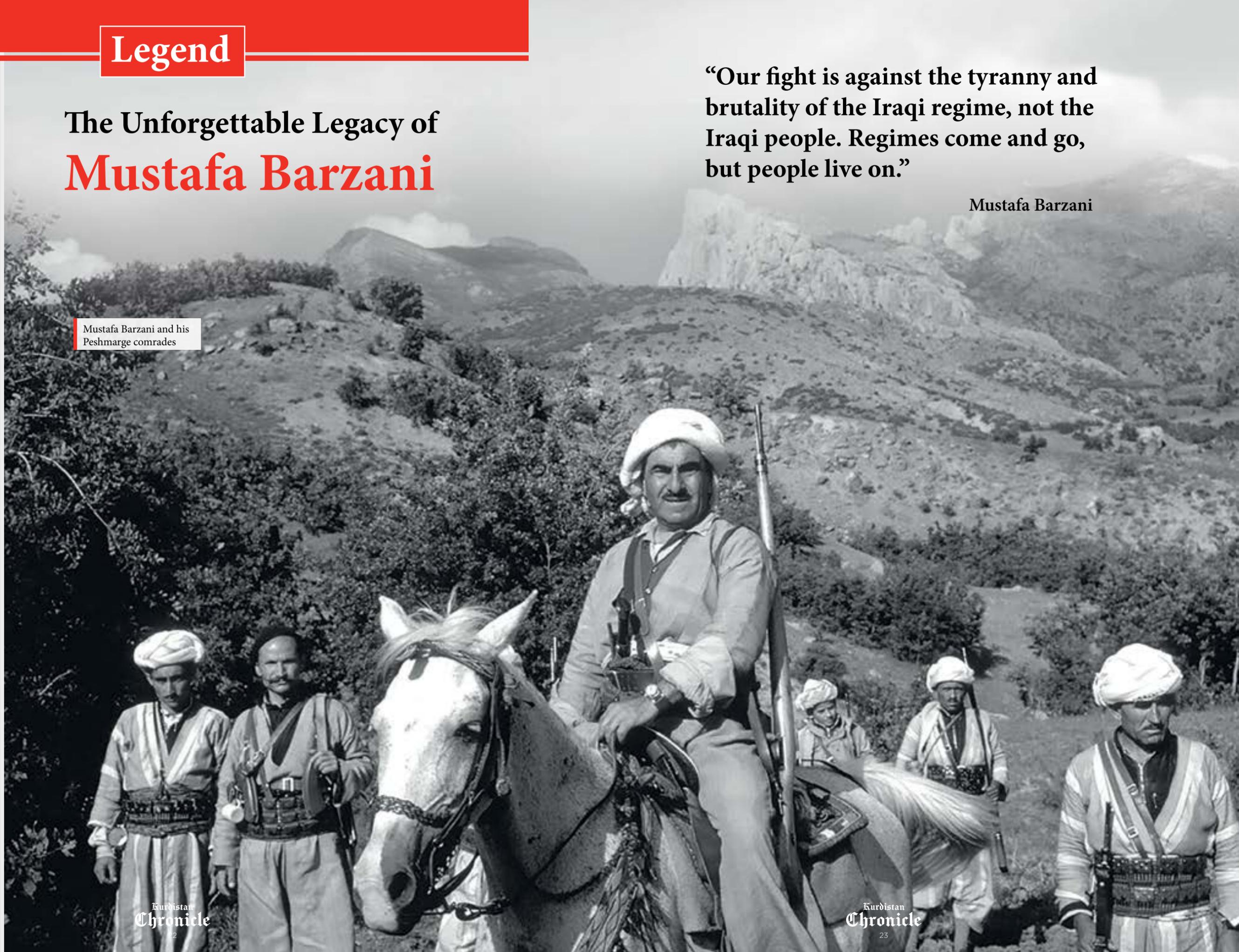
Mustafa Barzani



Awat Mustafa

*Awat Mustafa is a board member of the Barzani Charity Foundation and is the researcher and author of **The Soul of the Mountains: The Principles and Values of Mustafa Barzani**. He holds a master's degree in International Development from Newcastle/ Northumbria University in the United Kingdom.*

Mustafa Barzani and his Peshmarge comrades



Every year in March, people across Kurdistan plant trees in honor of their beloved revolutionary leader, Mullah Mustafa Barzani. In addition, people come from all over Kurdistan and the world from March 1-14 to visit Barzani's tomb in Barzan to commemorate his death and birth. Barzani, a larger-than-life Kurdish leader, is regarded as "immortal" by Kurds for his contributions to the Kurdish cause during his lifetime.

His name has become synonymous with the fight for Kurdish independence, and his family, the Barzani, has been at the heart of the Kurdish nationalist movement for more than a century. Revolution and armed conflict, in Mustafa Barzani's view, were not powerplays, but necessary actions to fight for the rights and dignity of his people and reverse the catastrophic damage done by past enemies of the Kurds.

As a leader, Barzani brought together Kurds from across the political spectrum.

He founded the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), still the largest Kurdish party today, and is the father of the current KDP leader and former Kurdistan Region president Masoud Barzani, as well as the grandfather of current president

Nechirvan Barzani and prime minister Masrour Barzani. "He was a man of majestic appearance, and the greatest thing about him was his sharp eyes, which added to the strength and expression of the firm lines of a stern and watchful face," said the late Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser after meeting with Barzani in Cairo in 1958.

## Early life

Mustafa Barzani was born on March 14, 1903, in Barzan, a village on the eastern shores of the Great Zab in Erbil province. He was the youngest son of Sheikh Mohammad Barzani and his mother Khaton. When the people of Barzan rose up in 1907 against the Ottoman Empire to demand better treatment and the right to practice their culture and heritage, he was only four years old. The uprisings were met with a bloody massacre by the Ottoman military, who had been ordered to put them down because of the empire's aggressive policy.

Barzani and his mother were detained and imprisoned in an Ottoman jail in Mosul. Still a child at the time, he was detained for nearly nine months before both were released. He never met his father, who died in 1903, the same year he was born. His mother was a brave and strong woman who didn't have time to mourn her husband's death. Instead, she showed her son love and care and most importantly taught him honesty, bravery, and determination.

By the time he was 12 years old, living conditions throughout Kurdistan, particularly in the Barzan area, had reached a crisis point. Until its final days, the

Ottomans used every means possible to oppress the people and silence opposition. Meanwhile, Barzani joined the Barzan uprising at a young age, demonstrating a natural ability for leadership and military strategy.

The most momentous and significant period of the Kurdish struggle.

In 1931, Barzani followed in the footsteps of his older brother, the Barzani Chieftain Sheikh Ahmed Barzani, who participated in leading the Kurdish revolutionary movement to demand national rights for the Kurds. However, the royal authority in Iraq aided by the British occupying forces suppressed this movement, and the Barzan village was bombed by British planes, resulting in more than one thousand Kurdish military and civilians deaths. After these events, the Barzanis including Sheikh Ahmed Barzani emigrated to Turkey, but Mullah Mustafa Barzani stayed on and made the mountains of Kurdistan his home.

The 1932 Kurdish

Barzan-revolt was a milestone for the recognition of Kurdish identity, as H.E. Masoud Barzani argued that "the events between 1931-1961 were the most momentous and significant period of the Kurdish struggle.

The reason for this milestone was that, at last, the Kurdish demands from the different regions of Iraqi Kurdistan were finally incorporated into a unified cause under an organized leadership."

Thus, Mustafa Barzani was able to win the support of the wider Kurdish population, not just the members of the Barzani tribe. With this, a new era for Kurdistan began.

"Barzani's virtues are of the old type of bravery, and one admires their highness to a great extent. He lived his life leading a revolution using the methods of a veteran leader driven by pride and independence," the prominent Egyptian thinker and journalist Mohamed Hassanein Heikal remarked.

## Earning the recognition of Kurdish rights

As the emerging leader of the Kurdish revolution, he saw the growing need for a unified armed force to coincide

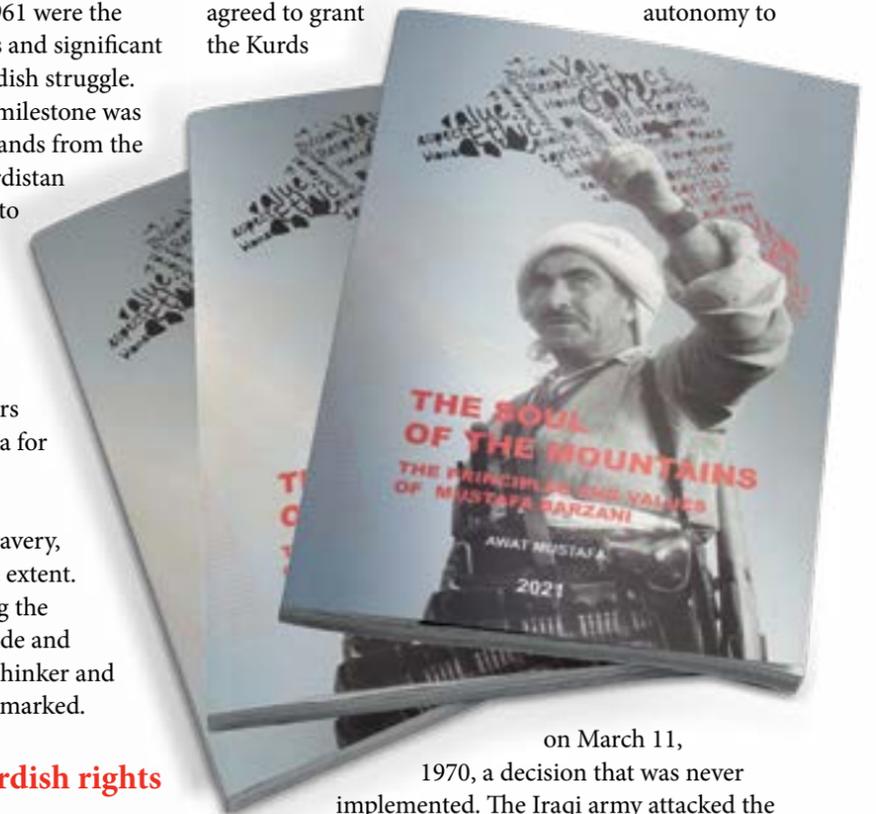
with Kurdish patriotism and succeeded in uniting the disparate Kurdish tribes under the banner of the peshmerga, the Kurdish freedom fighters.

Mustafa Barzani's leadership abilities were put to the test when he joined Iran's Mahabad Republic. In December 1945, the leader of the Kurdistan Democratic Party-Iran Qazi Muhammad established the Kurdish Republic of Mahabad in Mahabad (northwestern Iran), which was under Soviet military control.

Barzani was appointed Minister of Defense and commander of the Kurdish army in the Republic of Kurdistan. As Iranian forces clashed with the forces of the Republic of Mahabad, Barzani quickly established himself as a capable commander, inflicting defeats on Iranian divisions and being one of the few who did not surrender or defect to the advancing Iranian forces.

Barzani's largest and longest revolution was the September Revolution, which broke out in 1961 after negotiations between the Kurds and Baghdad did not bear fruit. Thereafter, the Iraqi government launched a military campaign against the Kurdish resistance.

After a decade of armed conflict, the Iraqi government agreed to grant the Kurds autonomy to



on March 11, 1970, a decision that was never implemented. The Iraqi army attacked the Kurds once more in 1974. The revolution came to an end with the 1975 Algiers agreement between Iran



and Iraq, which ended Iran's support for the Kurdish revolution.

In his 1973 book *The Kurdish Revolt*, British military analyst Edgar O'Ballance wrote: "Barzani was able to extract the first legal recognition of the rights of the

Kurds in Iraq, which is the first regional recognition of the demands of the Kurdish people and the beginning of the recognition of the legitimacy and rights of the Kurdish people by others."

A legacy that will live on

On March 1st, 1979, Barzani passed away at Georgetown University Hospital in Washington DC, and his body was laid to rest in the Kurdish-Iranian city of Shino (Oshnavieh).

In 1993, his remains were returned to the Kurdistan Region of Iraq in a grand ceremony. He was laid to rest in Barzan next to his son Idris Barzani, the father of the current president of the Kurdistan Region Nechirvan Barzani.

"Among all the martyrs and heroes of the Kurdish movement, Barzani has a special place in the heart of Kurds everywhere. He is considered by many as the father of the Kurdish revolution, with his pictures found hanging in the homes of Kurdish families throughout Kurdistan, including in the former Soviet states and in places where famous journalists are located in Washington DC, who liken him to a legend because of his tremendous achievements on the battlefield," René Maurice, Director of the Press Office of the former French President François Mitterrand said.

Barzani helped the Kurds achieve a great deal; his name and legacy will live on among his people, and his philosophy will be passed down to future generations.

"I knew Barzani was a fighter, never afraid to stand up for his people. Through sacrifice and suffering, Barzani inspired others to serve something greater than himself, so please, serve well under his name". John McCain (1936 – 2018) Former United States senator from Arizona from 1987 until his death in 2018. ■



## The Diplomacy of Conference A Tribute to the KRG's Role in the World Government Summit



Amad Abdul Hameed Muhammad

Amad Abdul Hameed is the Consul General of the Republic of Iraq to Dubai and the Northern Emirate.

Holding diplomatic conferences and government summits remains critical in forging progress in international relations. In such conferences, views can converge alongside the wills of nations, as they are discussed within a framework of dialogue.

Alongside this, government-to-government exchange thrives, as nations

benefit from learning about one another's experiences, understanding how various initiatives, programs, and strategies have been successfully implemented and how these successes could be applied to their own local context.

With the slogan *Foreseeing Future Governments*, the World Government Summit held from February 13-15, 2023,

in Dubai was attended by 20 heads of state. Among the attendees were the President of the Arab Republic of Egypt Abdel Fattah El-Sisi, the President of Senegal and head of the African Union Macky Sall, the President of the Republic of Paraguay Mario Abdo Benitez, and the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev, as well as a group of prime ministers including KRG Prime Minister Masrour Barzani and more than 150 ministers.

Also in attendance were international figures, international organizations such as the United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, the Secretary-General of the Arab League, and a group of the elite members of the private sector including thousands of investors.

The summit encompassed more than 220 sessions, in which 300 world personalities including presidents, ministers, experts, thinkers and future makers shared their ideas across 22 international forums. The summit

primarily focused on the preparedness of governments for future development and studied plans that help them develop policies and strategies to enhance their future role.

### KRG-UAE friendship

KRG PM Barzani and his accompanying delegation held several significant meetings on the sidelines of the summit with His Highnesses Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the President of the United Arab Emirates and Ruler of Abu Dhabi; Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, the Vice President, Prime Minister and Ruler of Dubai; Sheikh Saud bin Saqr Al Qasimi, Ruler of Ras Al Khaimah, and Sheikh Saif bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Prime Minister Deputy and Minister of Interior of the United Arab Emirates.

During these meetings, all expressed their thanks for accepting their invitations and recognized the keenness



PM Masrour Barzani's official visit to the UAE and while meeting with Emirati Minister of Education.

PM Barzani meeting with Sheikh Humaid bin Rashid Al Nuaimi, the ruler of the emirate of Ajman, in the UAE.



Photo: Sabr Dri

of the KRG and its continued coordination and cooperation with the UAE to consolidate the well-established relations between the two states.

Taking pride in their friendship with the Kurdistan Region, the parties discussed ways to enhance bilateral cooperation at all the levels, especially economic and those of common interest. The UAE showed its openness and willingness to establish renewable energy projects or wind energy and investment in the Kurdistan Region. In return, PM Barzani expressed his gratitude



for the UAE's continued support, showed his interest in the UAE's prosperity and experience in the field of reconstruction and technological development, and expressed eagerness to

transfer that experience to the Kurdistan Region.

During the visit, PM Barzani and his accompanying delegation also paid visits to the Emirate of Fujairah and the Emirate of Ajman, where he was received by His Highness Sheikh Hamad bin Mohammed Al Sharqi and

His Highness Sheikh Humaid bin Rashid Al Nuaimi, his Crown Prince, and other Emirati personalities. These two visits were for the purpose of consolidating relations and discussing ways to strengthen bilateral relations.

### Other bilateral highlights

In another but related part of the conference, PM Barzani met with his Georgian counterpart Irakli Garibashvili and discussed ways to improve the relations between the Kurdistan Region and Georgia, while stressing the importance of enhancing prospects for coordination and cooperation between the two sides in areas of common interest. The two prime ministers also discussed opportunities for opening the Georgian consulate in the Kurdistan Region and launching direct flights between Erbil and Tbilisi.

Regarding the visit overall, the Consul General of the Republic of Iraq to Dubai and the Northern Emirates

Amad Abdul Hameed Muhammad valued the role of PM Barzani and his presence at the second World Summit of Governments and underscored the benefits that the KRI gains from attending such conferences and other visits around the world.

The consul further stated that “we see diplomatically the region has reached the highest levels of relations with the countries of the world, as KRI leaders are warmly received by kings, presidents, and rulers of the world countries.”

Finally, he expressed his admiration for the prime minister's follow-up on areas in which he sees positive outcomes for the people and government of the Kurdistan Region, whether they be related to trade, support for national products, investment, or technological development and his attempts to transfer experience to the Kurdistan Region. ■



Nahro Zagros

Dr. Nahro Zagros is the Editor-in-Chief of Kurdistan Chronicle and a senior fellow at Gold Institute for International Strategy in Washington D.C.

## March 5th The Anniversary of Raperin



The Kurdish uprising (Raperin in Kurdish) began on March 5, 1991, in the aftermath of the Gulf War when Kurdish leaders called on the Kurdish population in northern Iraq to revolt against Saddam Hussein's regime.

The city of Ranya was the starting point of a revolution that would change the face of Kurdistan forever, marking a key moment in the Kurdish people's long struggle for autonomy and self-determination.

### The city of Ranya was the starting point of a revolution that would change the face of Kurdistan forever

The uprising was sparked by years of persecution and repression by Hussein's regime and the regimes that preceded him and was fueled by a sense of frustration

and anger at the lack of progress in addressing the Kurdish people's demands for greater autonomy and recognition in Iraq.

### History of suppression

The Kurdish people have had a long history of persecution and discrimination since the creation of Iraq in the 1920s. In fact, the history of persecution towards the Kurds dates back centuries, with Kurdish people having been subjected to various forms of discrimination and violence, including forced assimilation, cultural suppression, displacement, and genocide. Many Kurds have been denied basic human rights, including the right to speak their own language, practice their own religion, and participate in the political process.

Under Saddam Hussein's regime, Kurds faced particularly brutal treatment. In the late 1980s, Saddam Hussein's regime carried out a campaign of genocide against the Kurdish people, killing over 182,000 innocent men, women and children. In 1988, the regime used chemical weapons



free, thanks largely due to the brave men and women who risked everything so that future generations could live without fear or persecution.

However, the uprising was short-lived and was met with a fierce response from the Iraqi government, which launched a brutal crackdown on the Kurdish population. The regime used a combination of military force, including helicopter gunships, tanks, and heavy artillery, as well as chemical weapons, to crush the uprising.

Thousands of Kurdish civilians were killed in the fighting, and over a million people were displaced from their homes and forced to flee to the mountains and to neighboring countries to avoid Hussein's wrath.

The international community was slow to respond to the crisis, with many countries citing concerns about destabilizing the region and upsetting the balance of power in the Middle East. In response to the humanitarian crisis that resulted from the fighting, the United States and its allies established a no-fly zone over northern Iraq, which provided some protection for the Kurdish population. The no-fly zone remained in place until the 2003 invasion of Iraq, which led to the overthrow of Hussein's regime.

### Never to be forgotten

The March 5th uprising is now remembered annually among Kurds around the world as Liberation Day – a reminder not only that freedom can never be taken away without consequence, but also that no matter how daunting an enemy may seem, there will always be those willing to fight against injustice wherever it arises.

It is through remembering this history – and continuing its legacy – that we ensure our collective safety going forward into whatever challenges await us in the future.

Today, the Kurdish people continue to face many challenges and obstacles in their quest for autonomy and self-determination. Nevertheless, they remain committed to their cause, and their struggle continues to inspire people around the world who believe in the fundamental right of all people to live in peace, freedom, and dignity.

The Kurdish people have continued to fight for greater autonomy and recognition of their rights in Iraq and in other countries where they live.

The Kurdistan Regional Government was established in Iraq in 1992 and has since played a key role in the political and economic development of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. ■



in various places, including in the city of Halabja (commemorated every year on March 16), killing 8,000 people.

### The events of 1991

The March 5th uprising began with small skirmishes between Kurdish forces and Iraqi troops in and around Ranya before quickly spreading throughout Kurdistan, as more towns joined in solidarity with those fighting for freedom.

It quickly spread, with Kurdish fighters seizing control of many cities and towns, which witnessed scenes of celebration, as citizens who had long suffered under successive Iraqi regimes finally regained control over their lives. By March 21, every corner of Kurdistan was



**Marewan Hawramy**

*Marewan Hawramy is one of the publishers of the Kurdistan Chronicle. He is a writer and an expert in protocol and diplomacy.*

## Invest Kurdistan

### An Emerging, Multi-Sector Business Hub

The Kurdistan Region has emerged as a promising investment hub in recent years thanks to its relatively stable political climate, strategic location, abundant natural resources, and growing economy. The region has succeeded in diversifying its economy, developing infrastructure, and creating a business-friendly environment that offers meaningful incentives to investors. According to the Kurdistan Board of Investment, the region has licensed a total of 45 foreign projects with a total capital of \$10.58 billion and 29 joint venture projects with \$1.68 billion, and the trend is only growing. The region's GDP per capita for 2022 was \$7,038, and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) has set an ambitious target of achieving 10% annual GDP growth over the next few years.

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### More than just energy

One of the main reasons for the region's attractiveness to investors is its abundant natural resources. The region is home to significant oil and gas reserves, with estimates putting the total at over 45 billion barrels of oil and three trillion cubic feet of gas, and boasts significant reserves of minerals, including iron and copper. Kurdistan's agricultural sector is also rapidly growing and presents the region's

biggest potential, as the availability of fertile lands and a favorable climate make it an ideal location for cultivating a diverse range of crops and fruits. According to the KRG, the sector has grown steadily in recent years and is projected to continue to expand, with the aim of transforming the region into a crucial food source for Iraq and neighboring countries.

In fact, last year Kurdistan notched its largest non-oil export, sending 2,000 tons of domestic pomegranates that were produced, packaged, and transported through a special initiative led by the Office of Prime Minister Masrour Barzani. The pomegranates were sold in the largest markets across Europe and the Gulf, and the Kurdistan Region announced soon thereafter that it planned to export other agricultural products including apples, grapes, and honey.

