The Future

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The Future

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"The Future" is a quarterly policy magazine published by the Center for Future Studies (CFS) in the Kurdistan Region. The magazine features accessible, insightful analysis of Kurdish affairs and regional political dynamics across Iraq, Iran, Turkey, and Syria. Each issue delivers thoughtful policy papers that translate complex geopolitical issues into clear, actionable insights for a broad audience.

Vision

To establish "The Future" as a leading policy magazine that bridges research and practical understanding, making complex regional issues accessible to decision-makers, professionals, and engaged citizens interested in Kurdistan and the broader Middle East.

Mission

The magazine's mission encompasses several key objectives. It presents clear, compelling policy analysis grounded in the research of the Center for Future Studies while translating complex regional dynamics into accessible insights for non-academic readers. "The Future" provides forward-looking perspectives on developments affecting Kurdistan and surrounding regions and elevates diverse voices contributing to policy discussions about the region. Through balanced, well-researched content, it aims to inform and influence policy conversations.

Publication Focus

The publication focuses on several core areas. Policy analysis breaks down regional political developments and their implications, while expert commentary features insights from policy experts, regional analysts, and political figures. The magazine identifies future trends and emerging issues likely to shape the region. A regional spotlight offers focused analysis of key developments in Iraq, Iran, Turkey, and Syria. Visual data elements use infographics and visual elements to illustrate complex regional dynamics.

Editorial Structure

The editorial structure of "The Future" follows a quarterly publishing schedule with Winter, Spring, Summer, and Fall issues. Each issue contains eight to ten policy papers, approximately 2,000-3,000 words each. Regular sections include interviews with key figures, opinion pieces, and data-driven analysis. The magazine features a visually engaging design with infographics, maps, and professional photography, and often presents thematic issues addressing pressing regional developments.

Target Audience

The target audience for "The Future" includes policy professionals and decision-makers, government officials and diplomatic personnel, business leaders with regional interests, journalists and media professionals, and educated general readers interested in Kurdish affairs and Middle Eastern politics.

"The Future" complements Kfuture.Media's news coverage by providing deeper analysis and forward-looking perspectives, making the Center for Future Studies' research accessible to a wider audience while maintaining analytical rigor and policy relevance.

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Iraq and the Turbulent Regional Environment

Dr. Yousif Goran

Dr. Yousif Goran is the President of the Center for Future Studies (CFS) and a former Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. He earned his Ph.D. in Law from the University of Sulaymaniyah. His research focuses on politics, international law, educational policy, constitutional law, and security.

Despite the passage of more than twenty-two years since the establishment of the current Iraqi political system and state, founded on a federal constitution approved and voted for by approximately 80% of the population, the political scene in Iraq—both in terms of relations between its main components and within the state's service institutions—remains far from stable and effective. Instability, ethnic tensions, conflicts among Iraq's diverse and different components, poor governance, and inadequate services continue to constitute the main headline of daily political life in Iraq. The various political elites appear incapable of finding sustainable solutions to Iraq's intractable problems.

No two people disagree about the level of complexity in the geopolitical and security environment surrounding Iraq and its impact on the Iraqi interior. The region is witnessing the most violent regional and global conflict it has experienced in decades. The strong and effective emergence of non-state actors (armed organizations and networks) and the intense, sometimes violent, competition between regional states in the area (Turkey, Israel, Iran) over their regional interests, combined with the presence of global powers such as America, Russia,

and China, have placed the region and the strategic neighborhood surrounding Iraq in a state of permanent instability. This has directly affected Iraq and complicated any meaningful process aimed at solid institutional reconstruction of the state.

Despite this, Iraq faces new external and internal challenges and threats that differ from those it confronted during the war on terrorism. Internally, the current dispute between the federal government and the Kurdistan Region, despite ongoing efforts, does not appear to be moving toward resolution. The failure of both governments to find a solution to the salary problem specifically has directly affected the confidence of the people of the Kurdistan Region in both governments. This could potentially destroy future bridges of relationship and trust for Kurdish citizens and widen the gap between the two parties. Additionally, the persistence

of remnants of terrorist groups and the anticipated American withdrawal from Iraq in September of this year will place Iraq and its armed forces before a real test in combating terrorism—a test in which it failed after the first American withdrawal in 2010, resulting in approximately 40% of Iraq's territory falling into the hands of terrorist organizations.

Externally, the regional environment neighboring Iraq and the current open conflict between Iran and Israel have made Iraq—especially after the fall of Assad's regime—more exposed to regional variables and events, placing it within conflict zones that are not connected to any Iraqi national interest.

Based on this, resolving internal problems that threaten domestic security and stability—such as problems with the Kurdistan Region, combating corruption, building institutions of good governance, enhancing dialogue and

societal discussion among different components, and moving away from the language of threats and collective punishments—will inevitably protect the internal front and strengthen it against any challenges, whether internal or external.

On the external front, distancing oneself from the polarization policies and alliances currently ongoing in the Middle East and drawing up a foreign policy stemming from the interests of all components of Iraqi society, along with positive neutrality, will enhance Iraq's regional and international standing and make it a point of convergence and interaction for influential regional and international powers.

Middle East is Changing, and This Transformation Holds Significant Implications for the Kurds

Dr. Omed Rafiq Fattah

Interview: Ranko Bakir- Kurdsat News
Transcript and Translation by Hevar Sherzad

Professor Dr. Omed Rafiq Fatah serves as the President of Cihan University Sulaimaniya (CUS), in Kurdistan Region of Iraq. He earned a Ph.D. in Political Science from Sulaimani University (2012) and a Master's degree in Political Science from Al-Nahrain University (2006). In addition, he is a researcher at Center for Future Studies (CFS). His research interests span political science, security studies, international relations, authority and authoritarianism, political security, and public policy-making

The Middle East is experiencing unprecedented transformation following the events of October 7, 2023. In this interview with Kurdsat News, Prof. Dr. Omed Rafiq Fattah, researcher and analyst and deputy president of the Center for Future Studies (CFS), examines how regional shifts—from Israel's strengthened position to the weakening of the "Resistance Front"—affect Kurdish communities across different territories. The discussion explores Turkey's surprising peace overtures toward its Kurdish population, the Trump administration's role in accelerating regional changes, and the strategic positioning of Syrian Kurdish forces. Dr. Fattah also addresses prospects for Kurdish statehood and the importance of political unity in Iraqi Kurdistan, offering expert insights into how Kurds navigate this rapidly evolving landscape.

+: Dr., from your perspective, what exactly has taken place in the region—particularly since October 7? Do you believe these events were pre-planned?

:- It's true that the Middle East is in turmoil and undergoing major shifts. But it's not only the Middle East—the entire world is experiencing substantial change due to global political dynamics. The fact that these developments have been closely monitored and studied indicates that they were not sudden or accidental. Rather, they were premeditated part of a broader plan.

Whether or not it was in anyone's favor, the results did not serve the interests of those who initiated the changes—particularly Hamas, who took the first step. Ironically, instead of weakening Israel, the situation has positioned it to become an even greater power. Now, any regional

changes must take Israel's interests into account. In other words, no transformation in the Middle East will be possible unless Israel's demands are acknowledged.

This has turned Israel from a country that was economically vulnerable into one that is now a dominant force—not just in terms of military strength, but also international standing. Although Israel may have suffered economically, it has gained significantly in terms of military technology and strategic alliances. Today, Israel has become a formidable power—one that cannot be ignored or underestimated.

+: Well, you mentioned that the force that initially attacked was not accompanied by luck. When you attack Israel, didn't they foresee Israel's response? Didn't they anticipate that Israel would react in this way and continue its actions accordingly? Or do some believe that this was part of an Israeli plan from the beginning, knowing that such an incident would occur?

:- Indeed, there are many interpretations, and this isn't a new debate. At this stage, it may be too late to focus on how the incident occurred. The reality is, both sides—Hamas and Israel—had their own plans. What we know for sure is that the events were not random or accidental.

Hamas had a strategy. Israel may have had one, too. But what's clear is that Israel suffered a serious blow in terms of international reputation. The state, which projected itself as a powerful and invincible force, was deeply shaken—even domestically.

That's why I don't believe that a country or entity like Israel would intentionally allow itself to be struck in this way. What happened, in my view, is that Hamas carefully planned and executed its operation—capitalizing on Israeli negligence and utilizing advanced technologies to bypass Israel's security.

However, this also gave Israel an opportunity. By identifying and addressing these vulnerabilities, Israel was able to transition from a primarily defensive posture to an offensive one. It shifted from reacting to actively reshaping the battlefield.

Now, the entire region is watching to see what strategic direction Israel will pursue next—and what goals it aims to achieve. As we say in Kurdish: "The blow that doesn't break me only makes me stronger."

In a way, these events have actually strengthened Israel. From a strategic standpoint, those who subscribe to the theory of conflict believe that Israel anticipates and plans for every major change in the region. But in my view, had Hamas not initiated this move, Israel's response—and the current regional behavior of the Israeli state—would not have unfolded in the way we're seeing today.

+: So, in your view, was this an opportunity for Israel to carry out its broader plans? Prime Minister Netanyahu has said, "We will reshape the Middle East." Do you believe this initiative began after October 7, or was the plan already in place and just waiting for the right moment to begin—step by step?

:- Israel's approach to national security is well-defined. It has a clear strategy for safeguarding the security of its people and its state.

Initially, the primary threat came from neighboring states. In the next phase, the

danger shifted to non-state actors—groups like Hamas, the Islamic Jihad, Hezbollah, and various Iran-backed militias in Syria. The Houthis in Yemen also fall into this category. These non-state actors posed serious, though indirect, threats to Israel's security.

At first, the threat was purely from states. Later, both states and non-state groups became simultaneous threats. In Israel's national security doctrine, neutralizing both types of threats became a top priority.

Dismantling the influence and strength of these groups was Israel's first major objective. And to a large extent, it succeeded. Israel managed to weaken their operational capacity and disrupt the flow of military aid to them. Today, Hamas and Islamic Jihad—once considered the most powerful jihadist groups in Palestine—have been largely incapacitated.

Before that, Israel dealt with Hezbollah. It also acted against Iranian-aligned groups operating in Syria. And while the Houthis in Yemen remain a concern, Iraqi militias have also presented security challenges. Some of these factions have tried to position themselves—between Iraq and Jordan—as emerging threats to Israel. But many of those groups are no longer as prominent or even mentioned.

Now Israel's strategy has changed. After weakening non-state actors, it moved to limit the influence of regional states. It has succeeded in reducing the ability of certain countries to interfere in the internal affairs of Israel's neighbors. In doing so, it has secured major strategic victories in both previous phases.

Now, Israel has entered a third phase. This involves dealing with regional powers through broader international influence. By that, I mean larger states in the region—countries like Turkey and Iran—that had once formed a significant economic and military bloc capable of challenging Israel's security.

However, these powers are no longer as dominant as they once were. The regional balance has shifted. Israel, which was once considered a small regional player, has now emerged as a major one. Today, the issue isn't simply about defending against threats. The challenge is that Israel refuses to allow any force outside its borders to grow powerful enough to pose a threat to its security. In short, the equation in the region has changed—dramatically.