At the 2022 Global Energy Forum organized by the Atlantic Council, the prime minister stressed his plan for economic diversification, with the focus being on agriculture, manufacturing, and services, all with the aim of creating new revenue sources "in addition to the energy sector – not [as] an alternative."

### Attracting tourists and investors

In addition to natural resources and agriculture, the Kurdistan Region is also gaining popularity as a tourist destination, making it a key sector for the regional government's plans to diversify the economy. In 2022, the region attracted



Dr. Muhammed Shukri, Chairman of the Kurdistan Board of Investment.

Photo: Safin Hamid

over 6 million tourists, and there are plans to invest in touristic infrastructure and promote the region as a travel destination.

To further attract foreign investors, the KRG recently launched the Invest Kurdistan platform to showcase the

**Kurdistan's agricultural sector is also rapidly growing and presents the region's biggest potential, as the availability of fertile lands and a favorable climate make it an ideal location for cultivating a diverse range of crops and fruits.**

KRG's long-term vision and how it offers a variety of incentives for foreign investors, such as tax exemptions, simplified business registration procedures, and a favorable regulatory environment that supports investment and safeguards the interests of foreign investors. Through Invest Kurdistan, the KRG has devised a comprehensive two-year plan to transform its Board of Investment into an investment promotion agency.

Invest Kurdistan is run by a group of young professionals who meticulously evaluate investment opportunities, establish clear short-term and long-term objectives, identify potential foreign investors, and extend invitations to them to enter the market. As confirmed by Dr. Muhammed Shukri, Chairperson of KRG's Board of Investment, approximately 100 companies in the Gulf States have already been approached to participate in the first stage of this initiative.

### Investment opportunities

During an exclusive interview with Kurdistan Chronicle, Dr. Shukri explained that Invest Kurdistan seeks to present a comprehensive overview of investment opportunities for potential foreign investors. This includes providing essential statistical information, highlighting applicable laws and regulations, and outlining available incentives.

He further emphasized that foreign investors stand to benefit from a range of advantages, such as a 10-year tax exemption, a five-year waiver on customs fees, complete ownership rights, the legal ability to transfer their capital and/or interests, and the potential for extension of all incentives.



A construction project in Erbil.

Since 2006,  
the KRG has licensed a total of  
**1,111 projects**  
with a total capital of  
**\$66.5 billion,**  
out of which 44 were foreign  
investments

When asked about investment opportunities in the energy sector, the Kurdish official disclosed that the focus has shifted towards investing in the petrochemical and industrial sectors as well as infrastructure rather than expanding oil-export volumes.

“We have reached out to numerous companies, particularly those in the Gulf, to encourage investment in the petrochemical sector for the purpose of utilizing the byproducts of oil,” Dr. Shukri said, pointing out that the region is prioritizing investments in road construction, railways, water management, dams, environmentally friendly technologies for electricity production, industrial clusters, agricultural projects, and educational and tourism infrastructure projects.

## Foreign investments and joint ventures

In 2022, the KRG’s Board of Investment licensed a total of 93 projects, and it is actively working to increase this number. Since 2006, the KRG has licensed a total of 1,111 projects with a total capital of \$66.5 billion, out of which 44 were foreign investments. Additionally, many foreign businesses have partnered with local investors to form joint venture projects in the Kurdistan Region.

“With every foreign investor who chooses to invest in Kurdistan, we see it as an opportunity to create and present another success story by assisting them to succeed. This, in turn, can help to further establish Kurdistan as a highly desirable investment hub in the region,” Dr. Shukri concluded.

The young and educated workforce is seen as one of the region’s main assets and yet another draw for investors. According to official statistics, the median age in Kurdistan is just 23 years old. More than 30 universities train thousands of highly skilled graduates each year and, ultimately, prepare a highly skilled workforce with great ambitions for the market, including international companies, organizations, and investors. ■



**Aveen Howrami**

*Aveen Howrami is an American Kurdish activist with a decade of experience in the education field. She has provided assistance to numerous local NGOs, schools, and educational institutions in their internationalization efforts and technical expertise.*

## KRG Aims to Establish Child-Friendly Legal System

In February, the Ministry of Justice in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) announced a new collaborative initiative called Justice for Children and Juveniles. The KRG’s ministry of Justice and UNICEF will carry out several initiatives included in the project over the course of the next five years.

“The project will serve as a road map for protecting children’s rights in the future in the Kurdistan region,” Nariman Talib, spokesperson of the Ministry of Justice told Kurdistan Chronicle.

Nariman detailed how the project seeks to ensure justice for children and adolescents in the court system, to safeguard the rights of children whose parents are separated or whose mothers are serving time in adult-correctional facilities, and to support their reintegration into society.

“Due to their young age, many children are forced to stay with their convicted mothers in the same prison; according to the project plan, private housing and a kindergarten will be constructed to keep the children away from the prison environment and convicted individuals, and the children will be provided with the necessary public education,” he said.

He also mentioned that the project intends to improve and modernize juvenile detention centers.

Talib added that the Prosecutor General’s Office under the Ministry of Justice will

coordinate with the relevant government agencies and organizations to carry out the project’s objectives.

“However, due to the financial pressures of the Iraqi federal government, the Kurdistan Regional Government is unable to implement many of the project’s plans; thus international organizations must assist in this,” he concluded.

In February, both the ministry and UNICEF presented the project plan and a new report, published in November, titled Mapping and Assessment of the Child Justice System in the Kurdistan

**“The project will serve as a road map for protecting children’s rights in the future in the Kurdistan region,”**

Region of Iraq, which was funded by the German government through the KfW Development Bank.

“UNICEF is committed to supporting the Kurdistan Region of Iraq to protect and promote the rights of every child, including children who are in contact with the law,” said Ms. Sheema SenGupta, UNICEF representative in Iraq. “This mapping and assessment are the first steps to realizing



Refugee and IDP children at a camp in the Kurdistan Region.

Photo: Safin Hamid

the rights of the most vulnerable children.”

“There is no justice without judicial justice. By making sure that children know about their rights and have access to the judicial system, we protect the most vulnerable in society. This strengthens every democratic society,”

said Mr. Klaus Streicher, Consul General of the Federal Republic of Germany.

Dr. Anna Janke, Country Director of the KfW Office Iraq, explained that the report identifies several challenges and that the Juvenile Justice System for Children

recommended needs for improvements concerning adequate prevention, response, and social reintegration, as well as diversionary justice.

“Deprivation of liberty is one of the most harmful violations of children’s fundamental human rights. We need to reimagine the justice system where every child knows and can claim her rights, can access free legal aid and representation in the courts, and is protected from detention. We also need to ensure the use of diversion and easy access to alternative dispute-resolution mechanisms and child-friendly courts,” said Dr. Janke. ■



Photo: Safin Hamid



**Benoit Drevet**

*Benoit Drevet is French journalist, born and grew up in Lyon, France. As a freelance journalist, he is covering Iraq for several international media outlets. He is the correspondent for Radio France, the French national radio, La Croix, a French national newspaper, and RTS and the public radio in Switzerland.*

## Heart and Reason Choosing to Live in Kurdistan

**F**or me, a 32-year-old French, born and raised in Lyon, experiencing Kurdistan was like opening a gift package after having tried for a long time to analyze its contents through its wrapping paper. As a French journalist based in Erbil, I am the correspondent in Iraq for the French media outlets Radio France and La Croix and for Swiss radio. I chose Erbil rather than Baghdad and will explain why. From my point of view, I made the right choice.

I first thought of moving to Erbil in 2014. As a now 32-year-old French journalist passionate about the Middle East, the city was then a stronghold for journalists following the war against ISIS and particularly the battle of Mosul. Life intervened, but finally I set foot here for the first time at the end of September 2021.

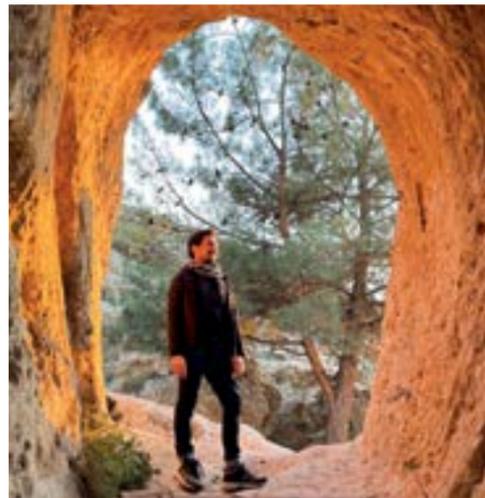
Working with the French Center for Research on Iraq (CFRI), of which I am now the communications manager, we were organizing a conference. My first surprise was seeing so many Kurdish flags and an almost total absence of Iraqi flags, which are systematically accompanied by Kurdish colors when they do appear.

Here, there was no need for an Iraqi visa – instead, a visa for the autonomous region was available at Erbil International Airport. I quickly realized that it was a

quasi-state. Borders, regional government, local police, locally financed peshmerga fighters, and of course different Kurdish dialects overshadowed the Iraqi Arabic in the street. Even the phone plans are local and designed for the region. I thought I was setting foot in Iraq but felt like I was arriving in a country that is literally nowhere to be found on any of the world's maps.

### A sometimes-hard-but-fascinating multimillennial history

Fast forward to May 2022, and I am back in the Kurdistan Region for the CFRI. We are organizing a youth camp to build social cohesion and coexistence in the mountains near the village of Barzan, a two-hour drive north of Erbil. The landscapes are majestic. I feel like I am in the Provençal Alps in the south of France.



It is the historical land of the Barzani, the family that

occupies a central place in the Kurdistan Regional Government of today. It is also where a dark story occurred: the genocide of 8,000 Barzanis by the Iraqi state in the 1980s, a tragedy that resembles so many others experienced by the Kurds since the fall of the Ottoman Empire. I see that the Kurdistan Region appears on the right track of development and relative stability

compared to the Middle East and Iraq.

My dream is to become a journalist in the Middle East, and my choice is made: I will start in Kurdistan. There, I find a comfort of life that is much closer to the expectations of the average European because the city is dotted with modern residences and buildings.

Although Erbil has lost its historical charm, its multi-millennial history is visible in the heart of the region's economic and political capital, with the city built around its great citadel (Qalat), which is said to have been continuously inhabited for longer than anywhere in the world.

This city, spreading out across an arid plain, is teeming with life and represents a strategic crossroads for any journalist interested in northern Mesopotamia. It is near Mosul, its heritage and culture under reconstruction; Kirkuk, a land of oil disputed between Baghdad and Kurdistan; Sinjar, the land of the Yezidis on the road to Rojava, the Syrian-Kurdish region; Turkey to the north; and Iran and Syria to the east.

**My dream is to become a journalist in the Middle East, and my choice is made: I will start in Kurdistan**

Erbil is at the crossroads of the large Kurdish region divided between Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Turkey. Fatally, this region is replete with interesting journalistic subjects, and so many great peoples and empires have passed through here. Erbil occupies a strategic place in the diplomacy of the United States, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Turkey, Iran, Germany and France for good reason.

### The choice of security

I quickly realize that Erbil is the real refuge for non-government organizations (NGOs) in the region. The city is full of foreigners, especially in the Christian part of Ankawa (Erbil), and it is perfectly safe to walk around at night. Petty and medium crime is invisible.

In the tourist areas, most of the hotels, cafes, restaurants, and bars (yes, in Erbil, you can easily find them) have nothing to envy France. The teahouses, bazaars, and minarets reflect the special Middle Eastern atmosphere in which one quickly feels at home.

When my family or friends were worried about me going

to Iraq, I was quick to point out that Kurdistan was not quite Iraq in terms of lifestyle and feel. Of course, there are conflicts in the region, but they are focused on specific places and groups, so that they go unnoticed to those uninterested.

While I am not naive to the omnipresent surveillance and to having a private life that is notoriously more controlled than in my home country of France, I also recognize that the roots of chaos arrive faster than we can foresee without this control.

In my job, I have yet to witness any type of abuse; at most, I have experienced reinforced security measures in trying to access certain sensitive subjects. It is sometimes frustrating, but I can work freely without feeling unsafe.

### The culture of hospitality and mutual support

As far as culture is concerned, it is both related to and different from that of the Arabs, Persians, and Turks. There is not one language but many dialects from Sorani to Badini (Kurmandji), which makes the task of learning the local language more complex, but a foreigner can also get by easily in Erbil speaking English. Arabic, however, remains a must-have.

This society loves music and dance, which incorporates Arabic, Persian, and Turkish influences but also has its own Kurdish codes. Its minority components – notably Arab, Christian, and Yezidi but also Kurdish-Iranian and Kurdish-Turkish – allow it to be enriched by different Middle Eastern cultures.

Finally, I would like to end on the warm welcome that I have received from the region's inhabitants, which is incomparable. Here, people live for each other, and mutual aid is a sacred value. Can one imagine strangers inviting you to a restaurant and not wanting to let you pay the bill in France? Here, this is common.

Networking, an essential component for journalism, is, therefore, a blessing. The goodness of the people matches the beautiful landscapes seen on the horizon of Kurdistan's mountains.

I know that the Kurdistan Region is unfinished surprising me in the good sense of the word. I plan to settle here for a while and who knows: perhaps we - you the good reader and I – might have the opportunity to meet, exchange experiences and impressions, and share a good tea or a delicious Shawarma. ■



**Myli Sangria**

*Myli Sangria is a sophomore at the University of Central Florida and the Spring 2023 recipient of the Kurdish Political Studies Program's Dr. Najmaldin Karim Research Fellowship. She volunteers with Sinjar Academy as a language mentor and volunteer coordinator for its new English program.*

## Solutions on the Shoulders of Giants Germany's Commemoration of the Yezidi Genocide



On Thursday, January 19, three major political parties in the German Bundestag – the Social Democrats, Greens and Free Democrats, and CDU/CSU sister parties – motioned to recognize the 2014 massacre of the ethno-religious Yezidi Kurds carried out by the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) as “genocide.”

As it joins 18 other governments and international bodies like the Netherlands in formally recognizing these atrocities as genocide, Germany's decision bears significant weight among its fellow states as the host of the largest diaspora of Yezidis outside the land of their historic heritage in the Nineveh Plains. In the immediate aftermath of the genocide, 1,100 Yezidi women and children needing advanced psychological and medical

support received otherwise-inaccessible healthcare through German protection programs in Baden-Württemberg, Lower Saxony, Schleswig-Holstein, Berlin, and Brandenburg.

The final decision closely followed two unprecedented convictions within the German court system. Just two days before the Bundestag's resolution commemorating the genocide, the German Federal Court of Justice confirmed the sentence of ISIS militant Taha A.J. for genocide and other crimes after he failed to appeal against the Frankfurt court in November 2021.

Remarkably, Taha A.J.'s trial was the first based on the universal jurisdiction addressing international crimes committed abroad by a non-German citizen. The second genocide conviction, involving a female national accused of aiding and abetting genocide, followed in May

2022. This year, a third trial will take place in the Higher Regional Court of Koblenz and is against a German national known as “Nadine K.”

Pursuing further action, Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock prioritized a victim-oriented approach in her January 19 speech: “It has already been mentioned that the judgement of the Frankfurt Higher Regional Court is so immensely important because the charge was not just terrorism but genocide, crimes against humanity, because the individual crimes suffered by the victims were heard and sentences imposed. This is a milestone in the global fight against impunity.”

Improving its efforts to commemorate the Holocaust and the colonial-era Namibian genocide, Germany's agenda toward such atrocities has long been recorded from the vantage point of the perpetrator. However, as unpardonable impunities persist, German lawmakers have quickly commemorated and condemned mass-scale atrocities as an enduring offer of solidarity against ongoing cycles of oppression. Last year, the Bundestag recognized the 1930s Soviet “Holodomor” famine as genocide, a recognition that drew unmistakable parallels with Russia's ongoing war on Ukraine.

The recognition of genocide, one of the greatest crimes under international law, differentiates commiseration and commemoration. According to the Genocide Convention under Articles I, V, and VI, a state recognizing the genocide of a people is not only obligated to prevent genocide but punish it and prevent it.

“After this major event, the ball will be in our court, and we need to use this opportunity and this sympathy for the best interest of the community and its destiny,” commented Haider Elias in a joint statement by Yazda and the Yezidi Survivors Network (YSN).

Acknowledging the Yezidi-led fight to recognize the genocide on a meaningful scale, the Bundestag offered special acknowledgments and thanks to individuals Nadia Murad, Lamiya Aji Bashar, and Farida Khalaf for sensitizing the public and calling for crimes to be addressed, as they processed the narrative of their own trauma and losses.

The Bundestag published twenty objectives in its resolution to support Yezidi recovery in Sinjar and diasporic communities. Calling on the courts in-state and throughout the international community, it urges support for existing projects adequately documenting

the genocide and to strengthen UNITAD's mandate to continue the prosecutions of ISIS perpetrators.

While the Bundestag credits Russia's current blockade for the failed referral by the Security Council to the International Criminal Court (ICC), subsequently preventing prosecutions through the ICC, it stresses the Government of Iraq's participation in reforming its justice system and ratifying the ICC's Rome Statute.

As at least 130,000 displaced Yezidi civilians still lead their lives in camps, countering the genocide itself and its ongoing effects remains a principal goal. This January, an estimated 100 families returned to their homes in Qahtaniya, while dozens moved their belongings back into Siba Sheikh Khider and Tel Ezeir.

In her 2022 year-end review on advocacy, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Nadia Murad's address to the public will remain a compelling standard for ten years, or even a

The Bundestag's eighteenth point places women at the center of Germany's foreign and development policy, vowing to support and promote Yezidi women as "agents of change" with the resources to engage with the world as self-determined, fulfilled individuals.

Yezidi woman tailor in an IDP camp.



Photo: Safin Hamid

The resolution emphasizes multiple components of holistic wellness for the Yezidis at risk, such as stabilizing Sinjar, resolving community uncertainty concerning children conceived through rape, and addressing the vulnerable situation of impacted Yezidi women. The Bundestag's eighteenth point places women at the center of Germany's foreign and development policy, vowing to support and promote Yezidi women as "agents of change" with the resources to engage with the world as self-determined, fulfilled individuals.

century from now: "We can always do more to empower survivors and center them in our conversations and projects. Survivors know best what they need to heal and recover. We can be there to listen, amplify their voices, and provide resources."

Germany's formal recognition of the Yezidi genocide is an important step toward such empowerment. ■

A Yezidi mother in an IDP camp holding his daughter's ID who was kidnapped by ISIS.



## Wings of Hope A Yezidi and His Story

### Foreword

**T**he so-called Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) has committed the crime of genocide against the Yezidi people. The Yezidis, a non-Muslim Kurdish religious minority in northern Iraq, have been targeted by ISIS since the militant group took over large parts of Iraq and Syria. From their bases, ISIS stormed the Iraqi city of Sinjar on August 3, 2014, quickly capturing it and changing the lives of its Yezidi population forever. Tens of thousands of Yezidis were murdered while thousands more were taken captive, victimized by brutal and unspeakable acts of violence. Yezidi women have been forced into sex slavery, sold off as brides, and subjected to the

places, Camp Rawanduz, is home to small group of Yezidi families who fled Sinjar in August 2014. They are hoping to return home.

It is here, on the outskirts of the small town of Rawanduz, that I encountered a young, displaced Yezidi boy named Emad. His unique love for birds inspired me to write this article and detail his story and the struggle of his people. My time spent with Emad and his friends in the hot summer months of 2016 opened my eyes to a whole new way of life and showed me the horrors that many only see through a television screen. It is through Emad that I can briefly tell the story of his people and the hope for their future.

Emad is a Yezidi, and this is his story.



A map showing the Kurdish Region of Iraq. In the bottom left of the map is Emad's hometown of Sinjar. On the right is Emad's new home, Camp Rawanduz.

worst kinds of physical and mental torture. Sinjar, home to a majority of the world's Yezidi population, now lays in ruins. Since its liberation from ISIS in November 2015, much of the city is uninhabitable. Even though the city is no longer under ISIS control, many Yezidi families still reside in camps within the borders of the Kurdish Region of Iraq. One of these

### Emad

Emad squats on a dusty cinderblock, hiding in the shadows from Iraq's burning mid-afternoon sun. He sits and chews sunflower seeds, spitting the salty shells near his feet. Several of Emad's pigeons wander back and forth in the shade near him, picking at small bits of seed and

**S**ince its liberation from ISIS in November 2015, much of the city is uninhabitable. Even though the city is no longer under ISIS control, many Yezidi families still reside in camps within the borders of the Kurdish Region

bread. Perched on his cinderblock in front of me, Emad and his birds are taking refuge not only from the sun, but also from the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in the mountains of the semi-autonomous Kurdish Region in northern Iraq. Emad is a Yezidi, and this is his story.

Emad is 16 years old and his raspy, high-pitched voice always carries with it a bit of sarcasm, even when I can't

birdhouse. The small homemade enclosure is shaded by a faded blue United Nations tarp that protects the birds from the strength of the afternoon sun. Emad enjoys sitting with his birds, watching all eight of them eat and drink before letting them stretch their wings and fly above the camp. The love Emad has for his birds is unique, setting him apart from everyone else in Camp Rawanduz. Situated in the back of a small neighborhood, Camp Rawanduz is tucked nicely next to an abandoned stadium. Like the rest of the Yezidis in Camp Rawanduz, Emad also enjoys playing football. Once the sun falls low to the horizon, cooling the dusty summer air, you can find Emad running in the overgrown and abandoned stadium next to the camp with other Yezidis, all of whom are engaged in a competitive game of football. As the men run after each other and the young children play together on the sidelines, Emad's birds soar through the evening air, flapping their wings high above the field below.



Emad with his pigeons.

understand his words. Along with 200 other Arabs and Yezidis, Emad lives in a small camp for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in a quiet town called Rawanduz, situated two hours north of Erbil, the capital city of the Kurdish Region of Iraq. Spitting out a few more sunflower seeds, Emad's beloved birds softly coo and wander around in front of us. High in the mountains and far from his hometown of Sinjar, Camp Rawanduz is his new home.

While continuing to chew sunflower seeds, Emad's shaded cinderblock seat lies next to a makeshift

### Sinjar

Sadly, these are not the same birds that he owned back in his hometown Sinjar. Emad's previous birds are gone, and so is his former life. The sectarian violence that has engulfed Iraq since the rise of ISIS forced him to abandon his old birds, pushing his family out of their ancestral home in the Nineveh Plains and deep into the mountains of the Kurdistan Region. Based on a radical interpretation of Sunni Islam, ISIS established a self-proclaimed caliphate in areas under its control in Iraq and Syria. Since their rapid and brutal rise, ISIS has carried out



Zane Ziebell

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a systematic and genocidal campaign of death and destruction, killing and enslaving thousands of Yazidis when it overran Emad's city of Sinjar in August 2014.

It has been almost two years since Emad's family and so many other Yazidi families in Sinjar were forced into exile. The ISIS offensive in August 2014 to capture the predominately Yazidi city forced Emad and thousands of others into the mountains just north of Sinjar. With no other choice but to flee, Emad and 200,000 Yazidis were able to escape death, violence, and sexual repression through a humanitarian corridor opened by the Kurdish peshmerga forces. Many were not so lucky, as between 2,000 and 5,000 Yazidi men, women, and children were murdered or enslaved by ISIS in what is now known as the Sinjar Massacre. Suffering from what has now been labeled genocide by the United Nations, the Yazidi people have since been thrust into the spotlight of the international community. Their persecution and suffering have become a rallying cry in the global fight against ISIS.

## The Peacock Angel

The Yazidis are a previously unknown and ancient religious minority who exist mainly in Kurdistan. Worldwide, the Yazidi population numbers a little under one million, with an overwhelming majority living in northern Iraq. The Yazidi faith is an ancient, orally transmitted religion that predates Islam. Yazidism believes in one God who is represented by seven angels. The most important angel to Yazidis, Melek Tawous, or the Peacock Angel (Melek Tawous is represented as a peacock in Yazidi tradition) fell from heaven after refusing to bow to Adam. This defiance in the face of God caused Melek Tawous to be cast from Heaven and sent to Earth. After falling from God's grace, Melek Tawous was later forgiven, returning to Heaven. Some extremists still unjustly equate the Yazidi veneration of Melek Tawous to devil worship, as Shaytan (the devil or 'satan' in Arabic and in Islam) also fell from Heaven after refusing to prostrate to Adam.

## Enslavement

Further, the Yazidis do not have a written or sacred text such as the Bible, Qur'an, or Tor'ah. This allows ISIS to kill the Yazidis without remorse, as it is justified by their radical interpretation of the Qur'an. Unlike the Christians of northern Iraq, the Yazidis have faced the worst type of oppression from ISIS as they are not 'People of the Book'. Subsequently, with the unjust label of devil worshippers, pagans, polytheists, and infidels for their veneration

of the Peacock Angel, the Yazidis were faced with two options when ISIS took over Sinjar: conversion to Islam or beheading. Those who weren't executed included many Yazidi women and young girls who were given as prizes and brides for fighters. Girls as young as 11 were raped repeatedly, given a monetary value, and sold off, forced into a life of sex slavery and servitude. Boys of fighting age like Emad were beheaded, shot in the head, and executed.

Today, it is thought that around 3,000 Yazidis, mainly women and girls, are still held by ISIS as the group seeks to purify the world of their blood and erase the Yazidi identity. Even worse, more than thirty mass graves filled with the bodies of innocent victims have been uncovered around Sinjar since its liberation from ISIS rule in November 2015. Containing the bodies of murdered Yazidis, these mass graves in combination with forced slavery and sex servitude amount to the world's first case of recognized genocide since Darfur in 2003. The Yazidi genocide is on-going. Thousands of Yazidi men, women, and children are still missing.

## Wings of Hope

In Soran, a small city just north of Rawanduz, Emad and I wander a busy street in the bazaar. It is evening during the holy month of Ramadan, and the sun is setting, its powerful rays dulled as it falls to the horizon. Men



Emad holding the egg from his two birds, and Saduk holding his and Emad's new birds.

and women hurriedly shop for last minute fruits and vegetables before breaking their fast. An odd pair, Emad and I walk together into a small bird shop to buy two new pigeons for his collection back in Camp Rawanduz. After 20 minutes of excited browsing, Emad decides on a pair of brown and white pigeons, a strong male and a female, complete with a fertilized egg. I haggle with the owner, happy to be able to gift Emad with two new pigeons and a baby on the way.

As we travel back to Rawanduz in a taxi, Emad's birds are headed for a new home and a new life. Much of Sinjar has been destroyed since its liberation, as airstrikes and improvised explosive devices have crumbled the buildings and left much of the city in ruins. When reconstruction is complete, Emad will return to Sinjar. He and his new birds will once again be heading for a new home and a new life. Until then, Emad will rest and wait on his dusty cinderblock, patiently caring for his birds and remembering better days before the war. As we sit together, his new birds are circling overhead, flying together in the evening sky. As they dip and dive, their little wings of hope flap mightily, carrying dreams of peace and memories of home through the winds of freedom above.

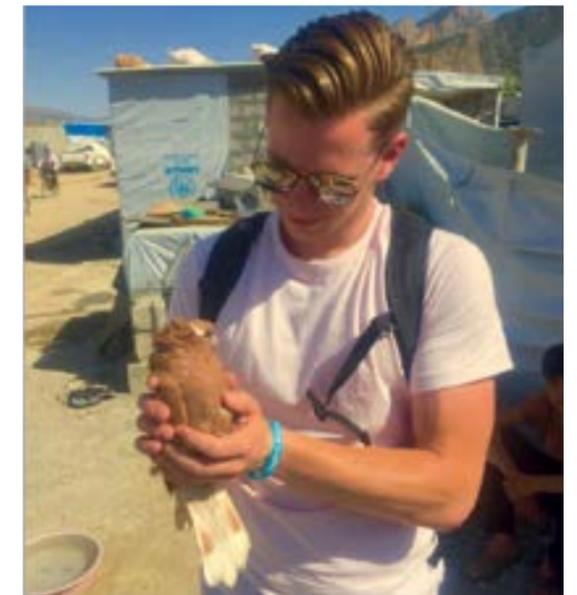
## Emad is a Yazidi, and this is his story

From the United Nations Human Rights Council Report, "They came to destroy": ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis June 15, 2016

"When ISIS attacked Sinjar, they came to destroy," Yazidi religious authority.

33. Following this separation, ISIS fighters summarily executed men and older boys who refused to convert to Islam. Men from rural Yazidi villages who fled with their personal firearms in their belongings were also executed when weapons were discovered in their possession. Most of those killed were executed by gunshots to the head; others had their throats cut. ISIS fighters carried out executions of male Yazidis in the streets of towns and villages, at makeshift checkpoints, on roadsides, and on the lower sections of the roads ascending Mount Sinjar. Other captives, including family members, were often forced to witness the killings.

64. While held by ISIS fighters, Yazidi women and girls over the age of nine are subjected to brutal sexual



Emad and Saduk, two Yazidis from Camp Rawanduz, shopping for new birds in the Soran bazaar.

violence. Most of those interviewed reported violent daily rapes by their fighter- owners. Some were handcuffed behind their backs during the rapes while others had their hands and legs tied to the corners of the beds. Little, if anything, protects against rape. Girls as young as nine were raped, as were pregnant women. Many women and girls reported being injured as a result of the rapes, suffering bleeding, cuts, and bruising.

74. From the moment of capture, through the various holding sites and while being bought and raped by ISIS fighters, Yazidi women and girls were verbally abused by ISIS fighters. Insults were specifically directed at their Yazidi faith, saying that they "worshipped stones" and referring to them as "dirty kuffar" and "devil-worshippers."

83. ISIS fighters often target younger Yazidi children as a means of punishing their mothers. In one case, an ISIS fighter killed several children after their mother failed in her escape attempt. He beat her for crying over the death of "kuffar children" before raping her. In 2015, a Libyan ISIS fighter bought a Yazidi woman and her young children, the oldest of whom was a seven-year-old girl, and held them in a house in Dayr Az-Zayr governorate. After loaning the mother to be raped by another ISIS fighter for one night, the Libyan fighter took the seven-year-old girl into a room, locking the door behind him. He told her mother, who was screaming at the door, that he wanted to check whether the seven-year-old "was ready to be married." ■

## A 35-Year Quest for Justice

**H**alala Jalal was only 12 years old when the Iraqi regime of Saddam Hussein attacked the Kurdish city of Halabja with chemical weapons. Miraculously, Halala managed to survive the attack, but she has been sick ever since. She can't breathe without the respirator. She spends multiple hours a day in her one-bedroom home Halabja dependent on an oxygen tank.

This month marks the 35th anniversary of the chemical attack on Halabja and the 20th anniversary of the removal of Saddam Hussein's regime by the allied forces.

The Halabja poisonous gas attack occurred from March 15-19, 1988, amidst the Iran-Iraq War. The chemical weapons attack killed 5,000 people, half of them children, and wounded many hundreds more.

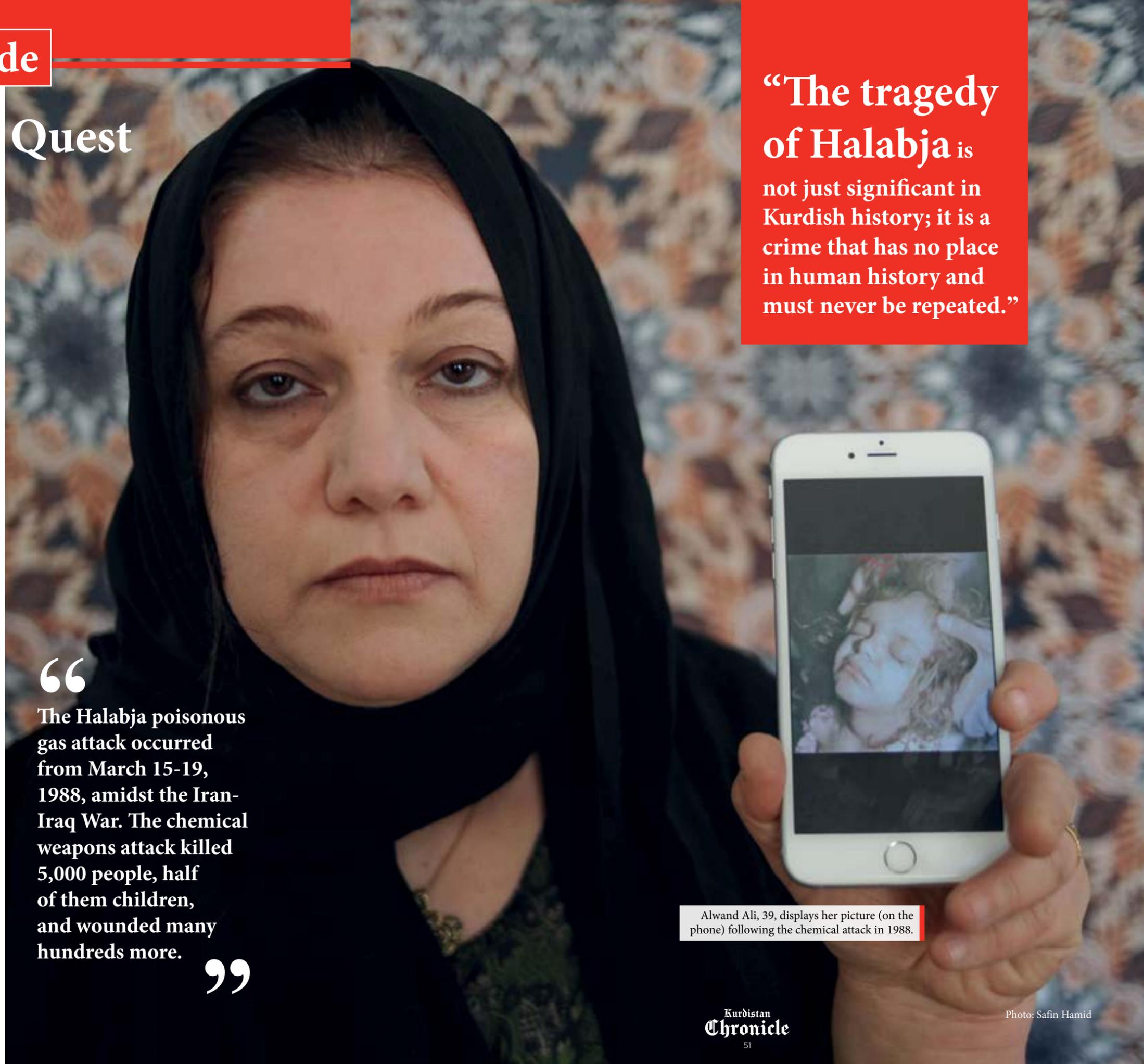
The wounded are still suffering – some are paralyzed for life and others are afflicted with chronic coughing and are experiencing a life of gradual death.

There is a cemetery dedicated to the victims of the Halabja attack, at the gate of which is written the following: "Members of Baath Party (Saddam's Party) are not allowed to enter. The cemetery was built so that future generations would



**Qassim Khidhir**

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**“The tragedy of Halabja is not just significant in Kurdish history; it is a crime that has no place in human history and must never be repeated.”**

**“The Halabja poisonous gas attack occurred from March 15-19, 1988, amidst the Iran-Iraq War. The chemical weapons attack killed 5,000 people, half of them children, and wounded many hundreds more.”**

Alwand Ali, 39, displays her picture (on the phone) following the chemical attack in 1988.



Photo: Safin Hamid



not forget this heinous crime. According to Luqman Abdulkader, president of an association for the victims of the Halabja chemical attacks, there are 835 people in the Kurdistan region who are still suffering from Saddam's chemical attacks, with some of them in critical condition.

Luqman, one of the victims who lost six family members in the attack including his wife, said that the people of Halabja were overjoyed when Saddam was deposed. "There is nothing more joyful than seeing your oppressor fall in front of your eyes," Luqman told Kurdistan Chronicle.

After the regime was deposed, the people of Halabja expected justice to prevail and compensation to be provided, but their hopes were dashed.

"The mentality of the current rulers in Baghdad is not dissimilar to that of Saddam's regime. They do not recognize Kurds as their own citizens and are unwilling to apologize for the genocide against Halabja," said Luqman.

Luqman has met with leaders from Baghdad on several occasions in Baghdad and Halabja, but he believes they are unconcerned about the people of Halabja and their plight.

We had high hopes for Baghdad becoming the nation's

capital, but as Luqman put it, "we quickly learned that it does not care about our peoples' interests."

For the victims, justice entails not only bringing Saddam and his aides to justice, but also bringing the international corporations that assisted Saddam in obtaining chemical weapons to justice.

For more than a decade, the Halabja victims' association has collaborated with international lawyers to force the companies from Germany, the Netherlands, and France to pay their roles in the crime.

Halala, who was having trouble breathing, gave an explanation. "The tragedy of Halabja is not just significant in Kurdish history; it is a crime that has no place in human history and must never be repeated."

When Saddam's notorious cousin, Ali Hassan Majid, dubbed "Chemical Ali" by the Kurds, was hanged for his role in gassing 5,000 people in Halabja, there was talk of bringing him to Halabja and hanging him there, but the people of Halabja including Halala fiercely rejected the idea.

"We are not seeking revenge; we just want justice to prevail," said Halala. ■



Photo: Safin Hamid

# Decisive Action

## The UK's 1991 Intervention



Gary Kent

Gary Kent has been the Secretary of the APPG on the Kurdistan Region, House of Commons, since 2007 and writes in a personal capacity.

Art sometimes imitates real life. The number one record on the British pop music charts in March 1991 was by The Clash and was called "Should I Stay or Should I Go?"

You couldn't find a better way of framing the American dilemma after chasing Saddam Hussein out of Kuwait and contemplating if it should finish off the job in Baghdad. US public opinion wanted their boys and girls to come home, and the US declined to breach the limits of its UN remit to liberate Kuwait.

But then the country had to decide how to respond to the uprisings of Shias in the south and Kurds in the north, which it had encouraged in the belief that Saddam's days were numbered after his humiliating rout in Kuwait.

The consequent Shia uprising in the south was mercilessly crushed due, in part, to a foolish US decision to allow Saddam to use his helicopters in Iraq.

### John Major

Fortunately for the Kurds, the British Prime Minister John Major listened to the upsurge of popular and parliamentary concern about the conditions of the Kurds who had revolted and made significant gains but were then forced to flee to the mountains. The television news showed the reality every day, and footage is

showcased in the Red House Museum in Suleimani to this day. Kurds were in desperate straits. There were between 500-1000 deaths a day in the turmoil of March and April. Visiting the Turkish border, British Conservative MP Paul Howell said, "On television, you only see the faces, you don't see the ground. There you see human feces, diarrhea, sheep's heads and entrails. It's as close to hell as you can think of."

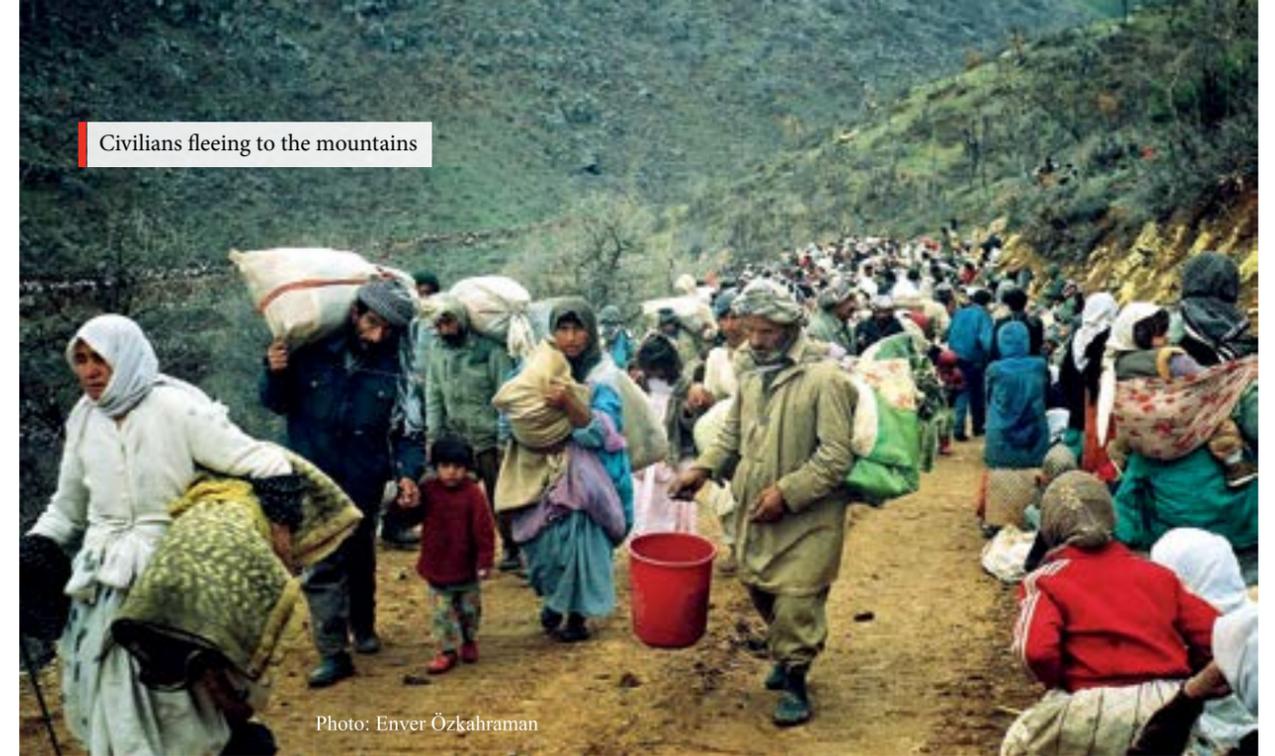
British Conservative MP Julian Amery argued that in any conflict when there is a choice faced between non-interference in the affairs of other countries and helping refugees in danger, we should firmly choose the latter. This should occur even through co-operating with some of our allies and using military power under the

### British Labour's Shadow Overseas Development Minister Ann Clwyd gave the Commons her eye-witness account of the five days she spent with the Kurds in the mountains.

aegis of the United Nations and, if that is not possible, we should still act.

### Accounting genocide

British Labour's Shadow Overseas Development Minister Ann Clwyd gave the Commons her eye-witness account of the five days she spent with the Kurds in the mountains. She passionately described how they were freezing by night and bitterly cold by day, wearing the same clothes in which they had fled and living



Civilians fleeing to the mountains

Photo: Enver Özkahraman

in makeshift tents of the same quality as the thin plastic that laundries use. She said "Saddam Hussein is still killing, killing, killing, in Iraq. This is genocide, and it calls for an international response."

Major said that "worsening conditions amounting to near-genocide" and "potentially a humanitarian disaster" made him "sufficiently concerned at the plight of the Kurds" to raise the issue himself in the Cabinet on March 21 (Newroz, by coincidence) because "It was clear we should help."

In his autobiography, Major recalls that: "defeated in the war, Saddam Hussein's fury turned on his domestic opponents – the Kurds"...and that "genocide was in the man's mind, and it was certainly in the man's character."

Iraqi Embassies in Britain and across Europe were occupied by Kurdistanis. Many prominent Kurdistanis such as Safeen Dizayee, Mam Jalal Talabani, Hoshyar Zebari, Massoud Barzani, and Nadhim Zahawi deserve credit for their rushed but effective lobbying.

The British people were moved to act and gave hundreds of tons of material aid to the Kurds. I was a young parliamentary researcher then, whose MP had been asked to help find transport for tons of blankets and food to the mountains. We somehow managed to persuade Iran to send a Boeing 747 to deliver the aid.

### A model for future humanitarian emergencies

The usual rules of international relations would have left it there, but Major acted decisively with an innovative solution: to impose a no-fly zone over Kurdistan and a haven on the ground.

This idea won French and then European Council support and later enabled Major to persuade US President George H. W. Bush to join the operation, which lasted for 12 years.

Saddam arrogantly expected Kurdistan to fail without him. It proved him wrong. John Major's initiative resulted in the fastest major refugee return in history. Within three to four months, over 1.5 million refugees in Turkey and Iran returned to their homes.

Furthermore, refugees in Turkey since 1988 and in Iran since 1975 also began returning to Iraqi Kurdistan. This multilateral military intervention combined with, and in support of UN and NGO humanitarian assistance, saved countless lives.

The UK should be very proud of its intervention in 1991, which has been forgotten by too many, and which is a model for future humanitarian emergencies. It also more prominently thrust Kurdistan into the mix of British foreign policy thinking and today underpins a strong bilateral relationship of mutual benefit to this day. ■

# Newroz

## Kurdish New Year



Safin Hamid

Safin Hamed Ahmed is a Kurdish photojournalist who works with the AFP. He is a visual storyteller and the director of Framing, a not-for-profit photojournalism organization founded in 2016 in Erbil.

### The Meaning of Newroz

The Kurdish New Year celebration of Newroz (a combination of the Kurdish words new – meaning “new” – and roz – meaning “day” or “sun” in English) marks the start of spring and symbolizes renewal, hope, and freedom among the Kurdish people.