+: Since October 7, Dr., the discussions have shifted significantly. In the beginning, for instance, the focus was on how Iran should respond. There were even suggestions that if Iran were to send missiles toward Israel, they should avoid civilian areas. The conversation began around how to retaliate—but now we've reached a point where both Israel and the United States agree that Iran's long-range missiles must be completely dismantled.

The narrative has changed dramatically, as you mentioned earlier. So, Dr., can we now say that the so-called Resistance Front is effectively over?

:- The Resistance Front— which was essentially a term used to justify the positioning of certain groups or states as buffers against perceived threats—has indeed been significantly weakened. The structure that once support-

ed and legitimized this front is now either being absorbed into formal state institutions or is slowly being dismantled altogether.

What we're seeing is a fundamental shift in discourse. The Resistance Front used to have both ideological sources and logistical branches. But now, those lines of support, whether ideological, military, or logistical, have largely been cut off.

The nature of the war itself has changed. What once looked like a broader, more expansive regional war has narrowed into a more localized and controlled conflict. Just a month after October 7, there were serious concerns about the eruption of a large-scale confrontation. But now, we see that nearly all actors previously threatening Israel's national security have been forced into a defensive position.

It's also worth remembering that there was once talk of direct confrontation between Iran and Israel. Today, not only is that no longer the case, but even the groups that were fighting on behalf of Iran are, for the most part, no longer active.

Instead of open conflict, we now hear talk of indirect reconciliation. Where previously both sides refused to even consider dialogue, we are now witnessing efforts—mostly through international mediation—to bring them to the negotiating table, at least in a second phase.

So yes, the regional balance of power has shifted in a significant way, and it's likely that even more profound changes are on the horizon.

+: these changes appear to be happening very quickly. Why do you think that is? In your view, why is the international force—clearly backed by the United States—pushing for such rapid transformations in the region?

:- If we look at the causes of these rapid changes, it's not only the United States, although it certainly plays a major role. If we focus on the U.S. alone, we need to consider President Trump's slogan, "Make America Great Again." He believes that four years may not be enough to achieve all the changes he wants. If he doesn't act quickly, these changes could be lost or work against U.S. interests.

Trump views the Biden administration as one where the dignity and global standing of the U.S. were undermined. Therefore, he sees his current presidency as an opportunity to restore the country's power—economically, militarily, and diplomatically. He wants to reverse the perceived decline and make the U.S. a dominant global force once again.

To do that, Trump is pushing for rapid and significant changes, especially in the Middle East. In my view, time is critical for him. He needs these transformations to happen quickly to restore the U.S. to its rightful place on the global stage.

+: Well, do you think this situation will remain confined to Iran? Or will it spread to other countries in the region, such as Turkey?

:- Of course, we know that any change in Iran is unlikely to be achieved through military means. The United States avoids military intervention with Iran. Therefore, the first step will be negotiations—aimed at imposing its own conditions to bring Iran to a point where it no longer poses a threat to Israel's security.

The conditions that the United States and Israel seek to

impose for change in the Middle East apply to all countries that do not align with U.S. policies, particularly in terms of economy and trade. So, this change is not limited to Iran—it extends to Iraq and the broader region. Even the Gulf states are asking how these shifts are unfolding.

As I mentioned earlier, this wave of change is also an attempt to restore the prestige of U.S. foreign and domestic policy. We're witnessing not only military measures but also economic strategies—like tariffs and taxes—that have created significant turmoil in global financial and economic systems.

So, this is a broad and comprehensive transformation, and we may already be seeing its early signs in Turkey. While the U.S. may not be directly involved in Turkey's internal changes, it exerts influence through forces aligned with its policy. We observe Turkey gradually pulling back from Syria, especially following Israeli airstrikes on locations where Turkey intended to establish military presence.

It's evident that both the United States and Israel no longer want Turkey to interfere in Syrian affairs. They aim to limit Turkey's role in both foreign and military policy.

+: Well, the issue of peace in Turkey has recently been discussed by Devlet Bahçeli, who was previously a strong opponent of the Kurds. He often stated that he would never go to parliament to avoid seeing the faces of the Kurds. Yet now, he says Abdullah Öcalan should come to the Turkish parliament and dissolve the PKK from there. These rapid changes suggest that the deep state in Turkey has realized that the situation is no longer in their favor. They must reorganize their internal affairs—at least concerning the Kurds, which is a significant issue. Some argue that they are just wasting time, seeing where Turkey is heading. Do you think the issue of peace should be approached in this context?

:- I have used a different term in my writings to describe this era, instead of the common terms like "the New Middle East." If you look at it politically, especially through the lens of Russian and Turkish literature, you can say this is a new era for both Turkey and Russia, as well as the European Union. I will address your question on Turkey in a moment.

Let's first look at the European Union. It is reorganizing its military structure. If you observe the 25 European countries—from Sweden to Poland—they have significantly increased their military spending, by as much as 300%, to protect their security. For example, Germany and France have spent excessively on military technology in the last two years to ensure they can stand on their own.

+: And do you think they only realized this after the Russia–Ukraine war?

:- Absolutely. Also, The U.S. conditions, combined with the war in Ukraine, made it clear to European countries that they could no longer rely solely on NATO. As a result, they've begun to consider building a new structure under what is now being called "European Security." This project requires military strength and significant financial investment—enough to establish a capable army that can defend European sovereignty independently.