Typically falling on March 21, Newroz is an ancient festival celebrated by Kurdish people and other ethnic groups in the Middle East, Central Asia, and other parts of the world. Its celebration has been a vital part of Kurdish culture for thousands of years and is deeply rooted in Kurdish identity and history.

Each year at Newroz, families and friends come together to enjoy traditional food, music, dance, fireworks, and other festivities. In the Kurdistan Region, citizens celebrate a three-day holiday.

#### Cultural and political origins

The Kurdish Newroz celebration has its origins in ancient Zoroastrian traditions that are over 3,000 years old. Zoroastrians celebrated the arrival of spring as a time of

renewal and rebirth, a tradition that was later adopted by the Kurdish people and has since become an important cultural and political event for Kurds around the world.

The festivities begin with people gathering around bonfires lit at the evening on March 20, which are meant to signify the cleansing of bad luck or evil spirits while also commemorating the fire kept alive by Kawa, who fought against oppression in ancient times.

According to legend, Kawa – an ancient blacksmith – killed Zuhak,

an evil tyrant king, freeing his people from bondage after years of suffering under his rule. It thus signifies the freedom through courage that is evidenced today through Kurds’ modern-day struggles around the world.

As such, the colorful and joyous celebration of Newroz is both a cultural and a political event. In many parts of the world, Kurds have faced political persecution and discrimination, and Newroz is an expression of Kurds asserting their cultural identity, demanding their rights, and demonstrating resilience and strength. The day is often marked by political speeches and demonstrations calling for greater Kurdish autonomy and recognition.

#### Symbolic renewal

The focus of celebrating Newroz lies in its symbolism for renewal: it reminds people that regardless of how difficult life may seem at times, there will always be new beginnings ahead.

For many Kurds living outside their homeland, this day also holds a special meaning because it is an opportunity to connect with fellow



Men parading to the Kalé mountain in Akre to flame the Newroz fire.



members of their communities who are spread across the globe due to displacement caused by war or political conflict in recent decades. Newroz remains central to Kurdish culture, as its traditions are passed down from generation to generation and provide much-needed hope during difficult times; they remind everyone that no matter what occurs, nothing can stop them from dreaming big dreams while looking forward to brighter days ahead.

The famous Kurdish poet, Piremerd (1867 - 1950), captured the meaning of Newroz in his well-known verse. Translated by Tyler Fisher and Haidar Khezri.

## Newroz نه‌ورۆز

This joyous Newroz, New Year's Day of old renewal, revives a Kurdish rite of light, of lively news.

ئەم پۆژی سالی تازه‌یه، نه‌ورۆزه، هاته‌وه  
جه‌ژنیکی کۆنی کورده به‌خۆشی و به‌هاته‌وه

For years, the flower of our hope remained in chains, its vernal bud the blood of youth who yearn for change.

چهند سال گۆلی هیوای ئیتمه پێ په‌ست بوو تا‌کوو پار  
هه‌ر خۆینی لاهه‌کان بوو گۆلی ئالی نه‌وبه‌هار

The red that stained the highest Kurdish ridges here has heralded the dawn for nations far and near.

ئهو په‌نگه سووره بوو که له ئاسۆی بلندی کورد  
مژده‌ی به‌یانی بۆ گه‌لی دوور و نزیک نه‌برد

As Newroz lit undying fire in their hearts, the youth rushed forth to welcome death with open arms.

نه‌ورۆز بوو ناگرتیکی وه‌های خسته‌ جه‌رگه‌وه  
لاوان به‌ عه‌شق نه‌چوون به‌ به‌ره‌و پیری مه‌رگه‌وه

The sun ascends the summits of our homeland's heights. The blood of martyrs colors crimson dawn's first light.

وا رۆژ هه‌لات له به‌نده‌نی به‌رزى و لاته‌وه

خوینی شه‌هیده‌ په‌نگی شه‌فه‌ق شه‌وق نه‌داته‌وه  
Invaders made our homes their battlefield. Unheard of crimes, yet real: the hearts of girls have served as shields.

تا ئیسته‌ رووی نه‌داوه له تاریخی میلیله‌تا  
قه‌لخانی گولله‌ سنگی کچان بێ له هه‌لمه‌تا

Mourn not the martyrs of the homeland. Do not cry. Still living in the nation's heart, they never die. translated by Tyler Fisher and Haidar Khezri

پیتی ناوی بۆ شه‌هیدی وه‌ته‌ن شیوه‌ن و گرین  
نامرن نه‌وانه‌ وا له دلی میلیله‌تا نه‌ژین

Holiday Card: Ode for a New Day

O Kurd, happy New Year, happiest Newroz!  
On the path of glory, may our nation never lose.  
Cut the hand of occupation from our land:  
Gain freedom by your fearless stand.

بۆ کارتی جیژنه‌ پیرۆزه:

کورده پیرۆز بێ جه‌ژنی نه‌ورۆزت  
نه‌به‌زی له پێی سه‌ربه‌رزیی هۆزت  
ده‌ستی داگیرکه‌ر له خاکی بپه‌  
نازایی بینه‌ و نازادی بکړه

by Hejar (1921-1991)  
a collaborative translation by the Translation Society of the University of Central Florida. ■



**Tanya Goudsouzian**

*Tanya Goudsouzian is a journalist, author and editor specializing in Afghanistan and Iraq affairs. She has reported for various international media outlets, including Al Jazeera English, RFE/RL and Le Monde Diplomatique. She is recognized for interviews with leading political figures including presidents of Iraq and Afghanistan, military leaders and dissidents.*

## Erbil Rich With History, Replete With Opportunity

**Erbil is a wonderful mélange of the old and the new. Thousands of years going back to the fifth millennium BC, through the pre-Islamic era, and up to modern times reveals today's Erbil as a city that does not bury its heritage but proudly displays it instead.**

**I**t took two planes, a road trip, and a rickety speedboat to transport me to the Kurdistan Region of Iraq in January 2003. It was then the run-up to the U.S.-led invasion, and journalists were competing to enter, with neighboring Iran, Turkey and Syria not making things easy.

After a six-day wait in Damascus, I boarded a wobbly charter plane and flew to the border town of Qamishli. The journey continued by car, past oil rigs and into Malakia, where I took a speedboat ride across the Tigris River. On the other side, a large sign, "Welcome to Kurdistan," greeted new arrivals stepping onto the shore. It was the unofficial border crossing at Faysh Khabur – or peshkapur in Kurdish. Then by road I traveled to a regional political bureau in Zakho to register my arrival, and from there it was onward to Erbil.

I was among a few journalists who had managed to enter the country as the war approached. It wasn't Baghdad, but it was a part of Iraq about which little news was being reported in the mainstream media, especially after the No-Fly Zone had been imposed following Saddam Hussein's defeat in the 1991 Gulf War. The zone had permitted the establishment of the autonomous Kurdish Regional Government (KRG), but it had also left the cities under its jurisdiction walled in and isolated from the world. My assignment was to gauge the mood among the Kurds in the run-up to the invasion.

"Nobody knows much about the Kurds," my editor had told me flippantly. "Let's humanize them. Find out what they eat, whether

A Glimpse of Erbil from the Jalil Khayat mosque.





they go to the cinema, what they think of the upcoming U.S. invasion,” he instructed.

I spoke to a cross section of Kurds, including shopkeepers in the bazaars, truck drivers, communists, former political prisoners, survivors of the 1988 Halabja chemical attack, peshmerga commanders, and civil society activists. The optimism was unanimous. The U.S. must invade, and Saddam Hussein must go, along with the crippling sanctions that had so cruelly impeded progress in the semi-autonomous Kurdish region. For the Kurds, the war represented hope for a temptingly better future.

Erbil, also called “Hawler” by the Kurds, is an ancient city with an estimated population of around 1,600,000. It had always been an important regional trade center, with roads to Turkey, Iran, and Syria. The famous Hamilton Road constructed under British rule in 1928-32 by Archibald M. Hamilton runs from Erbil through the mountains to the Iranian border.

I stayed at the Chwar Chra Hotel, which at the time was the hotel of choice for most foreign journalists, politicians, and aid workers. It provided good security, clean rooms, and fewer power cuts than elsewhere. Under Iraqi rule after World War I and during the Kurdish struggle against Saddam in the 1970s, Erbil’s infrastructure had largely been neglected. Even after the establishment of the KRG, Erbil continued to suffer economically due to the economic blockade imposed upon it by Saddam and to the UN sanctions against Iraq.

**I was among a few journalists who had managed to enter the country as the war approached.**

The Chwar Chra boasted a restaurant that served succulent local dishes but was also a meeting place for the Who’s Who of Erbil. More importantly, the name of the establishment commemorated the short-lived ‘Mahabad’ Republic in Iranian Kurdistan, a tragic chapter of Kurdish history that offered foreigners a first glimpse into the Kurdish psyche. While Kurds looked to the future with hope, they would never forget the past.

In 1945, with backing from the Soviet Union, Kurdish politician and jurist Qazi Muhammed had founded the first ever independent Kurdish state in the city of Mahabad in Iran. Mustafa Barzani was appointed Minister of Defense and commander of the republic’s army. When Iranian forces engaged the forces of the Republic of Mahabad, Barzani quickly proved his reputation, as his forces

inflicted defeats on the Iranian divisions and were one of the few who did not surrender or defect to the advancing Iranian forces.

However, less than a year later, in December 1946, Iranian forces invaded the city and hanged Qazi Muhammed and his colleagues in the now iconic Chwar Chra square. Barzani and his followers managed to evade capture by finding refuge first in Armenia, later in Azerbaijan. After spending periods of time across the Soviet Union, he returned to Iraq and engaged in numerous insurgencies against Baghdad.

At the time of my first visit to Erbil in January 2003, Barzani's son Massoud was heading the Kurdistan Democratic Party that he had co-founded with Qazi Muhammed. I interviewed him then.

"We are not thinking of participating in the war because we are focusing on the day after the regime changes," he told me. "For several reasons, it would be very difficult for us to take part in this war. We don't intend to move our troops outside of Kurdish-ruled areas, and within this region, there are no targets for us to hit."

By the time of my second visit to Erbil in the winter of 2005, Massoud Barzani had been elected as the President of the Kurdistan Region and it was, as he put it, "the day after the regime change." Saddam was gone, the Baath party was destroyed, and it was finally time to build. Fortunes flowed into the Kurdish region, mostly from the Gulf countries and Turkey. Kurdish-administered northern Iraq was a blank slate, and risk-taking entrepreneurs from around the world were parachuting in. Soon, there would be two new airports, several new housing projects, shopping malls, five-star hotels, and Western fast-food chains.

Today, the presidency of the Kurdistan Region is held by Mustafa's grandson, Nechirvan Barzani, while Massoud's son Masrour Barzani is Prime Minister. In a nod to cross-Kurdish alliance, Qubad Talabani from neighboring Sulimaniyah is Deputy Prime Minister.

Traveling to Erbil no longer entails crossing the Tigris by speedboat or long car drives, as Erbil International Airport is now on par with global standards, with a VIP lounge offering croissants, cappuccinos, and Levantine treats like manakish and lahmajoon.

With much of the construction nearly complete, Erbil now boasts a skyline fit for any self-respecting Gulf country. High-end housing complexes, sushi bars, franchise fast-food restaurants such as Hardee's and KFC, and other shops are found throughout the city, as are international hotel chains such as Rotana and Divan (Marriott and Hilton are set to open in the near future as well). The favorite spots of European expats include a German beer garden and a restaurant in the hip section of Ainkawa.

But though Erbil residents look back with pride on their recent days of struggle and triumph, there is far more history in Erbil dating to the fifth millennium BC. At the heart of the city lies the ancient Citadel of Erbil and the Mudhafaria Minaret.

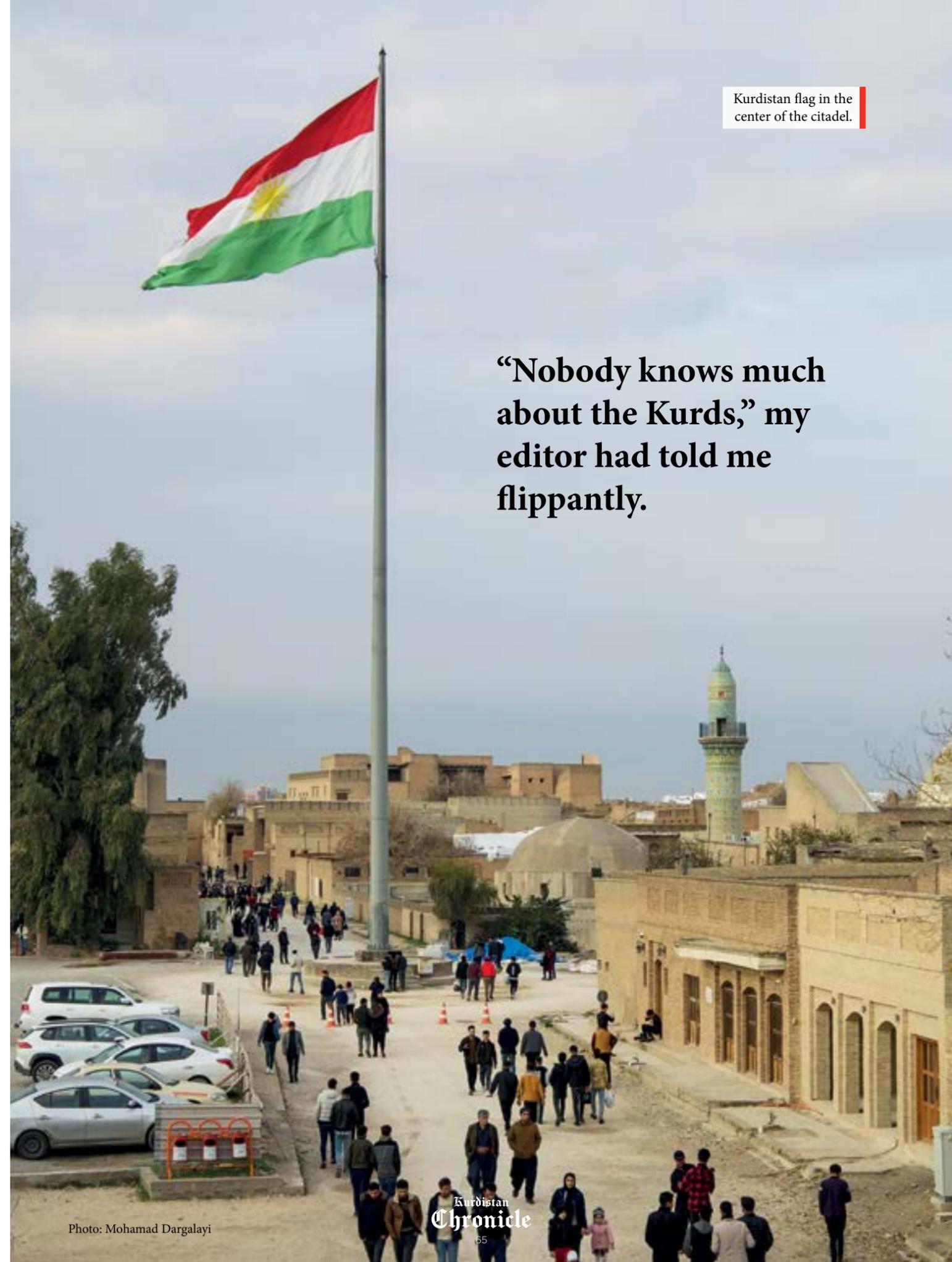
The earliest historical reference to the region dates to the Third Dynasty of Ur of Sumer, when King Shulgi mentioned the city of Urbilum. Over the millennia, Erbil has been ruled by such empires as the Sumerians, Assyrians, Babylonians, Medians, and Achaemenids and then later by the Sassanid Persians, Greeks, Parthians, Arabs, and Ottomans.

In fact, Erbil was already an ancient city when in 331 BCE Alexander the Great defeated the Persian king Darius III at the Battle of Gaugamela, also known as the Battle of Arbela (Erbil) in 331 BCE, ending the Achaemenid Empire and leading to the downfall of Darius.

Visitors to Erbil's archeological museum will find a large collection of pre-Islamic artefacts, particularly the art of Mesopotamia. The city is also a center for archaeological projects in the area and was designated as Arab Tourism Capital 2014 by the Arab Council of Tourism. In July 2014, the Citadel of Erbil was inscribed as a World Heritage Site.

As cities go, Erbil is a wonderful mélange of the old and the new. Thousands of years going back to the fifth millennium BC, through the pre-Islamic era, and up to modern times reveals today's Erbil as a city that does not bury its heritage but proudly displays it instead. It is rich with history, replete with opportunity, and ready to compete with other first-rate cities around the region. ■

Kurdistan flag in the center of the citadel.



**“Nobody knows much about the Kurds,” my editor had told me flippantly.**



**Khalil Abdullah**

*Khalil Abdullah is a Kurdish writer. Throughout the past 40 years, he has published more than 20 books, focusing mostly on culture and social issues.*

## “Free Besikci”

### A Call of Friendship, A Message of Fidelity

While the Kurds remain deprived of their basic rights and continue to stand up for their cause, they are often given a helping hand from their friends, in this case not only ‘the mountains’. There have been many instances bearing witness to how the Kurds welcome such opportunities to advocacies with faith and fidelity. One example is a brave call in 1987 for the release of Turkish philosopher Ismael Besikci from a prison in Antep, who had dedicated nearly his entire life to defending the Kurds around the world.

In February 1987, Kurdish newspaper Rebazi Nwe published the headline “Capture of Two Foreign Experts” on its frontpage. The news article revealed that Kurdish peshmerga forces had arrested two foreigner nationals, one German and one Turkish, who had claimed to be engineers working for a company contracted by the Ba’ath regime of Iraq but to have mistakenly entered a warzone under the control of the Kurdish fighters. The article pointed out that Jalal Talabani, then Secretary-General of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan and who later became the first Kurd to serve as the president of Iraq, had agreed to hand over the German national to the German embassy in Tehran or Baghdad but tied the freedom of the Turkish national to the release of Besikci from Aintab prison.

The reaction of Kurds to Besikci’s conviction as part of the Kurdish cause was well received by the imprisoned Turkish sociologist. In his latest book titled My Memoirs, Besikci recounts the day he

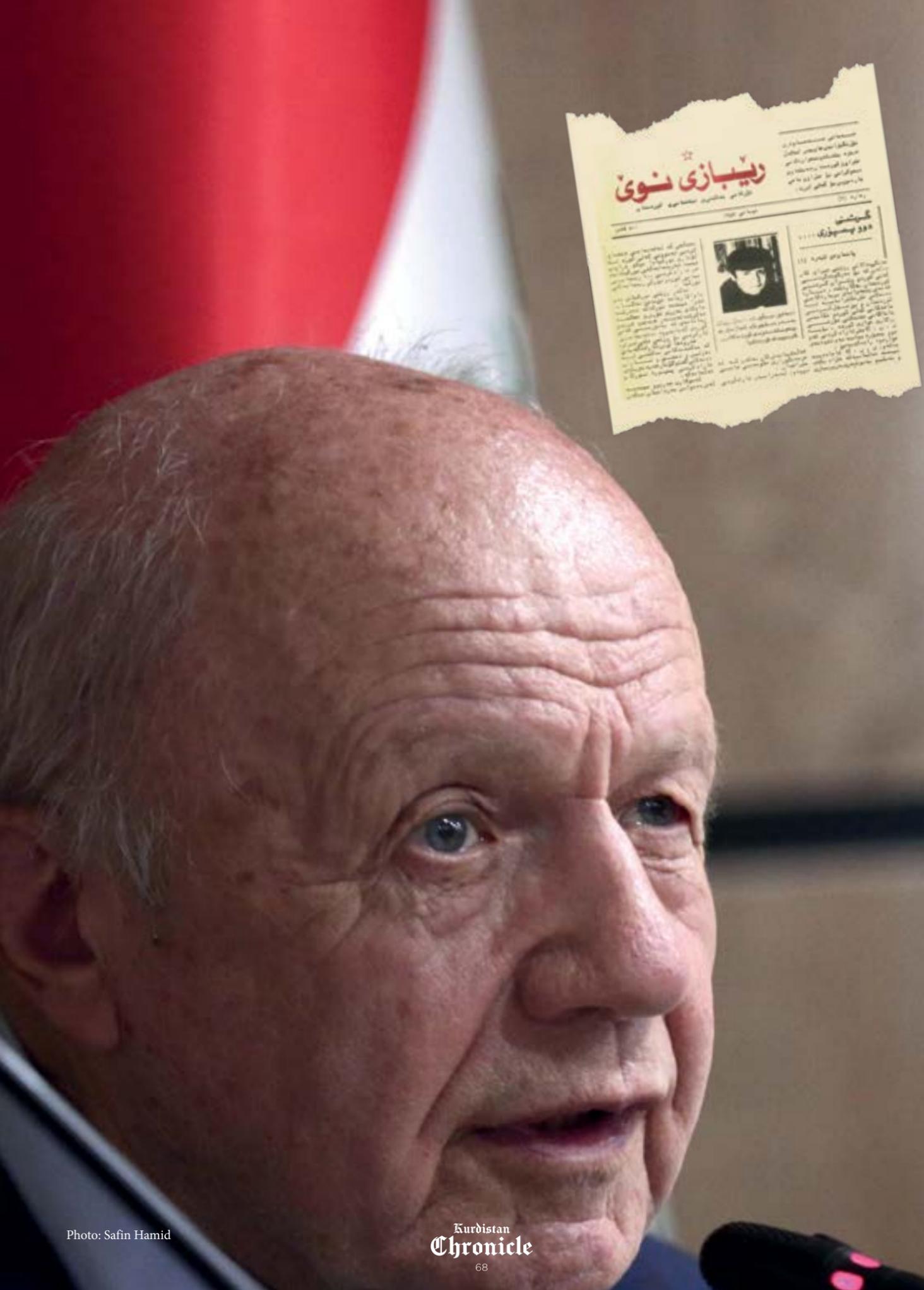
From prison  
to prison  
his heart  
was a canary  
calling on his tongue  
FREEDOM

From headsman  
to headsman  
all were Hallaj  
cutting off his tongue  
But still steady spoke

And saying day and night:  
in this country  
there are Turkish  
there are mountains  
there can even be Jinn and Demons  
But the Mountainous Turks  
have never been  
Nor will they ever

**Moayed Teyib**

# FREEDOM



read the news on Turkish Hurriyet newspaper. While hearing others calling for his freedom was a pleasant feeling that happens rarely behind bars, Besikci was in fact rather worried that prison authorities might call him in for investigations about his connection to these developments. This, however, never happened, but the rapture of having faithful friends in Kurdistan remains with him to this day.

Besikci has become famous around the world for his writings stemming from his thoughts and attitudes about the Kurds. He was born in 1939 in a conservative Turkish family in the Iskilip district of Corum province in Turkey. After doing his primary and secondary studies there, he was admitted to Ankara University's Faculty of Political Science and graduated in 1962, after which he completed PhD at Ataturk University.

During his military service from 1962-1964, he was sent to serve in a village near the Bitlis and Hakkari areas, where he first saw the Kurdish nomadic tribes with their livestock passing through. With his first impression, he noticed that these peripatetic tribes have their own language, traditions, clothes, and history and realized that they are completely different from the Turks. Thus, they never matched what some in Turkey had called them: 'the Mountainous Turks.'

This was where his curiosity and inclination to delve into these nomadic tribes was triggered and grew into the subject of his PhD dissertation, a study of a Kurdish tribe named Alikan. This dissertation was rejected by the faculty at Ankara University, but Besikci was awarded an Honorary PhD for it by Bogazici University in Istanbul in 2013.

In the 50 years of his academic career, Dr. Besikci published 36 books and 31 research studies on the Kurdish cause in the Middle East, out of which 32 books are banned in Turkey while most of his works have been translated into other world languages, including Kurdish.

Since his works were dedicated to the Kurds, he was first disqualified from teaching at the university level and then he sued for segregating

from Turkish nation, bringing him a 13-year prison sentence in 1971. From that day onwards, he has been indicted and sentenced to a total of 250 years in prison and has spent 17 years behind 23 different prison bars for advocating for liberty, democracy and Kurdish rights.

Besikci's memories are of those days spent in the dark prison rooms behind iron bars. Given his crossroad between the university and prison, he willingly took the later as a place to produce academic writings about the Kurds and managed to turn prison life into a university setting. He has repeatedly stated that "after the Second World War, every involved nation obtained their rights except the Kurds, and the division of great Kurdistan from 1921 has remained."

Although he was known as the symbol of courage and liberal thought, as well as an adamant, determined, and advocating writer for Kurdistan, the Kurds are not the only people who have honored and valued Besikci's works – his views and words are highly respected worldwide.

Alongside being candidate for a Nobel Peace Prize in 1987, he was nominated for and bestowed many international awards but refused some from those countries who have oppressed Kurds or worked with their oppressors. Besikci has also been awarded honorary PhDs by three universities, including Soran University in Kurdistan, where a hall and a street are also named after him. In Rawanduz, a statue is built to pay tribute to his decades-long commitment to advocating for Kurdish rights.

Besikci has earned public, academic, and political respect in Kurdistan through his writings and endeavors. He has consistently upheld that "the Kurds are a politically significant and dynamic community of the Middle East." For this, several prominent Kurdish figures have complimented him in their works, among whom is renowned Kurdish poet Sherko Bekas who wrote:

"All we can do for you now is keep you as a flower, a poem, and freedom in our soul." ■

## One Writer's Odyssey from Sunny Kurdistan to Icy Canada



Interview by  
Sardar Sattar

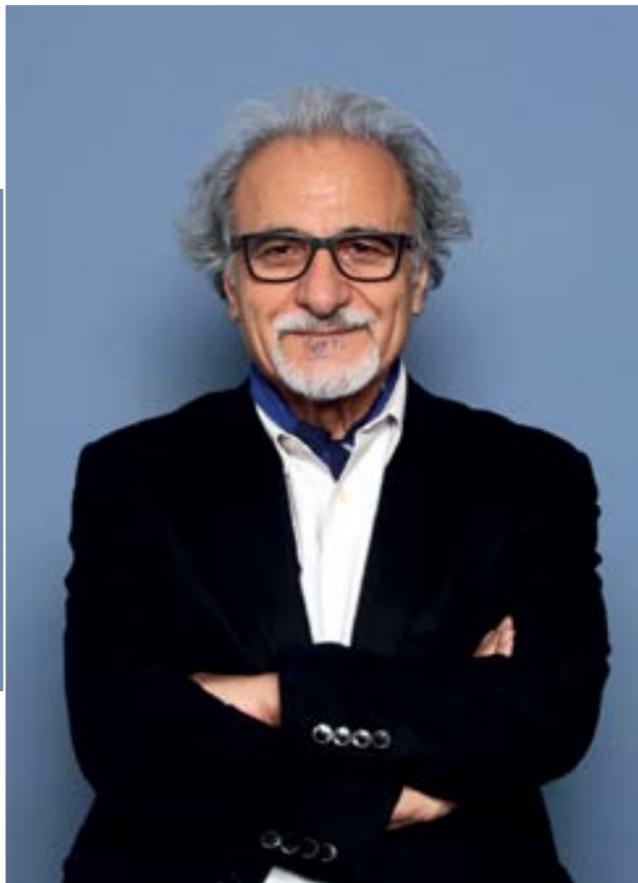
*Sardar Sattar is a translator and journalist based in the Kurdistan Region. He has an MA in English Studies from the University of Lodz, Poland. He has translated several books and political literature into Kurdish and English. He writes regularly for local and international newspapers and journals.*

It is a widely accepted truth that the greatest of sailors are not bred in calm waters but on turbulent seas.

This proverb can be equally applied to the craft of writing, for it is often the most arduous and trying of lives that yields the greatest literary treasures. This reality holds particularly true for Kurdish intellectuals, who have had to wage a tireless battle to defend the rights of their people, resulting

Jalal Barzanji, a distinguished Kurdish poet and novelist, is a prime example of an artist forged in the crucible of a life filled with struggle and tribulation. His journey from the sunbaked streets of his Kurdish village to the frosty terrain of northern Canada is an account that is both captivating and worthy of attention.

As a master wordsmith, Barzanji has been lauded with countless international awards, an honorary PhD from a Canadian University in Alberta, and has published several books of prose and poetry in



both Kurdish and English. In addition to his artistic achievements, he has demonstrated a deep commitment to assisting new migrants in Canada

in an unfortunate history of forced exile.

through his collaborative work with

various local and international organizations.

Recently, during his visit to Kurdistan, Barzanji shared his story in an exclusive interview with Kurdistan Chronicle. He revealed his struggles, his moments of triumph, and the creative works that have come to define his literary legacy.

**Kurdistan Chronicle** ■ How did you start writing and what was the trending literary school back then?

**Barzanji:** March 11 [the Iraqi-Kurdish Autonomy Agreement of 1970] carried a sort of freedom in its first breath and allowed Kurdish culture and literature to revive, but I cannot determine the time and exact reason why I started writing. I became interested in writing through reading literary works, and I'm sure I dreamed about a more beautiful world to live in. I had something deep inside me that I needed to let out.

Following Stalin's victory over Hitler, eastern European countries joined the socialist block, and communist parties started emerging around the world, including in countries further east. Back then, the communist party supported writers who wrote socialist realism. Meanwhile, the Kurds were in a situation that required resistance and realism literature. The latter was the side that I chose. I advocate freedom of expression, but I also

my first prose poetry titled "Cracked Graveyard" in a student magazine in 1971. Thereafter, my writing themes further expanded to include the complexity of humans' inner beings, existence, eternity, life, death, and the struggle for a better world.

There was no freedom of expression under the rule of Saddam Hussein. My first collection of poems was rejected twice by the [then Iraqi government's] 'literature police' and was only approved the third time when they cut out some parts. For me, this meant cutting out the sense, distorting the dream, and weakening the construction. While important fragments were missing, I finally decided to publish the collection in 1979 under the title *The Dawning of the Evening Snow*.

**Kurdistan Chronicle** ■ You have been living in exile for decades. What does exile mean to you? When do you feel you are in exile? How can you adjust all the scenes and memories that you have taken from Kurdistan with those you have in exile, and how do you deal with such a delicate realm?

**Barzanji:** An exile is a person who has been expelled due to their political, social, religious, ethnic, or war views, but migration for seeing new things, a better life, or shirking responsibilities is optional and intentional. Life under Saddam's authority and then under Iraqi

# Jalal Barzanji

have my own way to support the rights of my people, which also goes in line with the literary values that I hail in my works.

Paul Valery's quote "poetry is to prose as dancing is to walking" fascinated me a long time ago. Then I published

Prime Minister Haidar al-Abadi's rule after the Kurdistan Referendum, who imposed an air ban on the Kurdistan International Airports flights, was difficult. I could not return to Kurdistan and felt then like I am in exile. I can now freely travel to Kurdistan and do not feel that way. I am living in the post-migration and being-away stage



now, and the pleasure I get from my second country, the travels to my home country, and from my writings has prevented me from feeling tired.

Living in another country does not necessarily mean giving up and capitulating on your language, memory, culture, childhood or the scenes that you have kept in your thoughts; one can take all these things with them and share them with the new place. Whatever I have kept in my thoughts, I have intermingled them with the color from abroad and their reflections are seen in my works. Remoteness from home and land and entering a new geography have changed my poetic path; in my writings I talk about being abroad, looking miserable, and the lack of certain landmarks. I believe if the poet does not get stuck in nostalgia and avoids being lost in romanticism, they can write nice but somehow equivocal poems on this delicate condition.

**Kurdistan Chronicle** ■ After nearly half a century, you are still known by 'The Dancing of the Evening Snow' – what secret lies behind that?

**Barzanji:** The Dancing of the Evening Snow was written differently from the Kurdish style of poetry of that time. I used simple but deep language. I am honest with my feelings. The words freely gushed out, and I tried to set the scenes into their real nature and place.

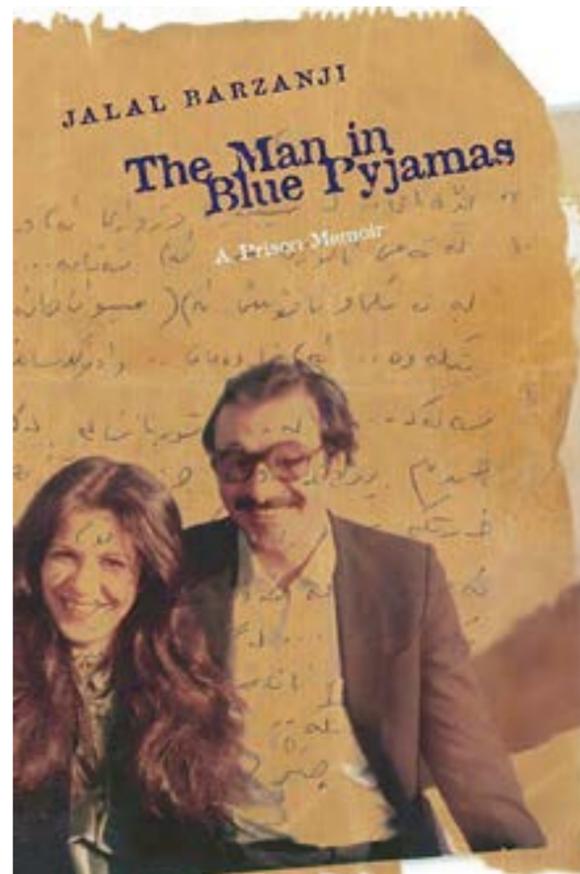
This collection of poems is paid careful attention by the poetry experts at the University of Alberta in Canada. This university decided to publish a select number of my poems from all six of my collections. After translating

the selected poems, they were published in a bulky book. They wanted to select poems from all my collections, and they should have, except from the 'The Dancing of the Evening Snow'.

**Kurdistan Chronicle** ■ Emigrating from Kurdistan and starting a difficult life in another country could detach a writer from their pen or force them to write romantically about nostalgia. However, your books have their own readers outside Kurdistan and have become the best-selling books and won prizes. How did that happen?

**Barzanji:** Throughout my long and delicate journey, and the challenges prior to re-starting my life from scratch in another country that included learning the language, fitting into a new system, finding a job, embracing fatherhood in a new culture, and being away from Kurdistan, I was afraid that these challenges would drive me away from writing, but since my start, writing has been my passion, inclination, and priority. Thus, this has been the dynamo of my continuation. Alongside these, being awarded the title of "First PEN Writer-In-Exile" in 2007 has opened doors for me.

In the course of my time abroad, I have two offices: one



in the public library of Edmonton city, Canada, and the other in the University of Alberta, where I wrote 'The Man in Blue Pyjamas', which was translated into English and published in 2011. Then, another collection of mine named 'Trying Again to Stop Time' was published in English in 2015. These two works have been best-selling books several times and won several prizes.

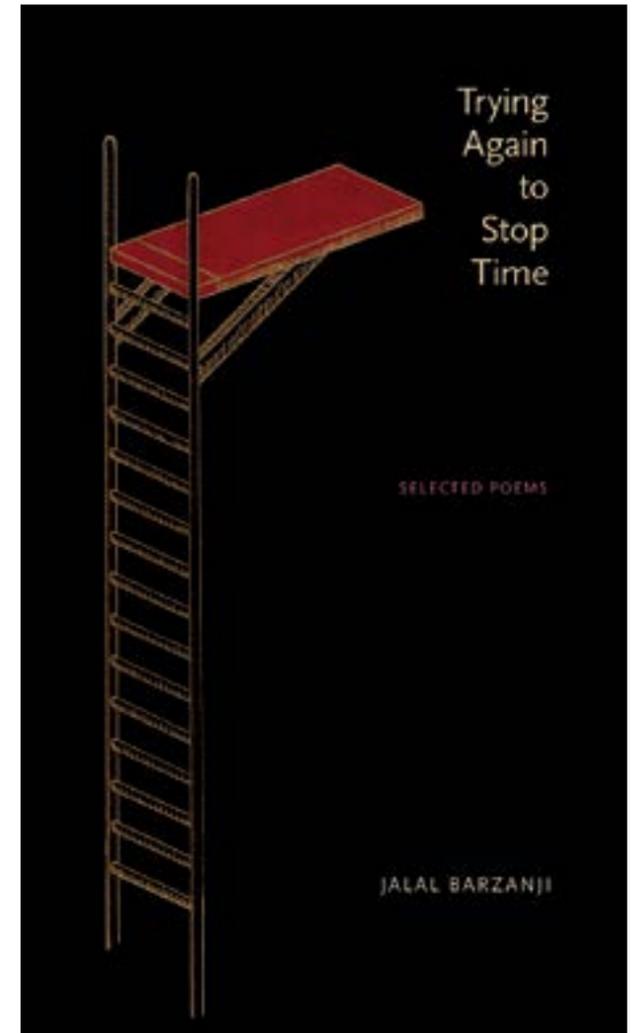
Afterwards, my relations got wider within the Canadian Writers' Community, and I became a member of the following organizations: International Writers' Association, Canadian Poets' Association, Alberta Province Writers' Syndicate, Poet's Walk Community, Edmonton Poetry Annual Festival, and Beyond Borders Writers, and was interviewed by many newspapers and television programs.

**Kurdistan Chronicle** ■ Countless books are published in developed countries, out of which there are only a few that gain readers, whereas yours, especially 'The Man in Blue Pyjamas', was received warmly by readers and became a best-selling book and won prizes. What was the secret behind its popularity?

**Barzanji:** This book was written visually. It is full of interesting and heart-warming stories and information about the history and culture of Kurdistan and the Middle East. The significance of the book lies in the fact that despite experiencing many misfortunes both as a person and as part of the nation to which I am attached, I lost no balance in narrating these stories with a humane and friendly perspective that steered away from hatred and vengeance. In this book, I also allowed the reader to accompany me and be in the setting during my journey and narration and think throughout as if they were with me.

**Kurdistan Chronicle** ■ You have been known as a poet, but how did you start writing novels? And how do you see the differences in expression in these two literary genres?

**Barzanji:** When I look back at my life, I see that from childhood to adulthood and then to maturity, I have not taken a straight line. I have stepped forward but been returned backwards, i.e. my life has been full of starts and stops, full of fragmented stories, and has been revolving around migration. I was born in a village with no electricity, which is where I learned the simplicity of life. I was seven years old when a school was established in our village for the first time. This was my first inner journey



of learning and discerning myself, but that journey was short; it did not complete its full circle as [the Iraqi Army] attacked us and burned our school, village, and dreams. We fled to Erbil with bare and empty hands. This was a migration from an innocent village to a big city that I knew nothing about it. From 1985 to 1988, after having done nothing wrong except for being Kurd, which was a wrongdoing and a crime according to [the Iraqi Army], I spent my life in the dark and unqualified prisons of the Ba'ath regime.

Years were circling around during which many good things happened, such as the Uprising [of the Kurdish against the Ba'ath Regime Authority in the Kurdish areas], clearing the Kurdistan areas from the invading enemy army. There were also unpleasant incidents like the fleeing [because the Iraqi army returned to the Kurdistan areas] and the civil war. I was personally in the fleeing but not in the civil war. From 1996-1997, to cover the distance from continent to continent, I depended on smugglers and reached Canada in 1998.

I restarted life abroad in the freezing temperature of -70 °C, but have continuously visited Kurdistan, my home country, as I do not want my poetic abilities in expressing thoughts and feelings with a prestigious and precise language to fall into disuse and become insufficient. I use words less in my poems and allow the reader to enjoy and merge the reflection of their feelings with the local, but the novel is a different, long genre. In the novel, to move forward and backward between events and narrate them requires a lot of words. Since there are characters, the novelist should know what roles they will give them. Meanwhile, there are also the setting, actions, and conflicts (plot), not to mention the narrator, so the



novelist needs to provide details on the events, actions, and answers to the questions with words and take the reader into events. Thus, narrating all these stories and experiencing all these different types of life has made me write novels as well.

**Kurdistan Chronicle** ■ Season of Solitude is the oration and biography of the author in a novel frame, but in parts of the discussions, some of the detailed analysis of the historically significant events are referenced. Why does the author think that analyzing these events through the voices and thoughts of the novel's characters is

important?

**Barzanji:** It is difficult to jump over parts of your life and skip them. Many think that in a biographical novel, the novelist talks about the life stories of other people, but readers still believe that these stories belong to the novelist. When the novelist talks about their own life, even if it is understood as the life of someone else, it gives the novel its formula for understanding. Narrating history, of course, or the catastrophic incidents through the characters' voices and thoughts is crucial because it gives the novelist more space to stimulate discussion about the novel's plot, events, actions, and details.

**Kurdistan Chronicle** ■ After reading Season of Solitude, the reader acquires a clear vision of the miserable history of Kurds in the area. Why does the author insert both the old and recent history into their story?

**Barzanji:** Through reading literature or listening to stories, readers want to know the identity and culture of nations. It is through literature that the Holocaust has become understood as the world's first genocide case. I have realized and learned about life in Russia from the novels of Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Pasternak and others, rather than from politicians' writings and works. I am personally among those writers who make their writings full of information and messages, as the Kurdish people have many untold catastrophic stories. Therefore, I blend story and history together and narrate the extraction in the form of drama. In narrating my nation's history and its tragic incidents, I intend to convey the reality of the incident with a high artistic quality and humane perspective to the world. When I wrote this novel, I took into consideration that it would be translated into English, and thus discussed some historical incidents accurately, so that they might provide extra material for open-minded Kurdish readers.

**Kurdistan Chronicle** ■ In Season of Solitude the clocks play an important role. Apart from telling time, do they have any symbolic meaning(s) in the author's mind?

**Barzanji:** In the novel's plot, the main character Shko travels to the North Pole in January and stays alone outside of any time zone on a day when the temperature is -70 °C. The aim of going to that place is to write outside of time zones and noise. In this novel, despite discussing many sensitive problems of the past and today, there is discussion between the human and time and its measurements. Although, for the writer, writing time is

different from normal time, later the writer realizes that we are all bound to time and living with others. Perhaps, living that way has its own joy, but a full escape from it is a waste of time itself.

**Kurdistan Chronicle** ■ This novel and the author's other works have proved that after spending decades abroad, the author is still bound not only to the norms and customs of his original people but also to their current barriers and obstacles as well. The geographical distance and being away from Kurdistan for many years have not made you disconnected from Kurdistan. Why is that? Is working at the migration office a reason for having such an uninterrupted spiritual connection or there are other factors?



**Barzanji:** The reason for my spiritual connection to the land is older than that. My roots are in Kurdistan because this is where I inhaled my first breath of life, started walking, and banked my first memories. Furthermore, my mother lives in Kurdistan. All these are living memories; I have kept them in my thoughts and wherever I go, even if to another planet, I will take them with me and keep them. I must also not forget that my long and delicate journey across countries, continents,

and water borders (as a migrant), 23 years of living with the concept of exile, making many travels, and frequently returning to my homeland have influenced and changed the style of my writings, which is reflected in my work. Through a very precise exploration, depth, and clarity in manifestation, I am merging my nation's story with my personal one in a friendly and humane perspective with a high artistic quality and sharing it with the world without losing myself, except in nostalgia and the present.

**Kurdistan Chronicle** ■ How do you view literary translation?

**Barzanji:** Translating feelings, keeping the aesthetics of

poetry and story, and rendering them from a language and culture to another, i.e. reshaping them, is very tactful work. Poetic translation must always convey the original text's meaning and message, without which there are no other bridges to pass literature beyond borders. Literary translation cannot be word-for-word translation; the translator must master both languages, cultures, and national metaphors; otherwise, the text will be spoiled, and the perception and flavor of the text will be uninspiring.

**Kurdistan Chronicle** ■ We have heard that the University of Alberta in Canada has awarded you an Honorary PhD. Could you talk this a little, please?

**Barzanji:** This is the highest degree that a university annually awards to those who have been creative in



literature, science, and law and have influenced others. Although I have been awarded many other prizes before, being awarded this degree by a Canadian university whose ranking is among the world's highest is worth appreciation.

**Kurdistan Chronicle** ■ You have been awarded with merit certificates abroad, but in your recent visit to Kurdistan you were awarded with merit certificates from Kurdistan institutes. How did this make you feel?

**Barzanji:** Awarding prizes and merit certificates means that others appreciate what you have done, and it is pleasing regardless of who awards it, but when your home country does not value your works, it is displeasing and leaves a gap. This time, the merit certificates came from my home, and the feeling of joy was different. It was another motivating driver to continue in the journey of writing. ■



**Judit Neurink**

*Judit Neurink is a Dutch journalist and writer who lived and worked in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq from 2008 to 2019.*

## Kurdistan's Heritage

**A promise to be  
developed**



## “Where’s the heritage?”

Judit Neurink wondered when she moved from Amsterdam to Kurdistan. In the end, she found enough to share with those who visit the region.

When you live in the Netherlands, heritage is part of your daily life. Moving to Kurdistan, I found myself searching for similar historic buildings and markers that I was so used to seeing.