In Russia, President Putin made it clear in his first speech after being re-elected that he intends to build a "new Russia." This signals a new era for the country in

terms of foreign policy, military ambitions, and economic alliances. We've already seen the formation of two or three major economic blocs in the region, many of which are being shaped with Russia as a central player. The same is happening in the energy sector, where Russia is working to reassert control.

Now, turning to Turkey—this moment could be described as the beginning of a "New Era Turkey." Why? Because Turkey has emerged as a regional power with few rivals. Much of the recent political discourse in Turkey reflects a growing confidence: the country now sees itself as capable of safeguarding European security through military means. That's a major shift.

It's true that the Turkish lira continues to decline—but let's set that issue aside for now.

Economically, Turkey is pursuing greater self-reliance. Militarily, particularly in defense technology, it now produces between 50 to 60 percent of its equipment domestically. This marks a significant leap forward. It enables Turkey to enhance its military strength without heavy reliance on foreign suppliers. That level of independence not only reduces vulnerability but also positions Turkey as a potential security provider in the region. Notably, Turkey has even offered to serve as a military guarantor for Europe in the event of a direct confrontation with Russia. That's no small proposal—and it may prompt the European Union to approach its negotiations with Turkey more seriously than in the past.

Historically, the EU was reluctant to bring Turkey closer or grant it full membership. Many European leaders saw Turkey as geographically closer to the United States, giving it more strategic value in transatlantic defense. But the dynamics have changed. As for the peace process in Turkey, it should be viewed through this broader lens. It's not simply a reaction to the PKK or internal opposition movements. Rather, it's driven by a strategic understanding: if Turkey wants to project strength abroad, it must reduce internal conflict. The peace process is the result of both external pressure and internal calculations—it's less about ideological shifts and more about positioning Turkey for the role it wants to play economically, militarily, and diplomatically.

+: So, can we say that Turkey is now in control of the peace process and that the Kurds are essentially excluded from shaping it?

:- Not exactly. The Kurds are not excluded from the discussion because they remain a vital part of Turkey's internal structure. You can't analyze Turkey as a state without recognizing its key components and one of the most significant of those is its people. The Kurds are a part of the Turkish people. The more internal conflict there is, the more Turkey's strength and reputation on the international stage are weakened.

The energy that Turkey could use to assert itself abroad, it doesn't want to waste on internal disputes. President Erdoğan, who sees himself as the figurehead of Turkey's resurgence in foreign policy, wants to open a new chapter. His push for a renewed presidency, constitutional changes, and active parliamentary debate are all part of a broader reform package and he wants the peace process with the Kurds to be part

of that package.

It's also important to note that this initiative appears to be driven more by Turkey than the Kurds this time. Historically, the Kurds have often been the ones to call for negotiations, primarily because they were the weaker party and needed to seek negotiations. But this time, the initiative seems to be coming from the Turkish side—and from within the institutions that support such a move.

I believe there is now an internal consensus among various power centers in Turkey. And once the delegations begin visiting İmralı and returning—whether they represent political parties or other entities, it seems likely that a shared agreement on the peace process is already forming. Let's hope this leads to real, lasting dialogue.

+: Dr., the fact that Turkey is now taking the lead in this issue has raised some doubts. It's as if Turkey is trying to buy time. That's why, just recently, the DEM Party called for the process to be accelerated, and Erdoğan held a meeting that lasted over an hour and 15 minutes. So there's some uncertainty, would you say that's because no concrete steps have been taken yet?

:- Yes, the doubt is understandable—and in fact, it's a necessary part of any serious analysis. After all, this is a conflict that has lasted over 50 years. You can't expect to resolve something of this scale in just six months or a year. So of course, there's suspicion. The process is fragile, and it's open to interference. Erdoğan may try to tighten his grip through this initiative. All these doubts are valid, especially because, so far, we haven't seen any practical or measurable steps.

But despite this, it's clear that the intent, both from the government and from Kurdish political forces, is to move toward a resolution that benefits all communities in Turkey. For the Kurdish side, if the process moves forward successfully, it could strengthen their political presence. For example, the DEM Party would likely gain far more seats than it currently holds if the process leads to broader national unity.

As we've seen in past elections, the AKP has made gains in Kurdish-majority areas, but that often has more to do with divisions among Kurdish parties than with popular support for AKP policies. If unity can be achieved, and if the peace process is handled sincerely, the DEM Party could position itself as a much stronger electoral force—one that truly reflects the voice of the Kurdish population in Turkey.

+: But Dr., do you really think Turkey will accept that? After all, we've seen Erdoğan remove 10 mayors and replace them with others—12 in total, 10 of them from Kurdish areas. If the pro-democracy forces gain a strong victory, do you believe the Turkish state will actually hand over the municipalities to the DEM Party and respect the results?

:- This is a long process—one that must be resolved through parliament. A constitutional solution is essential, and it must come from within the legislative body. One key step is separating the military from party control, especially since the armed forces remain heavily influenced by the AKP.

Now, considering all these intertwined issues, the question is: what guarantees are in place for a major power like Turkey—currently in the

hands of one party—to genuinely engage with a force like the PKK, which is now unarmed and backed by the people?

The only possible guarantee lies in the authority of parliament—through constitutional amendments that can institutionalize the peace process. The West should recognize this as a threat too. After all, even in Iraq we have a constitution, yet there's always the risk that the entire structure could collapse at any moment. That risk is real—but then again, what other alternative is there?

:+ Dr. You mentioned the West earlier. How do you view the current situation there? And how would you assess the political wing of the PYD and the Syrian Democratic Forces? Do you think they have handled the situation wisely?

:- So far, what we've observed is that, despite the fact that forces both within and outside the West do not consider the Syrian Democratic Forces, PYD, and other groups as their official representatives, the political and military approach taken has been, in my view, a wise handling of the situation in Syria. One key aspect is that there has been no direct confrontation between the Syrian Democratic Forces and the Syrian Liberation Front. This, in itself, is a significant achievement. Any confrontation would harm the West, especially since there is a certain level of legitimacy attached to the forces currently representing the state. The absence of direct conflict is an important success in that context.

Moreover, the agreement between Ahmad Sharo and Mazlum Abdia marked a significant step forward. Whether they will honor that agreement in the long run remains to be seen, but so far, the handling of the situation has been prudent. I also believe there are external forces outside the West that have an interest in safeguarding the region. This balance—whether it involves the United States, Israel, or another power—provides a form of protection for the West. This external support serves as a protective umbrella, which is a wise strategy.

+: Well, Dr., it's true that foreign forces, whether the French, the Americans, or others, have been involved in protecting them, but this protection is in their own interests. Do you think the Kurds in the West, particularly those close to the French, or the Americans, have played a role in securing this protection for themselves?

:- That's certainly one factor, but there's another aspect to consider. In politics, we talk about the "uncertainty principle"—the idea that there is uncertainty and unpredictability in international relations. All the major international powers—the United States, the European Union, and even Russia—are watching closely to see what will happen in Syria. Only Turkey seems unwilling to observe or wait—it acts while the rest of the world remains cautious. These forces have not been entirely reliable, and this ongoing uncertainty is shaping the international community's approach to Syria.

This uncertainty in global relations with Syria has created a situation where the question becomes: Who is the reliable force? The Syrian Democratic Forces, in my view, are the ones who have emerged as the true peacekeeping force in the region. Looking back at history, particularly

in the fight against ISIS since 2014, they've faced an occupying and violent force. The fact that the Syrian Democratic Forces have managed to establish a sense of security has been crucial. Their ability to create this sense of stability has allowed them to secure protection from international forces, leading to the establishment of an umbrella of security over them.

+: Dr., we often discuss political issues and the situation of the Kurds with political observers. Some believe that the current situation presents an opportunity for the Kurds to achieve their long-standing dream of a state. Do you think a Kurdish state is close at this stage?

:- But where could we establish it?

+: For instance, some observers argue that a Greater Kurdistan should not be formed in just one part, whether in the west or the south. Do you think this is achievable, or is it more of a personal preference?

:- If we look at it realistically, even though this may sound a bit unnationalistic, do we really need a state right now? The real question is: Do we need to create a Kurdish state at this stage? Or have we, instead, made a political and social contract with the countries of the region, especially with Iraq, the Kurds in the north, and Turkey? At this point, I don't think it's advisable. We are in a stage where we have some form of independence, but it is fragile and at times threatened.

I don't foresee a situation in the near future where we can claim to be in a position to establish a Kurdish state. Creating such a state requires certain principles, and at this moment, I don't believe any force in the region is willing to establish one. Additionally, these shifting political dynamics won't necessarily lead to the foundation of a new state in the region. The map of the states remains the same, even though the system of governance may change.

For example, in Syria, Bashar al-Assad succeeded another person, but the state itself—its geography and political boundaries—remains unchanged. Similarly, nothing fundamentally changed in Iraq since 2003. Therefore, there has been no radical shift in the structure or shape of states in this region that would allow us to think about establishing a Kurdish state. However, all the changes happening now are in the Kurds' favor. The fall of dictatorship and fascism in the region will open up opportunities for Kurds to solidify their identity within these states. This is a major step forward. Currently, what the West demands is for the Kurds to have their own distinct identity within the Syrian state, just as we do in Iraq. That identity can be both political and cultural. For instance, in Iraq, we have our own political, cultural, and even financial characteristics, and now the financial issue has been addressed.

In Syria, however, the demands must be different. The demands of Syria and the West don't necessarily align with ours. For example, they call for the implementation of a federal system, and they advocate for decentralization.

+: It takes many different forms.

:- Yes.

+: Well, you mentioned that, from both a regional and international perspective, the creation of a state may not

be appropriate at this moment. But do we have the necessary resistance within our region? Are we ready to build that state at home?

:- If we revisit this question, I don't think there is an opportunity to consider creating a Kurdish state in Iraq right now. As I mentioned earlier, I don't believe the structure of the state in Iraq will change. We need to seriously consider whether the Iraqi state and the international community would ever allow Iraq to be divided into two parts. This would not only pose a threat to Iraq itself but also to other countries, including those in Europe.

The changes happening are meant to prevent the current system of governance in the region from staying the same. The survival of this governance system is a threat to the national security of both Israel and the United States. Therefore, in my opinion, the form of states in the region will not change until we have the resistance and readiness to build a state.

+: Dr., my last question is about our presence in South Kurdistan. There have been significant changes in the region, and political forces seem to be preparing for these changes. The two influential political parties, the PUK and the KDP, have been working to form a government and have shown a lot of understanding and rapprochement. Do you think they fully grasp the changes in the region, that the conflict is no longer an issue, and that cooperation is now essential?

:- It's always beneficial to be united, especially when dealing with Iraq and the international forces. The focus of this unity should be on forming a government, and the international coalition forces are particularly emphasizing the need for a unified Peshmerga force. Energy is another key issue they stress in order to reach an agreement between the Kurdistan Region and Iraq.

The international forces have advised the Kurdistan Region to unify in these key sectors, but they are not imposing a unified government or any such demands. I think there is a shared understanding that the international equation is shifting. Therefore, we need a new government and a new strategy to navigate these changes. If this understanding had been formed sooner, it might have made the formation of the government more urgent.