I spent my childhood in a former pastor’s house opposite the church in a small Dutch town. The house itself was a monument of sorts, as it must have been built in the early 1900s or even earlier. When I moved to Amsterdam, I ended up living in a house built in 1920, just a stone’s throw away from the famous canals with their centuries-old buildings.

Where was all that in Kurdistan? Wasn’t the region part of the cradle of civilization?

When I settled here in 2008, I saw many buildings being erected and other not-so-old buildings being torn down to make room for ever

more concrete. After years of persecution and poverty, Kurdistan was finally able to recreate itself in its own image. The old buildings came with bad memories and had to go. An economic boom made that possible.

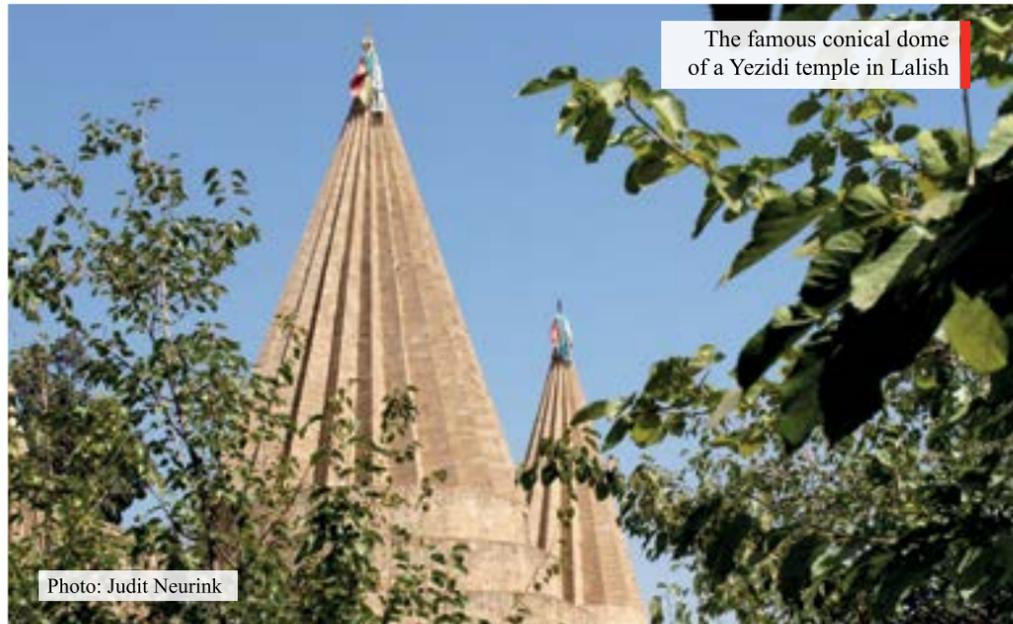
Although I could understand people wanting to live in better homes and enjoy the luxury of a great view through the sitting room window of their high-rise apartment, I was worried. For people without a history have no future. Which is why I have spent years seeking out what is left of Kurdistan’s history and trying to communicate the importance of holding on to it.

## Suleimani

In the first Kurdish town I called home, Suleimani, an

old building with a precarious-looking balcony out front would always catch my eye, as a concrete wall of buildings towered ever higher above it. It housed an old shop, almost a museum really. It was always surprising what you could find in there, but you’d rarely want to buy any of it. It took a Kurd who had lived abroad to lovingly convert it into a successful café and restaurant; inside, he hung the huge old wooden door from his ancestral home in Kirkuk to showcase the importance of inserting the past into the present.

Some older buildings could still be found in the old town center around Suleimani’s bazaar, a few with exquisite motifs carved into their crumbling sandstone frontages. I found it hard to find out how old the bazaar really was, as nobody seemed the slightest bit interested in that fact.



The famous conical dome of a Yezidi temple in Lalish

Photo: Judit Neurink

Years later, UNESCO helped to restore a former hotel within it—the 90-year-old Hotel Farah, which had long since fallen into disrepair and is now a cultural center.

I also stumbled upon Suleimani’s former Jewish quarter, the Jewlakan. The synagogue has been converted into a mosque, but it is at least called the Jewlakan Mosque. Old houses remain standing at their original heights, as their inhabitants lack the funds to demolish and rebuild them, and this was now a poor area. For me, though, it was a rare jewel from the Jewish past that had ended so abruptly in the early 1950s, when most members of this religious minority left.

## Erbil

In Erbil, a friend showed me around the former Jewlakan

(in Tajeel quarter) at the foot of the citadel. Inside one of the houses, I was shown a small hidden door, an exit that dated from the time the Jews still lived here. I was told that the Orthodox Jewish women, who rarely left their homes, would use these doors to visit friends.

Parts of these quarters, though once prosperous and bustling with life, had fallen on hard times, and businessmen eager to build shops had already acquired them. But when the reconstruction of the citadel began, it was decided that these quarters should be restored as well and that anyone still living there was to be moved out. This proved to be good for the people, as the houses were old and without modern amenities, and the neighborhood faced serious water, hygiene, and vermin issues.

But houses that stand empty are more prone to crumble. And sadly – with the war against the Islamic terror group ISIS, the recession, and the major problems between Erbil and Baghdad presenting financial challenges – this is what has happened here, as the work never really got underway.

The oldest inhabited location in the region and Erbil’s center point, the citadel, became a World Heritage site in 2014. It had already been emptied by then. For years, internally displaced people had lived here, leaving their mark on the houses and damaging some of them in the process. Still, before they were evicted, you could wander around, as I did on many occasions.

## Through tourists’ eyes

When I’d lead tourists from different European countries around, I was happy to be able to show them at least some of the better-kept mansions on the side of Erbil’s bazaar, as well as the carpet museum restored by a Swedish Kurd who has never received enough praise for his contribution because, somehow, he had managed to preserve the old atmosphere of the building.

Most official reconstructions have a definite ‘modern’ feel to them: their lines are too straight, for one, and they are too perfect. Having lived among the rickety, uneven houses of Amsterdam’s canals, that hurts my eyes.

Moreover, it’s only the surviving Ottoman buildings that are being restored, though the citadel was, of course, inhabited long before. In Amsterdam, we have houses from different eras all mixed together; how I wish this could be possible in Erbil’s citadel, too.

When I started taking tourists around, my search for

heritage became more urgent, especially given the lack of guidebooks. Tourists like the old stuff; they like to hear about the history of the places they visit. We’d walk through the old center of Koya, where the caravanserai is still partly preserved, and get a sense of the bustling trading town it once was.

The famous old Delal bridge in Zakho was always too far out for us, because I’d take the groups to the ancient town of Amedi, which is beautifully perched on a mountain peak. Its Bab Zebar gate, which dates to the third century, connects the town to the valley below and offers stunning panoramic views. Tourists would be appalled by the graffiti and junk at these ancient places and sad that they’re not well-protected and that the (young) local people seemed unaware of their value.

## Making Kurdistan’s heritage accessible

The Kurdistan authorities are now looking after their sites better but only the more famous ones. Amedi was where, centuries ago, the famous Jewish female rabbi Azenath Barzani taught. But on these tours, we would of course visit the Yezidi temple at Lalesh. Walking barefoot, the foreigners would be captivated by the Yezidi guide telling them about his people and religion. And then on to Khanis, where King Sennacherib’s 2700-years-old aqueduct would remind us of this land’s antiquity, and of the state of engineering in those distant days.

The aqueduct is part of a large canal that used to feed the gardens of Nineveh many kilometers to the south. Archeology is still a work in process here. To show the extent of the project, I would take groups to nearby Jirwana to see the big stones engraved with Sennacherib’s story that once formed the base of a bridge that conveyed the aqueduct across a river. The only snag was that if it rained, our bus couldn’t reach it for fear of getting stuck in the mud.

So, over the years, I did end up finding a lot of heritage in Kurdistan. I’ve only mentioned part of it here, but a great deal of improvement is needed across the board. Kurdistan is a bit like Greece in the 1970s: a lot of beautiful places, but not enough protection and not enough done to really open them up to tourists.

Visitors want to understand what they’re seeing and to be presented with information in both words and pictures. And they want somewhere to have a tea at the sites, to quench their thirst after a hot walk around. Kurdistan has a lot of promise: I’d love to see it deliver on it. ■

# HAZEM KURDA



### Hazem Kurda

#### The Kurdish Rice King in Northern Europe

**R**estlessness and agitation for success often lead people to search for shortcuts. In their journeys, many ambitious young men and women abandon their dreams when they hit a few dead ends.

The story of Kurdish entrepreneur Hazem Kurda is, however, a different one. Kurda, also known as the Rice King in Sweden and other Scandinavian countries, was born in a militarized mountainous town in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq and grew into one of the most prominent businessmen in Europe. His story has inspired so many people that a book

has always dreamed big. His father, who had a great impact on his life, was also a prominent social figure in the small town where he first introduced refrigerators and TVs and allowed Kurda to manage his store's accounts to learn the art of business. The book also gives detailed accounts of the social and political developments of the time, retelling the firsthand experiences of Kurda in supporting the peshmerga forces who at the time were fighting against former Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein.

When late Kurdish freedom movement leader Mustafa Barzani signed an agreement with the regime in Baghdad in



Hazem Kurda welcomes President Masoud Barzani to Shinglbana resort in Rawanduz.

entitled Riskungen: Tur och retur Rewanduz-Eskilstuna (in Swedish) is dedicated to his success story.

#### Formed by his youth

The story of Hazem Kurda begins in Rawanduz, one of the magnificent locations in Kurdistan best known for its breathtaking canyons and remarkable place in the history of the Kurdish struggle for freedom. Since childhood, Kurda

1970, securing peace and self-rule for the Kurds, the residents of Rawanduz helped each other rebuild their bombed-out homes. However, peace was short-lived. Again, Iraqi troops were mobilized, and it did not take long before tanks appeared on the edge of the Korek Mountain. Together with others, the Kurda family managed to reach a safe haven, while Hazem was sent to Basra in southern Iraq to study civil engineering.

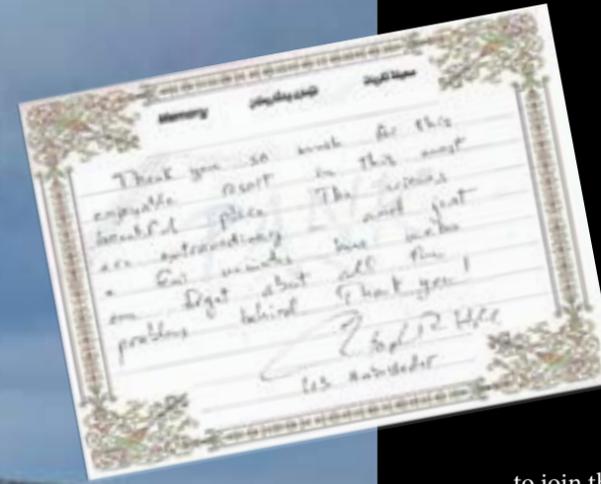


**Ann-Catrin Emanuelsson**

*Ann-Catrin Emanuelsson* has a Ph.D in peace and development studies. She is an author and freelance journalist in Sweden.

In the spring of 2007, he finally opened the door to Pank Resort (also known as Shinglbana Resort), one of the most attractive touristic projects in the Kurdistan Region and all of Iraq.

Shinglbana resort in Rwanduz.



Kurda has always dreamed

# BIG

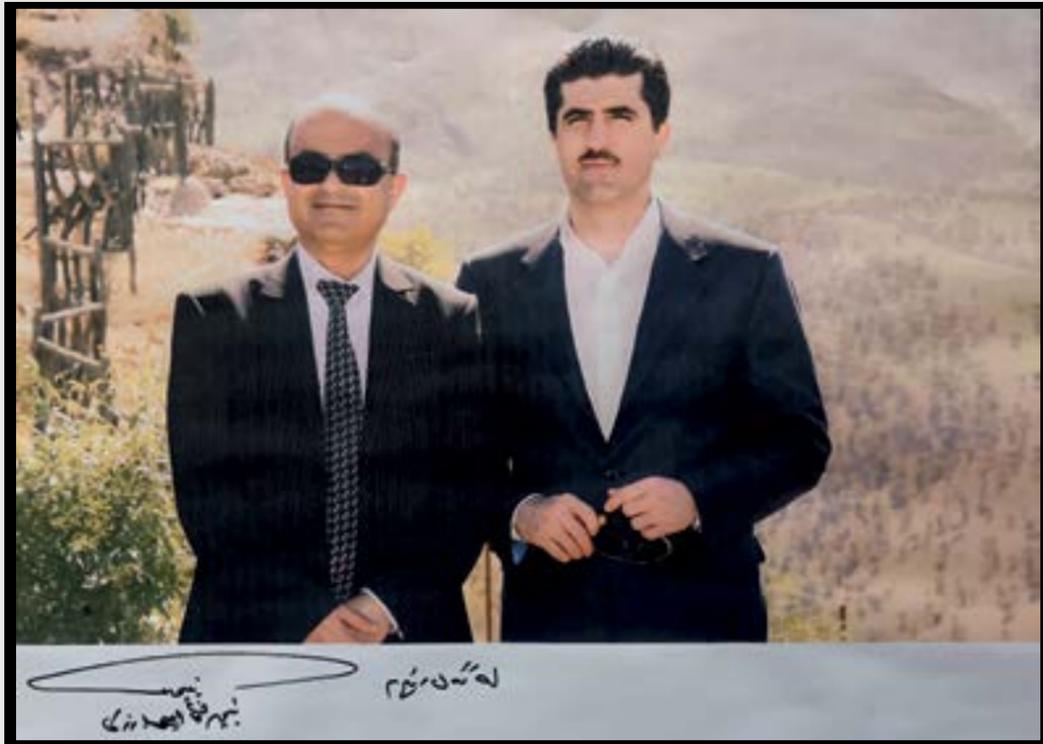
The distance, however, did not make Kurda forget about his people. While still in Basra, he resumed his political activities and found himself in sensitive and demanding circumstances, after which he headed up into the mountains to join the Kurdish peshmerga, but he was later forced to flee, first to Iran and then to Syria. In the end, like many young men of that period, he managed to reach Sweden, where he was granted asylum in 1981.

## Swedish entrepreneurial star

In Sweden, Hazem Kurda continued to make many active choices to fight for what he believed in. As in Kurdistan and Iraq, his actions were sometimes weighed down by obstacles and setbacks, but often enough they were lifted by favorable coincidences. His fearless and straightforward manner put him in difficult situations sometimes, but thanks to strong will and hard work, he always managed to move on and create better life conditions for himself and his family.

By washing dishes, working at a home-appliances factory, and starting a sausage stand in Eskilstuna, he eventually managed to defy the hardship and start a wholesale company in Sweden, which marked the beginning of his successful rice factory. He traveled to Thailand and India to find the best quality rice, which he then processed in Eskilstuna. Success came quickly. Soon his company, Swedish Rice, started growing and offering not only high-quality products but also job opportunities to many people.

Towards the end of the 1980s, his thoughts were often with the family in Kurdistan, but due to the dangerous political situation, it was impossible to return home. From his TV couch in Eskilstuna, Hazem Kurda often anxiously followed the Iraqi regime's brutal attacks on the Kurdish civilian population, including his own family, who had fled to the mountains towards Turkey to escape bombs in the early 1990s. Eventually, the West joined forces with the Kurds and succeeded in establishing the safe zone in northern Iraq that ultimately protected the Kurds from yet another massacre.



Hazem Kurda with President Nechirvan Barzani

“

“ Mr. Hazem Kurda left Iraq due to violence and grew from a dishwasher to an entrepreneur. When he finally had something to spend, the first place he thought to serve was Kurdistan. He should be happy and we should be proud to have people like him.

“I’m proud to see the result of Mr. Hazem Kurda’s hard work, especially that he has created something in his hometown that was once sought by many people as a wild idea in an uncertain situation... When he first filed the proposal, I asked him why Rewanduz? He explained that he wanted to serve Kurdistan by starting from his alley... This shows that the mentality has changed and we are ready to rebuild what was demolished by decades of war and bombardment in our homeland.

“Human capital is the most important national asset. It is of significant importance to have people like Hazem Kurda who face up to the responsibilities they have towards their people and their country.”

”

**Nechirvan Barzani**  
President of the Kurdistan Region

## Heading home to realize his dreams

As events unfolded, Hazem Kurda could not sit and watch the fast developments from Sweden. He decided he had to head back home to help. He began a humanitarian initiative to donate large amounts of rice to the residents of Rawanduz and assist orphans with food and clothing.

When Saddam Hussein’s regime fell in 2003, Hazem Kurda finally got the opportunity to start a major project that he had always dreamed about since he was a child: building a holiday resort and rollercoasters in the mountains outside of his hometown of Rawanduz.

His friends always had great doubts about his wild idea; some even thought it was completely insane to invest in a gigantic touristic project in a region that had just survived war. However, Hazem Kurda followed his embodied feelings and then worked purposefully.

In the spring of 2007, he finally opened the door to Pank Resort (also known as Shinglbana Resort), one of the most attractive touristic projects in the Kurdistan Region and all of Iraq. During the opening ceremony, also attended by then Kurdistan Region Prime Minister

Nechirvan Barzani, Hazem Kurda said the location of his project was a garbage landfill and that he had always dreamed about a touristic project in that unique landscape.

“I always dreamed that, but I never thought I would one day be the person who actually fulfilled that dream,” Hazem Kurda told Kurdistan Chronicle during an interview.

Old footage from the opening ceremony at Pank Resort shows a large number of locals and government officials with then Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani also delivering a speech to praise Hazem Kurda for “creating hundreds of jobs and adding to the fame of Rawanduz.”

“Implementing such a project by a successful Kurdish entrepreneur is a message from Kurdistan to the outside world: our homeland has been repeatedly gassed and bombed in the past but we are ready now to rebuild it. We are looking toward the future,” Barzani said.

## Faith in the future

Thanks to Hazem Kurda’s Pank Resort (Shinglbana), Rawanduz has now become one of the most famous touristic attractions in the Kurdistan Region and Iraq, where locals and foreigners stay for days to enjoy the unique nature of the area across all four seasons.

But that is not all. Hazem Kurda and his Pank Resort project are also known in the region for their charity activities and humanitarian initiatives. For the past eight years, Kurda has granted scholarships to top students graduating from high schools in Rawanduz and covered the medical expenses of anyone in need. He told Kurdistan Chronicle that soon he will announce a special annual fund so that the Pank scholarships will continue after him.

Hazem Kurda is the first foreigner to make it to the list of the top 80 business minds in Sweden. He has recently retired and plans to focus on charity activities and giving seminars at universities around Kurdistan to share his experience with the new generation. During the interview, he repeated numerous times that one’s service to the homeland should start from one’s own neighborhood.

“If we Kurds don’t have faith in the future, how will others dare to invest in Kurdistan? We’ve been waiting for decades for the freedom to create something of our own, and we can’t hesitate,” he concluded. ■



**For the past eight years, Kurda has granted scholarships to top students graduating from high schools in Rawanduz and covered the medical expenses of anyone in need.**

## Loristan of Kurdistan



The display of Loristan artefacts at the Oriental Institute, the University of Chicago, June 29, 2017.

Photo: Amed Demirhan



Amed Demirhan

Amed Demirhan is the General Manager and Director of the Barzani National Memorial. He is a multilingual librarian and researcher internationally recognized with multiple awards in librarianship.

Loristan is a home to several long-serving Kurdish dynasties and independent states in history. Many medieval and early modern historians and geographers mention this great kingdom that, besides ruling Loristan independently, greatly contributed to the leadership of the Iranian ruling class. In fact, the Zand Dynasty, founded by Kerim Khan Zandi, a Lor belonging to the Zand branch ruled Iran from 1751 to 1794. Kerim Khan was considered one of the most enlightened rulers in Iranian history. This was the first Indo-Iranian ruler of Iran since the invasion of the Arab Islamic forces and later the Turkic and Mongol nomads.

In April 1207, Ibn al-Athir (1160 -1233) called the people of Loristan “Lur Kurds” and described its geography as located between Fars, Khuzistan, and Isphan. Yaqūt al-Hamawi (1179-1229) writes: “Mountains inhabited by the Kurds in the vicinity of

Ispahan and Khuzistan. The name of this tribe extends to all these areas, which we often call Louristân or land of the Lours.” Persian historian and geographer Hamd Allah Mustawfi Qazvini (1281-1349) extensively details Loristan and other parts of Kurdistan and the historical changes in the names for the area and people across different periods.

North African-Moroccan traveler Ibn Battuta (1304-1369) traveled through Loristan and described its regions, cities, and people. His observations are particularly useful because they provide a much broader insight into Loristan.

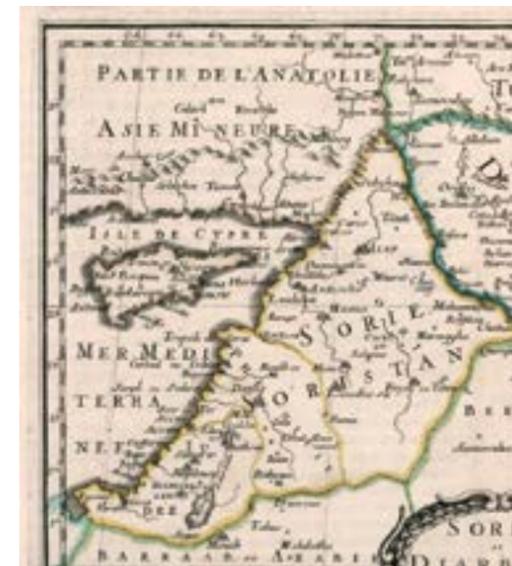
The Kurdish king of Bitlis Seref (Sharaf) Khan [king] (1543-1599), the author of the Kurdish dynasties, also provides a detailed description of the Kingdom of Loristan up to his day, while the Ottoman geographer Katib Çelebi (1609-1657) gives an extensive

description of the origin and geography of the kingdom.

Meanwhile, Ottoman traveler Evliya Çelebi (1611-1682) visited Loristan and mentioned the King of Loristan among the kings of Kurdistan in the 1650s. He recounts how the Ottoman governor of Baghdad Murtezâ Pasa/ Pasha (653-1654) sent a gift to King Sleyman of Loristan and other Kurdish kings while he was in the region.”

In general, most accounts agree that Loristan was initially divided into two parts: great and little Loristan. It was among the few kingdoms in the greater Middle East that survived the invasions of the Mongol and Turkic nomads from the 12th to 18th centuries.