However, the new agreement between the PUK and the KDP that is currently being discussed appears to be more concrete. The agreement has been strategically given more time, and all points of disagreement are now addressed in a way that can serve as an alternative to a broader strategic agreement. Both parties are now clear about their positions on the political map. The PUK and KDP, in particular, must understand their respective roles and know exactly where they stand.

+: Well, I know I mentioned the last question, but this agreement isn't just about forming the Kurdistan Regional Government and the 10th cabinet, is it?

:- No, it's not just about that. This is an agreement on public policy. It's an agreement that the vision of the PUK and the KDP should align as a common vision for governance and public policy-making. When we talk about public policy, we're referring to all sectors—prosperity, energy, tourism, and more.

I think this is a positive development after their previous conflicts, where both sides often criticized each other. If they can agree on a public policy, reorganize their governance approach, and address the demands of the forces within a clear roadmap, it will likely be better than before.

Beyond Division: Learning from Europe's Path to Integration as a Model for the Middle East

Dr. Momen Zellmi

Dr. Momen Zellmi is a political analyst, researcher, and diplomatic consultant based in Sulaimaniya, Kurdistan Region of Iraq. He serves as the Editor-in-Chief of The Future Magazine and Kfuture.Media. With a PhD in Language Education Policy and an MA in English Language and Literature, he is also a member of the university council at Cihan University Sulaimaniya. His research and publications focus on politics, security, language and education policy, gender, and culture.

Europe's journey from a continent plagued by violent conflicts to a region of unprecedented cooperation offers valuable insights for other parts of the world facing similar challenges. For centuries, European nations were embroiled in conflicts rooted in ethnic, religious, and territorial disputes, culminating in two devastating world wars that claimed millions of lives. Yet, from these ashes arose one of history's most ambitious political projects: the European Union. This transformation did not occur overnight but was the result of deliberate institution-building, economic integration, and a gradual shift from nationalist paradigms to cooperative frameworks (Dinan, 2014).

The Middle East today faces challenges that bear striking resemblances to pre-integration Europe: religious sectarianism, ethnic tensions, territorial disputes, and economic disparities. While acknowledging the significant historical and cultural differences between these regions, there are nonetheless valuable lessons that can be drawn from Europe's experience. This article examines Europe's pre-integration divisions, analyzes the mechanisms that facilitated European cooperation, and explores potential applications of these lessons to the contemporary Middle East.

The Situation of Europe Before Founding the European Union

Ethnic and Nationalist Conflicts

Before the establishment of the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1957, which would later evolve into the European Union, Europe was a mosaic of competing nation-states defined largely by ethnic and linguistic identities. The 19th century had seen the rise of nationalism as a dominant political force, with the unification of Germany and Italy transforming the European landscape. These nationalist movements, while liberating in some contexts, also sowed the seeds for future conflicts by emphasizing ethnic distinctiveness and territorial claims based on historical or cultural grounds (Hobsbawm, 1992).

The consequences of unchecked nationalism reached their apex in the two World Wars. World War I (1914-1918) emerged from a complex web of nationalist ambitions, security dilemmas, and imperial competition. The Treaty of Versailles, which concluded the war in 1919, attempted to redraw European borders along ethnic lines following President Woodrow Wilson's principle of "self-determination" (MacMillan, 2002). However, this approach proved problematic, as ethnically mixed regions inevitably created new minorities and grievances. The harsh penalties imposed on Germany also fueled revanchist sentiments that would later contribute to the rise of Nazism.

World War II (1939-1945) represented the ultimate failure

of the interwar order and the destructive potential of ethnonationalism in its most extreme form. The Nazi ideology, with its emphasis on racial purity and living space (Lebensraum) for the "master race," led to unprecedented atrocities including the Holocaust, which claimed the lives of approximately six million Jews and millions of others deemed undesirable by the Nazi regime (Kershaw, 2008).

Religious Divisions

While religious conflicts had diminished in intensity since the Thirty Years' War (1618-1648) and the Peace of Westphalia, religious identities remained significant markers of difference across Europe. Catholic-Protestant divisions were particularly pronounced in countries like Northern Ireland, where religious identity overlapped with political aspirations and socioeconomic disparities (Coakley, 2002). In Eastern Europe, tensions between Orthodox Christians, Catholics, and Muslims persisted, later erupting in violent conflicts following the collapse of Yugoslavia in the 1990s. Jewish communities across Europe faced varying degrees of discrimination and persecution, culminating in the Holocaust. Even after World War II, anti-Semitism remained a challenge in many European societies (Wistrich, 1991). These religious tensions, while no longer the primary casus belli for interstate conflicts as they had been in previous centuries, continued to influence social relations and political alignments.

Economic Disparities and Class Conflict

The Industrial Revolution had transformed Europe's economic landscape unevenly, creating stark disparities between industrialized regions and those that remained predominantly agricultural. These economic divides often reinforced existing cultural and political divisions. Germany's industrial Ruhr region, for instance, contrasted sharply with the more agricultural economies of Southern Europe. Within countries, the divide between urban industrial centers and rural agricultural areas created social tensions and political polarization (Berend, 2006). Class conflict intensified throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries as industrialization created new forms of wealth and poverty. The rise of socialist and communist movements challenged the existing order, with the Russian Revolution of 1917 establishing the Soviet Union as an alternative political and economic model. After World War II, Europe was divided not only by national boundaries but also by the ideological Iron Curtain separating Western capitalist democracies from Eastern communist states (Judt, 2005).