Qazvini, Sharaf Khan, and Katib Çelebi agree on the origin and migration of the founders of the Loristan



Sanson, N. (1652) Sorie et Diarbeck. Pub. in Paris

Dynasty. All three scholars identify the ruler and say that most citizens are from the West of Syria.

The following map shows historical Syria and the West of Syria.

However, Qazvini and Seref Kan describe the migration of Kurds in detail.

Qazvini states: “A. H. 500 (1107) some hundred families of Kurds emigrated from Jabalu’s-Summaq (Sumac Mountain) into Loristan. Their chief was Abu’l-Hasan Fadluya, who had a son named Ali. He was wounded

by his (P.134) enemies (538) but saved by his dog. Ali left a son named Muhammad. He died leaving a son named Abu Tahir, who, by his courage, rose high in Sunqur’s service, subdued Luristan, and became an independent sovereign. He died in A. H. 555 (1160). Hazarasp succeeded his father and ruled well and justly, so that more tribes, such as the “Aqilis and Hashimis and some two dozen others whose names are enumerated migrated into the country from Jabalu’s-Summaq (Sumac Mountain) and other places, while Hazarasp extended his domain to within four parasangs (22.4 km) of Isfahan. The title of Atabek (King) was conferred by the Caliph an-Nasir on Hazarasp” (Hamdallâh, 1330).



Sumac Mountain is located to the west of the city of Mersin in the Mersin province. The following map shows



L'Isle, D. De (1721) Map of Turkey, Arabia, and Persia. Royal Society of London and Paris

the original home of the majority of Kurdish-Lors and their capital in Loristan, “Mala-Mir” (Izeh, name changed in 1937 by the Iranian Government).

Mersin is considered among the cities of Kurdistan by the Ottoman geographer Kaib Çelebi. ■



**Farhad Shakely**

*Farhad Shakely is a Kurdish poet and academic, born in Garmian-Kirkuk province, Southern Kurdistan. he has published over 50 books, including eight poetry books; short stories; studies on the history of Kurdish literature; philosophy and Sufism. He lives in Sweden.*

## Another “Kurdish Literature”

**T**here is a global phenomenon in the literature resulting from the occupation of many of the countries and peoples of Asia and Africa by European colonialists: the phenomenon of writing in the language of the colonizer or occupier.

When the colonial powers imposed their own languages and cultures on occupied countries and prevented people from using their own language, it spawned a generation of writers who grew up without command, at least in writing, of any language other than the language of the colonial power, which became their sole, effective weapon in defending themselves and their case. Some of these writers became great creators in writing stories and novels in that they reached high literary levels and obtained recognition for their literature in cultural circles worldwide.

Many writers from the Indian subcontinent wrote, and still write, in English, and a great number of African authors in English, French, and Portuguese. The most prominent

example in the Arab world is from the Maghreb and some from Lebanon who produced, and still produce, great literature in French.

This phenomenon was and still is the subject of extensive academic studies and theoretical debates by researchers and

historians of literature. The most important question in this regard is: in what category does the literature that is produced by colonized people writing in colonial languages belong?

Let’s ask the question in a simpler form: is the literature that has been, or is, written by Mouloud Fir’awn, Katib Yassin, Assia Djebar, Abdullatif Laabi, and Salah Steitieh, a French or an Arabic literature?

This question is also being asked in Kurdistan, although not with the same force in which it is asked in the Maghreb or on the Indian subcontinent. Some people do not like considering Kurdistan a country that was colonized by Iraq, Syria, Turkey, and Iran because the simplified definition or conception of a colonizer is one with blue eyes and white skin who comes from overseas – and this does not apply to the Arab, Turkish, and Persian

rulers.

However, the relevant inquiry here is into some Kurdish creative writers who produce their work in languages other than their native Kurdish. To what literature tradition do they belong? Should they be studied as a part of Kurdish literature?

There are, however, many big names in Arabic, Persian, and Turkish literature with Kurdish origins who have produced work that is Signs Franchise for those languages. Brothers Mahmoud and Mohammed Taimour are of Kurdish origins and their pioneering role in Egyptian and Arab storytelling is well known in the history of Arabic literature. Abdul-Majeed Lutfi and Muhyiddin Zangana in Iraq were also writers who have represented Arabic literature with texts that are characterized as pioneering and innovative. The

most outstanding writer in contemporary Arab literature is, no doubt, the Syrian Kurdish novelist Salim Barakat, whose books are translated into dozens of languages.

One of the most renowned founders of Iranian fiction is ‘Alî Muhammad Afghani, a Kurd born in Kirmashan (Kirmanshah) in Iranian Kurdistan. The same is true with ‘Ali Akbar Darvishian and Mansour Yaghtuti. And when it comes to Turkish literature, no one disagrees that the Kurdish Yasar Kemal was the greatest international Turkish writer in the past forty years and was a candidate to win a Nobel Prize in literature for more than two decades.

I’m not here to arbitrate on such a spiky subject, although I have my clear opinion. I would rather like to draw the readers’ attention to the fact that in this study I did not want to embed Kurdish writers into any one particular literary tradition. As such, it remains an important issue that deserves serious consideration and thoughtful discussion. ■



Sculptures of famous Kurdish people in Minara Park, Erbil.

**One of the most renowned founders of Iranian fiction is ‘Alî Muhammad Afghani, a Kurd born in Kirmashan (Kirmanshah) in Iranian Kurdistan**

Photo: Mohamad Dargalayi



**Mohammad Dargalayi**

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

# Horses in Kurdistan

## From ancient warfare to modern equestrianism

The human domestication of animals in the Zagros region, which covers most of the areas inhabited by the Kurds, goes back thousands of years. Among the inhabitants of these lands, Kassites, who controlled Babylonia after the fall of the Old Babylonian Empire (c. 1531 BC to c. 1155 BC), are believed to be among the first people to breed horses.

Besides using horses for transportation, Kassites also needed these agile animals for the many battles they fought with their neighbors. They nurtured horses and taught their children to ride them. Later, due to their unique physical structure, Kassites horses were also exported throughout Mesopotamia.

Horse breeding was further developed in later periods of the first millennium B.C. Historical stone engravings and carvings of horses from the reigns of the Medes, Achaemenids, Parthians, and Sassanids survive today that indicate the importance of horses in daily life, including among the Kurds.

Besides its unique physical structure, the Kurdish horse breed is known for its beauty and strength. The breed

originates from the Kurdish areas of Iran, where the mountainous topography and moderately cold climate sculpted a unique horse population that is resistant to harsh environmental conditions.

### Horses and the Kurdish revolutions

Kurds, as the largest stateless nation in the world, have constantly been subject to the brutality by those who have ruled their lands. However, they repeatedly refused to accept such oppression and revolted from time to time to fight for their rights.

Horse breeding in Kurdistan might carry a different meaning than in other parts of the world. After all, horses were integral parts of Kurdish revolutions, during which the animal was the basic means of transporting weapons and mobilizing fighters. Horses, after all, were always part of the daily lives of the nomadic communities in Kurdistan and are obviously the best option for guerrilla fighting in the harsh environment of Kurdistan's mountains.





In 1946, when the first Republic of Kurdistan was founded in the Iranian Kurdish city of Mahabad, horses were part of the army and appear in authentic documentary films marching with fighters on their backs. After the republic fell before its first anniversary, hundreds of Kurdish fighters found a safe but difficult

passage to the Soviet Union. This journey, led by General Mustafa Barzani, was made possible by the horses carrying them, their weapons, and their families.

Later, during the two landmark revolutions of the Kurds in Iraq, the Aylul and Gulan revolutions, horses were once again pivotal in the struggle, traveling from mountain to mountain carrying fighters, weapons, food, and other equipment for the peshmerga forces.

Kurdish legendary leader Mustafa Barzani is known as one of the prominent figures in modern Kurdish history who, almost always, owned a stud farm of his favorite horses. He appears in many black-and-white photographs riding a white horse.

The tradition that he established lives on today for many in the Barzan area of the Kurdistan Region. They have protected the genetics of General Mustafa Barzani's horse and hope to get the breed officially registered in the Horse Encyclopedia as the Barzan horse.

## Horse riding in Kurdistan

Following the fall of Saddam Hussein's Ba'ath regime in 2003, the economy of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq began to develop quickly. This, obviously, has had a remarkable impact on the lifestyle of the very people who were subject to multiple massacres over the past few decades.

Equestrian championships and events to select the most elegant horses are common practices today in Kurdistan, and several horse clubs now convene those interested in horse riding both as a professional sporting game and entertainment.

Today, Erbil is home to one of the most professional horse clubs in the Kurdistan Region and Iraq. Karwan Barzani, manager of the Erbil International Equestrian Club, spoke to Kurdistan Chronicle in an exclusive interview to explain about the current situation of horse breeding in the Kurdistan Region. He explained that initial



Photo: Safin Hamid



Horse riding championships in Erbil

Photo: Safin Hamid

steps to introduce equestrianism as a professional sport were taken in 2008, when they founded a small club in the mountainous areas of Barzan, northeast of Erbil. The efforts received enough attention from the public that the founders began considering establishing an international club in Erbil in 2013.

Today, the Erbil International Equestrian Club attracts horse riders from around the Kurdistan Region, Iraq and the world for championships in steeplechase and flat racing. However, according to Karwan Barzani, challenges remain in introducing the Kurdish horse breed to international championships outside of Iraq due to a ban on transferring horses from Iraq to other countries. "Animal diseases and the violent natural environments in Iraq are the main reasons why other countries do not allow horses from Iraq and the Kurdistan Region to be transferred and introduced into events," Barzani added.

As horse riding booms both as a professional sport and personal hobby, the prices of horses are also rising. Sattar Ahmed, a Kurdish horse breeder in Erbil, says that the price for a horse can run as high as 8,500 USD. He further explained that Arabian horses are the most popular and most expensive horses in the Kurdistan Region market, followed by other different breeds of French horses. The Kurdish breed, however, does not compete in price as it is often used for transportation and farming in rural areas.

With equestrianism growing in the Kurdistan Region, a new market has certainly emerged and created more jobs. According to the official statistics in 2022, 239 horses were imported from other countries to the Kurdistan Region. To monitor the process and prevent any disease outbreaks, authorities enforce strict veterinarian regulations at border crossings and airports.

## Horses in Kurdish culture

Despite the relatively modern and high living standards in today's Kurdistan Region, horses remain part of the culture. Many couples use horses in their wedding ceremonies to follow their ancestors' traditions. In the old days, the family of a bride would carry their daughter and her belongings on the backs of horses to meet the family of a groom midway, from where the groom would take the bride and walk ahead of the bride's horse. While it remains an important practice in Kurdish wedding rituals, some might argue that it also reflects a patriarchal culture in which men dominate the family.

Finally, in Kurdish literature, there are countless stories and poetries in which horses play a central and structural role, while horses also carry specific meanings in Kurdish oneiromancy, denoting happiness, prosperity, wealth, achievement, and peace, some qualities that Kurds, as a nation, have been chasing for decades, if not centuries. ■

## Polo in Kurdish History and Culture

**T**he game of polo, chogan in Persian and gog in Kurdish, has its origins in Central Asia with roots in Iran dating to the period from the sixth century BC to the first century AD. It was initially a training game for cavalry units, particularly for the king's guard or other elite troops, and was considered a miniature battle by the warlike tribesmen who played it with as many as 100 people on each team.

Over time, it became a popular national sport in Persia. Historical records reveal that even the queen and her ladies engaged King Khosrow II Parviz and his courtiers in the sixth century AD. Ferdowsi, the famous Iranian epic poet, gave several accounts of the royal chogan matches in his epic Shahnameh in the 9th century AD.

Polo also spread to other countries such as Arabia, Tibet, China, and Japan. It reached its peak of popularity in Persia during the Sassanid Empire (224-651 AD), where it was a favorite pastime of the ruling classes. It was also popular in the courts of the Kurdish principalities for centuries.

### Polo in Kurdish courts

In the Middle Ages, polo spread from Persia to Byzantium. During the Islamic period, it spread among the Ayyubids and Mamluks in both Egypt and the Levant, where the elite preferred it to any other games. It is known that famous sultans, such as Salah al-Din al-Ayyubi and al-Zahir Baybars, played polo and encourage it to be played in their courts.

Playing polo was dangerous and often resulted in the death of players. One such story about the death of Najm al-Din Ayyub, the father of the sultan Salah al-Din, was narrated by Ibn Wasil al-Humaydi. "Najm al-Din was fond of playing with the ball and running with it, so everyone who saw him in this state would estimate that he would not die except from falling off a horse." And that's what happened!

# POLO

## Polo in Kurdistan



Ghyas Edden Hussein

Ghyas Edden Hussein is working at Famer Center for Ottoman researches and translations.

Meanwhile, Imam Ibn Kathir tells us that “Nur al-Din brought Salah al-Din close and made him one of his close companions, and he would not separate from him, either when he was present or when he was traveling, because he was handsome and good at playing with the ball.” The Ottoman traveler Evliya Çelebi (1611-1682) in his book *Siyahatnamah*, offers a vivid description of polo among Kurds during his third visit to Bitlis Castle. When Çelebi saw the Chogan Court near the Sharaf Khan Mosque, he saw mounted soldiers and knights of the “Ruzki” tribe, who used to come there to show off their skills in chogan and galloping.



He exaggeratedly elaborated that there are stone pillars at either end of the field, where two teams of a thousand knights each knight holding a mallet of wood faced off against each other from opposing ends. They placed a round wooden ball the size of a human head in the middle of the field, and when the band began to play and the rhythm of the drums reached its apex, a man from each side would rush forward on horseback, trying to hit the ball towards his own goal. Another also rushed forward to hit the ball rolling towards his team's goal, and the ball

then reached another knight, who hit it while it was in the air, and so on. The two armies fought, trying to hit the poor ball until it shattered into many pieces. Ultimately, one of them succeeded, and the losing team prepared a feast for the winners.

Polo was an amazing sight, and a great occasion to test fortitude, patience, and horsemanship. Sometimes it happened that the wands missed and hit the horse's legs, causing the poor pony or mare to become limp. But horses were so well trained that they chased the ball like cats after a mouse.

The game was also an excellent military exercise, although sometimes it degenerated into a real, blood-spilled battle for the ball. After the end of the game, the number of times that one of the two teams could bring the ball to his own goal are counted according to an agreed-upon number, say five or ten.

This equestrian sport is a favorite in both Kurdistan and Iran.

## Polo among Kurdish nomads

Mahmoud Bayazidi (1797-1867?), in a letter to the Russian orientalist Alexander Jabba on the customs and traditions of the nomadic Kurds, mentioned another type of polo called hoal. He related how in the afternoons, the youth and the boys from the summer camps all gathered and played in front of the houses to play hoal or compete in running. On the other side, Diaa al-Din al-Maqdisi, the author of the dictionary of al-Hadiyah al-Hamidiyah, defined hoal as a game for boys, each of whom takes a stick and hits a ball among them.

My elder neighbors have related to me that a game called hoali was still being played on foot among villagers

in the rural areas of the city of Kobani in the 1950s. As children, we also played a simple version of it in our backyards.

Here, we must distinguish between the term chogan meaning “mallet, playing stick” and hoal meaning “ball.”

On the other hand, Zeynelabidin Zinar, a modern author, details a game called gog in his book *Mirate*, explaining that there are two variations of this game: infantry gog and cavalry gog.

Infantry gog uses the ball (gog) and racket (kasho). The gog is made of sheep's wool and ranges in size from a pigeon's egg to a turkey's egg. The kasho spans six lengths and has a handle at the top and a wide bottom for receiving the ball. The field (meydan) is flat and in the middle is a small hole (hochk), around which a large and wide circle is drawn and guarded by one player from one of two teams. While one team tries to get the ball into the hole, the other works to block them from doing so and batting the ball away outside that circle.

Cavalry gog, on the other hand, is played by horsemen with mallets and takes two forms. The first is like infantry gog, but the ball is larger, and the mallets are longer. The second differs in the size of the meydan, which is larger and rectangular in shape. On each side is a goal with a length of 15 to 20 meters, guarded by one player. The ball is placed in the middle of the field, and a team wins if the ball enters the opposing goal several times.

## Polo in Kurdish literature

Kurdish men of letters have also referred to polo in their poetic works,

employing its terms and tools to express overwhelming emotions and the sense of submission, according to the doctrine of fatalism, to the will of the beloved or the divine. To elucidate this, we only have to look closely at the collection of Mulla Ahmed Jiziri (1570-1640) from Shirnakh to find the vocabulary of this sport in its two types, chogan and hoal, scattered in the folds of his divan. In one of his ghazals, he utilizes the ball, racket, mallet, and field, describing how he surrenders to the beloved's will:

د فزمان قوستایم - د بندا خدمتی دا یښم  
وکی گوی بی سر ویا یم - همان لیدی نو چوکانی  
لبز چوکان وکاشویان - ژ دربا تړک و هندویان  
دبازم هر وکی گویان - دما او تینه میدانی

I am standing awaiting the orders in service, like a ball without a top or foot (a metaphor for surrender) so you can hit it instantly with the mallet. I run like balls before mallets and rackets, before the hits of Turks and Indians (a metaphor for the eyelashes), when they enter the field.

And in describing his beloved's beautiful countenance and murderous, intoxicating looks, he says:

تختی د میز و بگنران - میدان جوقا گوی گران  
اصلان و جوتی می خوران - می دان شرابا ساغری

The throne of princes and lords has also become a meydan on which those chasing the gog play with their wands (a metaphor for the movement of sideburns around the mole). Lions and a pair of drinking companions (a metaphor for the eyes) have wine served to them from the cup.

While describing the divine being in another poem, Jiziri refers to the movement of the universe run by the infinite Creator, saying:

چوکان بابی لا مکان - فلکا فلک قائم سکان  
تشبیه گوی دا بر شکان - هر بی سکون وسکنه دا

The chogan of the wind of nowhere struck the firm ship of the universe, its rudder and its leg like a gog, so it is always restless and unstable.

He also mentions the sport of hoal in different places in his divan, as in this line where he makes metaphors about his beloved's hair swinging across her face:

میز و کرمائج لپولان قدرک وستاینه - لی د نیقی بصف و تیپ عرب هایتنه جنگ

Princes and Kurmanjs (Kurds) with their armies have stood on the fields of hoal, and the ranks of Arab armies have come to war in the middle.

کو دلیر هاته فی بولی - زبیر پُر هن کنن چولی  
ژ قنجان کو رفاند هولی - ژ محبوسان برن نرده

In another poem, he directly mentions his beloved saying:

When the beloved descended to this path, many had gone mad into the wilderness, and she thus overpowered other beauties by snatching the balls (lovers) and defeating them in the game of dice (love).

From Jiziri we turn to Sheikh Ahmed Khani (1651-1707) from Hakkari in his romantic epic “Mem û Zîn” (Mam and Zin), where we find the terms of the game used in an amazing way to describe lovers on the feast of Nowruz. Khani says:

پی خواس ههنگ, ههنگ د سزکول - کاشو ژ پیا و سز وکی هول

Some of them are barefoot and others bareheaded. Feet are like rackets and heads like balls; that is, they are so low that their heads almost touch their feet.

In his description of the hunting trip of Prince Zaidin, Khani says:

چوکان د دست دگل گپالان - هافیتنه گردنی غزالان

They carried mallets alongside canes and threw them on the necks of deer. When Khani mentions the efforts of Mam's best friend Tajdin and his two brothers to ask Prince Zaidin to release Mam, Zain's lover, from prison, Tajdin sends a messenger who tells the prince quoting from Tajdin saying:

هر چار سر د مه وکی گو - چوکان ایردنا وی کاشو

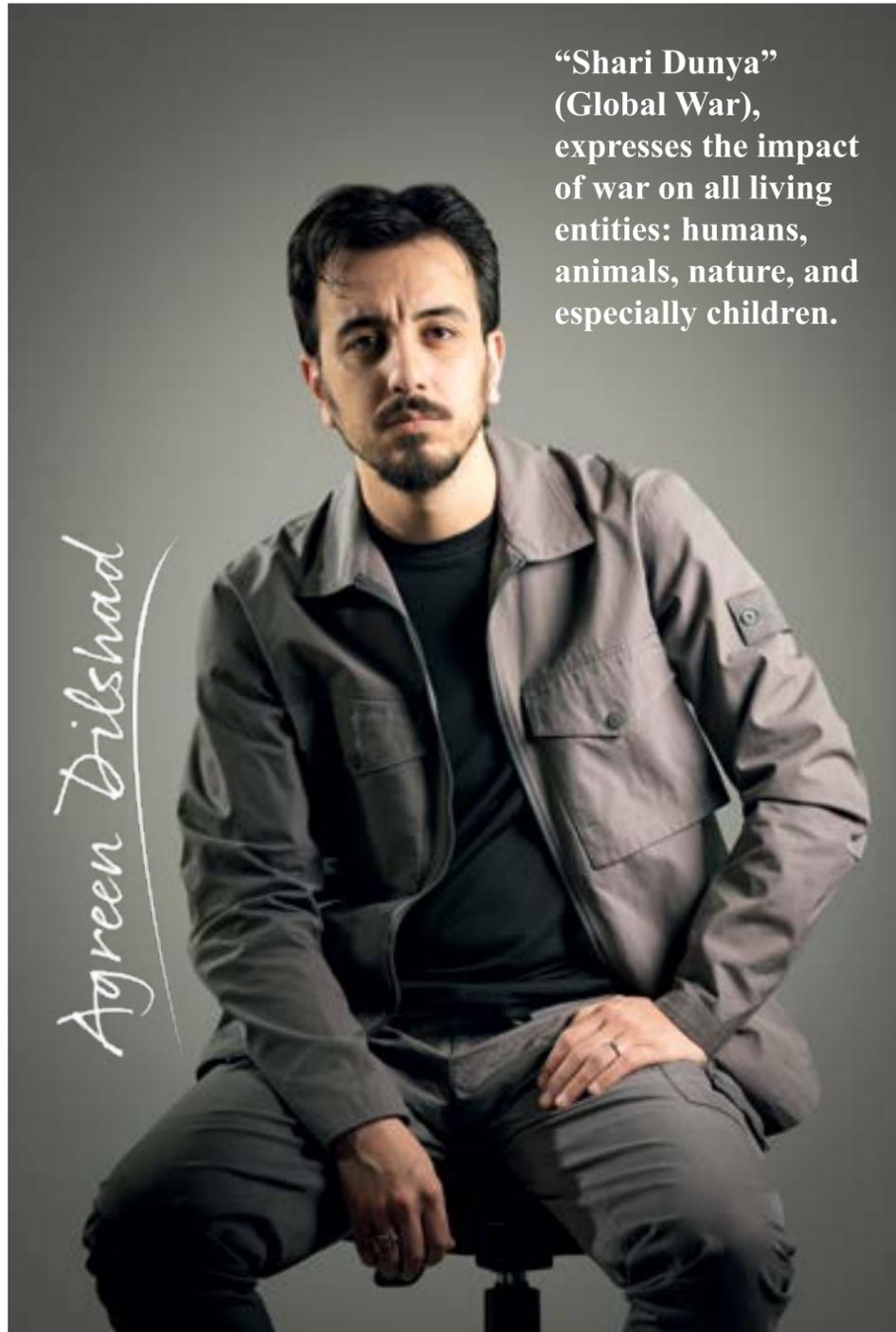
The heads of the four of us (Tajdin, his brothers and Mam) are like balls in front of the mallet of his will.

## Polo in folk stories

The game of gog i.e hoal is mentioned in the lyric love story “Fatima Salih Agha,” which is narrated and sung by many folk singers like Rifat Dari. In the story, the game becomes the reason for the long journey of Mohammed, the son of the Hauska tribe's prince, who seeks the beautiful Fatima, the daughter of a tribal prince called Salih Agha from Rawandiz.

The scene opens on a young man, the only son of his old mother, who goes out with his racket (kasho) to play gog with other young men from the tribe. He is accidentally hit on the waist with the ball by the prince's son and falls to the ground suffering from serious injury. His mother starts wailing and, unable to curse the prince's son, she tries to humiliate him by questioning who he thought he was being such a swaggerer among his fellow tribesmen, as if he was Fatima's suitor. ■

# Kurdish Singer and Songwriter Receives Prestigious International Award



“Shari Dunya” (Global War), expresses the impact of war on all living entities: humans, animals, nature, and especially children.

Agreen Dilshad of Kirkuk was awarded for the best song category of World Music in the 2022 UK Songwriting Contest (UKSC), one of the world’s longest-running and most successful international songwriting event.

His song, “Shari Dunya” (Global War), expresses the impact of war on all living entities: humans, animals, nature, and especially children.

Agreen, who has won multi national and international awards, grew up in the ancient and diverse Kurdish city of Kirkuk in Iraq, which has been subjected to countless wars and conflicts throughout history, giving him firsthand experience of his song’s topic. He studied music for five years at the Kirkuk Institute of Fine Arts and later gained his degree in Music at the College of Fine Arts in Erbil.

Writing to the UKSC, he expressed his commitment to promoting peace through his music and said: “I understand the trauma that children go through as a result of wars.”

“Shari Dunya” speaks to his experience, poignantly conveying his understanding of the trauma that children undergo during war. It is for this reason that Dilshad feels a duty to promote peace with his music, something he accomplished by winning the UKSC 2022 World Music award.

The power behind Agreen’s compositions is in both its lyrical content and its ability to evoke emotion among listeners. In “Shari Dunya,” we feel what life was like for Agreen growing up. Despite everything he endured, hope remains at the core of each of his songs, which resonates with audiences around the world who have also experienced similar traumas due to conflict or other forms of oppression.

This sentiment underscores why Agreen’s work deserves recognition: it serves both as an artistic purpose and can be used as a tool for social justice activism towards creating global peace initiatives. His song ultimately speaks to how our past experiences can influence the art that we create today and provide us the strength to build better futures tomorrow.

## Global War (Original Text in Kurdish Sorani)

What is the reason for this war?  
I cannot find an answer.



Men destroying humankind.  
Why does mankind remain unflinching?

Trees, plants, flowers, and blossoms,  
The earth and the sky lie in disbelief.

This child was not born  
To be deprived of his/her life.  
For the sake of your own desires,  
To be torn to pieces in your wars.

What is the purpose of this war?  
What do you gain from this war?  
By spilling all this blood  
How do you sleep at night?

Trees, plants, flowers, and blossoms,  
The earth and the sky lie in disbelief

له پیناوی چی ئەم شەرە؟  
و ئەلامیکم دەست ناکەوێ  
مرۆف مرۆف له ناو دەبات  
ئەم مرۆفە بۆ ناسرەوێ

دار و درمخت گۆل و گۆلزار  
زەوی و ئاسمان سەریان سووڕما  
بەلندەکان ئازەلەکان  
له دەست مرۆف و اقیان و پرما

ئەم منداڵە نەهاتوو  
لەم ژیاڵە بێبەشی کەن  
له پیناوی حەزی خۆتان  
له چەنگێکدا لەت لەتی کەن

له پیناوی چی ئەم شەرە  
لەم شەرە چیت دەستەهکەوێ؟  
تو ئەم هەموو خۆینە برژی  
شەو چۆن خەوت لێدەهکەوێ

دار و درمخت گۆل و گۆلزار  
زەوی و ئاسمان سەریان سووڕما  
بەلندەکان ئازەلەکان  
له دەست مرۆف و اقیان و پرما



Sazan M. Mandalawi

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

## Lezzoo Delivers Everything A Kurdistan Super App and Entrepreneurial Success Story

Whether among the buildings of Empire World populating the Erbil skyline or in older neighborhoods across the Kurdistan Region, red-uniformed men on motorbikes – with a red box ensconced on their back seats – deliver what the company describes as “happiness to your doorstep.”

Regardless of one’s preferred mantra, Yadgar Merani’s Lezzoo super app has certainly created an entrepreneurial sensation among a sea of new businesses

## Lezzoo is more than just a food-delivery app

in Kurdistan. Lezzoo is more than just a food-delivery app. Its customers can order food from their favorite restaurants, do their supermarket shopping online, buy pet food, procure miscellaneous goods from local start-ups, send flowers and gifts, purchase phone and internet cards, and even order water from Lezzoo’s dark store warehouse, which serves as a fulfilment

center for water distribution.

When I ask the 28-year-old Merani about the start of his company’s journey, he laughs, recalling how the CTO, Rekar, delivered Lezzoo’s first order five years ago with his own car. Back then, the start-up had only three co-founders but it now boasts more than 600 employees. Two co-founders remain today: Merani and Rekar Botani.

I meet Merani at Lezzoo’s headquarters on Erbil’s 100-meter road.

Unlike the classic stereotypical image of CEOs in my part of the world – dressed in suits and ties with a pinch of superiority – Merani welcomes me in jeans, a shirt, and a water bottle in hand, and emits a vibe of close engagement with his team in its open, modern office space.

As we relocate to a meeting room, he points to a group of young men with

laptops in one of the shared working spaces. “They are our developers,” he says proudly.

It is a spacious, modest space fostering collaborative work and creativity. Unsurprisingly, there is no excessive wooden furniture or a long CEO nameplate on the door in gold. Merani’s team is a young, lively, energetic workforce. We exchange warm smiles and nods.

### Imagining a new digital landscape

Merani, residing in Erbil but originally from Duhok, is a political science and international business graduate with a master’s in legal and political philosophy from UCL. It was in London while studying political philosophy when Merani spotted a Dileveroo rider, which inspired his journey to build Lezzoo.

**It was in London while studying political philosophy when Merani spotted a Dileveroo rider, which inspired his journey to build Lezzoo.**

Companies like Lezzoo are building the digital infrastructure of the Kurdistan Region and creating much-needed, early-career jobs. These start-ups are also quick and impactful, providing bottom-up support for the government’s larger visions for economic and social development.



Photo: Lezzoo Company

## Back then, the start-up had only three cofounders but it now boasts more than 600 employees.

Lezzoo has veritably transformed the landscape for apps in the Kurdistan Region and succeeded in instilling a new culture in a society where delivery – especially food delivery – was rare.

I was curious how Lezzoo was being affected by competing foreign companies with abundant financial resources entering the market. “The foreign companies provide awareness – mass education really – about how to use the platforms, which adds to their

popularity,” he said. “Delivery competitors amplify the message, raise awareness among consumers, and encourage them to use mobile applications, thus giving Lezzoo a new customer base without having to do any marketing. With the arrival of foreign competitors, our orders have increased,” he assured me.

When I ask Merani about his biggest challenge to date, he sighs: “Covid. We went from 1,100 orders a day to zero overnight.”

Looking past the glass windows of the meeting room, it was easy to conclude that the company had recovered. In fact, it has thrived. I decide to leave the questions and details about the company’s Covid experiences for another time.

### A journey full of challenges

Experienced human capital has been a notable challenge for Lezzoo, yet the company remains determined to serve the local community by offering employment opportunities. More than 80 percent of employees are local.

Merani’s vision for Lezzoo

## “I remember looking around thinking: I am from Erbil but am in San Francisco conversing with Harvard and Cambridge graduates and some of the world’s leading entrepreneurs.”

tracks closely with global success platforms such as Indonesia’s Gojek super app, which currently accounts for approximately 1.5% of Indonesia’s GDP, and has revolutionized the country’s digital economy.

The founders of Lezzoo received a seven-figure round of seed funding from Y Combinator, an accelerator in San Francisco co-founded by Paul Graham and Jessica Livingston, whose investment portfolio includes start-ups like Dropbox, Airbnb, DoorDash, Coinbase, Instacart, and Reddit.

Merani reminisces about how, at the age of 23, he was pitching to venture firms that were continents away from where Lezzoo was to be established. “I had never pitched to anyone,” he recounts. “I remember looking around thinking: I am from Erbil but am in San Francisco conversing with Harvard and Cambridge graduates and some of the world’s leading entrepreneurs.”

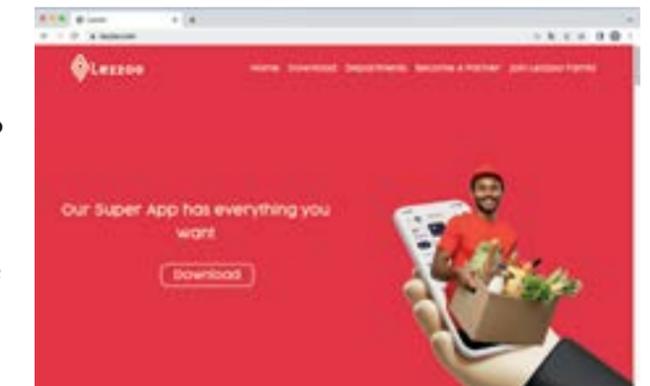
The Lezzoo co-founders at that time could not attend due to visa-approval issues. “I was all alone. I had arranged many meetings and as soon as anyone heard ‘Iraq’, I was dismissed. I received so many rejections. Iraq was a solid ‘No!’ for investors.”

Merani’s driven nature, ambitious thinking, and wide vision began with an app that serviced 12 restaurants in Erbil and ten in Duhok. Today, there are over 1,300 restaurants in Erbil present and 380 in Duhok. “It wasn’t an easy journey. I went to the Family Mall in Duhok and personally approached each restaurant in the food court.” As he recounts these experiences, he speaks with passion and determination; it is evident he has been involved in every detail and decision in the app’s journey, big and small.

## What’s next?

I am eager to glean what is next for Lezzoo, knowing that Merani’s start-up is more than a business; it carries core values, a story, and a mission. He enthusiastically says, “for Lezzoo, it is just the start!”

The super app is now connecting suppliers to retailers, creating an entire supply chain, going as far as linking farmers to urban centers and much more.



One cannot end a meeting with Merani without asking about the meaning of the name, Lezzoo. His creativity and innovation shine at their brightest as he replies: “Lez, in the Kurdish Badini dialect, means ‘quick’, and zoo in Sorani is ‘quick’. So, it is Quick-Quick!”

I would have never thought of that. ■



Photo: Lezzoo Company

# Dreaming of a New Utopia



**Qassim Khidhir**

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

**A**manj Amin, 38, is a soft-spoken man with an overgrown moustache on his upper lip and a goatee beard. He spends hours a day in his home studio, where he creates digital art while sipping coffee.

His works are bold and provocative but also a reflection of his beliefs. Everyone needs to leave something behind, and for Amanj, that something is his art.

His works have been displayed all around the world, including in Europe, Japan, the Arab Gulf countries, and his home, the Kurdistan Region.

His work is motivated by a desire to build a utopia in which war and violence are



unacceptable. Humans in this utopia have close relationships with trees, animals, and birds; there are no superiors or inferiors any kind.

“It all started when I began searching for my father’s soul,” he says of his creativity, which is based on his life story and religion.

Amanj was only seven months old when his father disappeared in 1985, and his family blames Saddam’s regime. Amanj was born in the city of Kirkuk and is a follower of the Kakai or Yarasan religion, a syncretic religion that believes in soul transmigration (donadon in Kurdish) and whose followers are in Kirkuk, Halabja, and Iranian Kurdistan.



When I saw a bird in our backyard, I thought it might be my father reincarnated and wanting to meet and speak with me,”



Amanj was born in the city of Kirkuk and is a follower of the Kakai or Yarsan religion, a syncretic religion that believes in soul transmigration

Photo: Safin Hamid

“Since I was a kid I always waited for my father to return. When I saw a bird in our backyard, I thought it might be my father reincarnated and wanting to meet and speak with me,” Amanj explained.

In 1991, he participated in an exhibition at the Artists’ Union in Kirkuk for the first time by framing and displaying his father’s clothing, what is currently known as installation art. This type of artistic understatement did

not exist at the time.

One of Amanj’s main themes is animals and

birds with human bodies, work he has only shown in Kurdistan and Europe. He is hesitant to exhibit it elsewhere in Iraq.

“I don’t want my art to incite violence toward the religious minorities who believe in transmigration of the soul,” he told Kurdistan Chronicle, adding that he doesn’t

think the Iraqi audience is ready for such a concept.

## Art deliverables for every home

“The Genocide Stamps” are widely recognized as a significant piece of Amanj’s art. After ISIS invaded Mosul in June 2014, he quickly came up with a plan to expose the atrocities against Yazidi Kurds, Christians, and Shiite Muslims. He subsequently chose to design postage stamps.

“I chose stamps because they can be delivered to every home and have material value,” said Amanj, who later expanded on the idea by including the atrocities committed by Iraq, including the infamous 1988 chemical weapons attack on the Kurdish city of Halabja by Saddam Hussein’s regime.

He even created a stamp featuring Iraqi human right activist Nadia Murad before she received the 2018 Nobel Peace Prize for her work as a leading advocate for survivors of genocide and sexual violence.

Stamps designed by Amanj have been issued internationally, including by the Universal Postal Union. Moreover, at the Dubai Expo in 2022, he displayed his “Genocide Stamps” to an international audience.

## Climate friendly

Amanj is also well-known for addressing the theme of climate change in his art by highlighting the role that humans play in damaging the environment and encouraging people to recycle rather than pollute. With the assistance of the German Goethe Institute, he recently exhibited artwork in Erbil and Baghdad that draws attention to environmental issues such as air, water, and waste pollution.

“I need a pollution-free climate to build the utopia,” Amanj explained.

One of the key reasons Amanj works as a digital artist rather than a traditional one is that traditional art produces a lot of waste and causes environmental harm.

The artist is currently working on a new project that involves gathering forgotten Kurdish stories, which were previously only spoken orally over the past decades but are now on the verge of being lost forever, and transforming them into works of art.

“Archiving history through art is preferable to archiving history through words, since words are progressively altered and lose their original meaning, while art cannot be altered,” Amanj said. ■



Mem Armetem

Mem Armetem was born in Van and currently studying for his doctoral degree at Artuklu University in Turkey. He is the editor of Sûretgraf magazine.

## The photographer who captured the colors of Kurdistan in Turkey



Before Enver Ozkahraman began taking photographs in the late 1960s, Turkish media knew little about the nature, people, and beauty of Turkey's Kurdistan.

**He visited many villages in Turkey's Kurdistan, most notably those on the border of Turkey and Iraq in Hakkari province, to photograph Kurdish people and the nature around them.**

Enver, a tall man with two long-lensed cameras, one around his neck and the other in his hand, was born in Diyarbakir province in southeastern Turkey near the banks of the Tigris river. During his youth, he visited many villages in Turkey's Kurdistan, most notably those on the border of Turkey and Iraq in Hakkari

province, to photograph Kurdish people and the nature around them.

Enver completed his mandatory military service and soon after began working for the state agency YES (Roads, Water, Electricity), which provides essential services to rural areas. Enver, who was also a painter, was instantly taken with the stunning landscapes of Kurdistan, inspiring him to purchase a camera to capture them.

"I became a photographer due to the vibrancy of the Kurdish people and their environment, the colors of their clothing, mountains, and plains," Enver said, who then mentioned that the colors of Kurdistan women's clothing were derived from nature itself.

# Enver Özkahraman



*"The colorful Kurdish culture painted my photographs."*

Then he added that the Iraqi Kurdish freedom fighters, the peshmerga, were another reason he became a photographer.

"While working in villages near the Iraqi border, I encountered some peshmerga. My friends did not believe

me and laughed at me, so I purchased a camera to show them the photographs."

He began with a Russian Lübitel 6x6 cm film camera because European and American cameras were too expensive at the time, and Enver could not afford them.



“Every frame we shot cost money, so it made us very sad when even a few frames were burned. We had to be vigilant and familiar with the light and adjust the aperture and shutter speed accordingly. Otherwise, you would not only miss an

## Rug weaving is the art of this nation

opportunity, but you would also lose financially,” Enver explained.

Since 1969, Enver has taken countless photographs, though he is not referring to digital ones. Hundreds of his photographs appeared on calendars and postcards in Turkey and abroad during years when these were popular.

“I have created an archive of a nation, I have everything



you want from the sheep dung to the clouds,” Enver boasted of his accomplishment.

### Photographing the exodus of Iraqi Kurds in 1991

During the 1991 exodus, when more than one million Iraqi Kurdish refugees flooded across the borders into Turkey and Iran to escape Saddam Hussein’s Republican Guards, Enver went to the border to photograph the refugees, as the Turkish army did not permit Kurdish refugees to cross.

“These photographs of Kurds who were fleeing Saddam’s oppression are special to me; I traveled as



down from generation to generation for centuries. This experience led him to establish a workshop in the eastern Turkish province of Van to preserve this traditional art. There, he began teaching rug weaving to young girls who were unable to attend school and had left their villages due to the lack of work opportunities.

This provided a means of support for young women to sell rugs and participate in bazaars and fairs. Today, his workshop has evolved into a literacy-focused school.

“My mother used to make rugs at home when I was a kid. Rug weaving is the art of this nation,” he said.

Kurdish kilims have unique designs and motifs and are made of madder and wool. They have thirty major motifs in total. The most common designs are Herki, Sumarkl, Saman, Halitbey, Gulhazar, Gulsarya, Gulgever, and Sine. Kurdish kilims are made up of five main colors: red or bordeaux, dark blue, brown, black, and white.

far as possible on foot to take them,” he said.

The photographs of Enver have been exhibited in numerous countries, including Switzerland, Sweden, and the United States. Now, his only desire is to open an exhibition in the Iraqi Kurdistan cities of Erbil and Duhok.

Enver never tires of discussing his photographs; he believes that photographers and filmmakers should pay more attention to older generations and forgotten stories.

“The old people are treasures, untouchable treasures,” Enver said. ■

“That’s all I have in my heart. In that exhibition, I’ll show them the years 1988-1991,” he said.

### Teaching rug weaving to young Kurdish girls

While visiting the villages, he became acquainted with the art of rug weaving, which has been passed



# Wildlife

## Highlighting Kurdistan's Wildlife The Griffon Vulture



Photo: Sabr Dri

**K**urdistan's high mountains and landscape provide a favorable environment for many different varieties of wildlife, one of which is the Eurasian griffon vulture, a large old-world vulture in the prey family Accipitridae. The griffon vulture is 93-122 cm (37-48

Sabr Dri



in) long with a 2.3-2.8 m (7.5-9.2 ft) wingspan. In the nominate race, males weigh 6.2-10.5 kg and females 6.5-10.5 kg. It has a white neck ruff and yellow bill. The buff body and wing coverts notably contrast with its dark flight feathers. The maximum recorded lifespan of a griffon vulture in captivity is 41.4 years.

Like other vultures, it is a scavenger, feeding mostly from the carcasses of dead animals, which it locates by soaring over open areas, often in flocks. It establishes nesting colonies in cliffs that are undisturbed by humans and offer extensive coverage of open areas to source animals that have perished. ■

# TEDx

## Nishtiman 2023

### Empowering Ideas, Igniting Change



- TEDxNishtiman, an independently organized event licensed by TED, held its sixth annual event in March 2023.
- The event aimed at inspiring young people across the Kurdistan Region.
- It featured local and international speakers who shared their success stories.
- The event was themed "Empowering".
- Kurdistan Region Prime Minister Masrour Barzani attended the event and delivered a speech to over 1,500 attendees.
- The Prime Minister expressed support for initiatives that promote creativity, innovation, and change.
- The event showcased 14 speakers from across Kurdistan Region, including inventors, businesswomen, entrepreneurs, academicians, and experts from technology, education, healthcare, and the arts fields.
- Over 40 startups displayed their products and services at the event.
- PM Barzani visited their booths, encouraged exhibitors, and expressed the government's support for innovative startup projects by Kurdistan's youth.
- TEDxNishtiman has mobilized over 3,000 young volunteers since 2017, with 20% finding employment opportunities.
- The program aimed at empowering women, men, youth, and minorities to develop communities through technology, innovation, and education.
- It is aimed to give people the tools and resources they need to improve their lives, using the power of technology to create positive impacts on their community and drive progress on a global scale.

# Hiking

## Kurdistan Sets **New Guinness World Record** for Largest Hiking Event

**O**n March 11, 2023, the Kurdistan Mountain Climbing Federation and Visit Kurdistan Company made history by setting the Guinness World Record for the largest hiking event. The hiking excursion on Mount Safin in the Kurdistan Region totaled 816 participants, who included members of different mountaineering groups, sports enthusiasts, and university students.

The event was made possible with the help of 110 volunteers who were instrumental in facilitating the excursion, in which the participants were treated to breathtaking views as they made their way up the trail. After the successful conclusion of the hike, Areen Masrour Barzani, a dedicated Kurdish environmentalist who spearheaded the event's organization, was presented with an official certificate by the Guinness Book of World Records, which monitored the event online.

This achievement is a testament to the growing interest

in outdoor activities in the Kurdistan Region. It also highlighted the respect that Kurdish societies have for nature and, especially, mountains, which have played a vital role throughout history to protect Kurds from its adversaries.

The Kurdistan Region has always been known for its stunning landscapes and natural beauty, which make it an ideal destination for outdoor enthusiasts. The event underscored the potential of the region to become a premier destination for adventure tourism.

It also highlighted the importance of preserving the environment and promoting sustainable tourism practices. The organizers made sure that participants followed the Leave-No-Trace principle to avoid any harm to the natural surroundings. Along the trail, they also planted trees to mark this historic day, which will be remembered by generations to come.