Political Fragmentation and Power Competition

Europe's political landscape before integration was characterized by competition rather than cooperation. The balance of power system that emerged from the Congress of Vienna in 1815 attempted to prevent any single power from achieving hegemony but ultimately failed to maintain peace. International institutions remained weak,

and security was primarily sought through shifting alliances rather than collective arrangements (Kissinger, 1994).

The League of Nations, established after World War I, represented an early attempt at international cooperation but lacked enforcement mechanisms and universal participation. Its failure to prevent the rise of fascism and the outbreak of World War II highlighted the limitations of purely voluntary international cooperation without substantive integration or binding commitments (Henig, 2010).

The Devastation of World War II as Catalyst for Change

The scale of destruction caused by World War II was unprecedented. Approximately 40 million people died in Europe alone, with civilian casualties exceeding military ones in many countries. Major cities lay in ruins, economies were shattered, and the continent faced a refugee crisis of massive proportions. Beyond the physical devastation, there was a profound crisis of confidence in the European political order and the nation-state system that had produced such catastrophic results (Judt, 2005).

This devastation created a powerful impetus for change. Leading European thinkers and politicians concluded that the cycle of nationalist competition and conflict had to be broken. As French Foreign Minister Robert Schuman declared in his famous proposal for the European Coal and Steel Community: "World peace cannot be safeguarded without the making of creative efforts proportionate to the dangers which threaten it" (Schuman, 1950). This recognition that fundamental structural changes were needed to prevent future conflicts set the stage for European integration.

European Union as a Solution

Early Steps Toward Integration

The first concrete step toward European integration came with the establishment of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) in 1951.

The ECSC, proposed by Robert Schuman and designed by Jean Monnet, placed the coal and steel industries of France, West Germany, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg under a supranational authority. This arrangement had both economic and political objectives: to modernize these industries while making war between France and Germany "not merely unthinkable, but materially impossible" by integrating the production of materials essential for warfare (Monnet, 1978).

The success of the ECSC led to the signing of the Treaties of Rome in 1957, establishing the European Economic Community (EEC) and the European Atomic Energy Community (Euratom). The EEC created a customs union, eliminating tariffs between member states and establishing common external tariffs. While primarily economic in nature, these agreements contained the seeds of political integration through the creation of common institutions: the Commission, the Council of Ministers, the Assembly (later

Parliament), and the Court of Justice (Dinan, 2014).

The Functional Approach to Peace

The path to European integration followed what political scientists call a "functional approach," beginning with technical cooperation in specific economic sectors before gradually expanding to broader political integration. This approach, advocated by theorists like David Mitrany and Ernst Haas, suggested that cooperation in one area would create "spillover effects," necessitating cooperation in related areas and gradually building habits of cooperation (Haas, 1958). Instead of attempting to immediately create a European federation—an approach that had failed in previous efforts—the founders of European integration adopted an incremental strategy focused on concrete achievements. As Jean Monnet famously stated: "Europe will not be made all at once, or according to a single plan. It will be built through concrete achievements which first create a de facto solidarity" (Monnet, 1978, p. 323).

Economic Integration as Foundation

Economic integration served as the foundation of European cooperation, creating material incentives for con-

tinued collaboration across national boundaries. The Common Market established by the EEC stimulated trade between member states, which grew dramatically in the decades following integration. This economic interdependence raised the costs of conflict, as prosperity increasingly depended on maintaining good relations with neighboring countries (Eichengreen, 2007).

To address regional economic disparities, the European Community established structural funds designed to develop poorer regions, particularly in the Mediterranean countries that joined in later enlargements. These transfers helped reduce inequality between member states and regions, although disparities persisted. The European Investment Bank provided loans for infrastructure development and other projects that promoted integration and balanced development (McCormick, 2014).

The process of economic integration deepened over time, culminating in the creation of the Single Market in 1993 (following the Single Eu-ropean Act of 1986) and the introduction of the Euro as a common currency in 1999. These steps further integrated the European economies, making them increasingly interdependent and reducing the economic rationale for national competition (McNamara, 1998).

Democratic Institutions and the Rule of Law

Alongside economic integration, Europe developed democratic institutions that ensured representation for all member states while protecting individual rights regardless of nationality, ethnicity, or religion. The European Parliament, directly elected since 1979, provides democratic legitimacy, while the Council represents member state governments. The European Commission acts as an executive body with initiatives designed to advance common European interests rather than national ones (Hix & Høyland, 2011).

The European Court of Justice established the primacy of European law over national law, ensuring that integration agreements were enforced consistently across all member states. This legal framework protected citizens' rights and prevented discrimination based on nationality, creating a truly common legal space (Alter, 2001).

Human rights protection became a central feature of European integration, particularly following the adoption of the European Convention on Human Rights in 1950 (under the auspices of the Council of Europe) and the incorporation of fundamental rights into the EU legal order. The European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg provides a venue for individuals to seek redress for human rights violations, regardless of their citizenship or identity (de Búrca, 2011).

Cultural Exchange and Identity Building

Beyond formal institutions, European integration promoted cultural exchange through programs like Erasmus (student exchange), research collaboration, and cultural initiatives. These people-to-people contacts helped overcome stereotypes and build understand-

ing across national boundaries. While national identities remained strong, European integration gradually fostered a complementary European identity among many citizens, particularly the younger generations who grew up in an integrated Europe (Fligstein, 2008).

The principle of subsidiarity—decision-making at the most appropriate level—helped balance integration with respect for national and regional identities. This approach allowed for unity in diversity, recognizing that cooperation did not require homogenization. The EU motto "United in Diversity" reflects this philosophy of maintaining cultural distinctiveness while working together on common challenges (Shore, 2000).

Case of the Middle East: Problems and Issues

Religious Sectarianism and Extremism

The Middle East is characterized by deep religious divisions that have historical roots but have been exacerbated by modern conflicts. The primary division is between Sunni and Shia Muslims, a split that originated in disputes over succession after the death of Prophet Muhammad in the 7th century. This theological division has taken on geopolitical dimensions in the contemporary Middle East, with Iran positioning itself as the protector of Shia interests and Saudi Arabia asserting leadership of the Sunni world (Nasr, 2007).

Religious sectarianism has been particularly devastating in Iraq following the 2003 US-led invasion, which disrupted the political order and unleashed sectarian violence. The civil war in Syria has similarly taken on sectarian dimensions, with the Alawite-dominated regime of Bashar al-Assad confronting predominantly Sunni opposition forces (Phillips, 2015). The rise of extremist groups like ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria), which imposed a brutal interpretation of Sunni Islam in territories it controlled, further deepened sectarian divisions and resulted in the persecution of religious minorities, including Christians, Yazidis, and Shia Muslims (Stern & Berger, 2015).

Beyond the Muslim-majority populations, the Middle East is home to significant Christian communities with ancient roots, particularly in Lebanon, Egypt, and Iraq, as well as smaller religious minorities like Druze, Yazidis, Baha'is, and Zoroastrians. These communities have increasingly faced persecution and displacement, threatening the region's religious diversity (Griswold, 2010).

Ethnic Tensions and Minority Rights

Ethnically, the Middle East is far from homogeneous. While Arabs constitute the largest ethnic group, the region is also home to Kurds, Turks, Persians, Berbers, and numerous other ethnicities. The Kurdish population, numbering approximately 30-40 million people spread across Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria, represents the largest stateless nation in the world. Kurdish aspirations for greater autonomy or independence have frequently led to conflict with central governments, most notably in Turkey's decades-long strug-

gle with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) (McDowall, 2004).

In Iraq, the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) has achieved significant autonomy following the 2003 invasion, creating a de facto Kurdish state within Iraq's borders. However, the 2017 independence referendum, which overwhelmingly supported Kurdish independence, was met with military action from Baghdad and opposition from regional powers, highlighting the continued challenges to Kurdish self-determination (Stansfield, 2017).

Other ethnic minorities face varying degrees of discrimination and marginalization. The Amazigh (Berber) populations in North Africa have historically faced cultural suppression and lack of recognition for their language and identity. In Iran, groups like Baloch, Arabs, and Kurds have complained of discrimination by the Persian-dominated central government (Elling, 2013).

Territorial Disputes and Border Conflicts

The modern borders of Middle Eastern states were largely drawn by European colonial powers following World War I and the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. The Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916 between Britain and France created artificial boundaries that often divided ethnic and religious communities or combined disparate groups under single administrations. These borders have been contested since their creation, contributing to regional instability (Fromkin, 1989).

Prominent territorial disputes include the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which remains unresolved despite decades of peace initiatives. The status of Jerusalem, claimed by both Israelis and Palestinians as their capital, remains particularly contentious. Border disputes also exist between various Arab states, such as the Saudi-Yemen border and the Kuwait-Iraq border, which was a factor in Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990 (Halliday, 2005).

Water resources are another source of territorial ten-

sion, particularly in regions where rivers cross international boundaries. The Tigris and Euphrates rivers, flowing from Turkey through Syria and Iraq, have been a source of discord as upstream dam projects affect downstream water availability. Similarly, the Jordan River basin is contested by Israel, Jordan, Syria, and the Palestinian territories (Gleick, 1994).

Authoritarian Governance and Democratic Deficits

Many Middle Eastern states have been characterized by authoritarian governance, with power concentrated in the hands of monarchs, military leaders, or single-party regimes. The lack of democratic accountability has contributed to corruption, human rights abuses, and the marginalization of opposition voices. The 2011 Arab Spring uprisings represented a widespread demand for democratic reform across the region, but with limited long-term success (Lynch, 2016).

Tunisia remains the only country where the Arab Spring led to a sustained democratic transition, although its democracy continues to face challenges. In Egypt, initial democratic reforms were reversed by a military coup in 2013 that installed a new authoritarian regime. Libya, Yemen, and Syria descended into civil wars following their uprisings, with devastating humanitarian consequences (Brownlee et al., 2015).

The persistence of authoritarian governance has impeded the development of institutions capable of mediating conflicts between different groups and ensuring equal rights for all citizens regardless of religion or ethnicity. Without inclusive political frameworks, sectarian and ethnic identities have often become mobilized for political purposes, deepening divisions rather than promoting cooperation (Bellin, 2004).

Economic Disparities and Resource Dependency

The Middle East exhibits stark economic disparities, both between and within countries. Gulf states like Qatar, the United Arab Emir-

ates, and Saudi Arabia enjoy high per capita incomes due to their vast oil and gas resources, while countries like Yemen, Syria, and Egypt face significant poverty and unemployment. These disparities contribute to regional tensions and migration pressures (Richards & Waterbury, 2008).

Many Middle Eastern economies suffer from over-dependence on natural resource exports, particularly oil and gas, which makes them vulnerable to price fluctuations in global markets. This "resource curse" has often impeded the development of diversified economies and reinforced authoritarian governance, as regimes use resource wealth to buy political loyalty rather than develop accountable institutions (Ross, 2012).

Youth unemployment remains particularly high across the region, creating social instability and providing fertile ground for extremist recruitment. The demographic bulge—with youth (15-29 years) constituting approximately 30% of the population in many Middle East-ern countries—presents both challenges and opportunities for future development (Dhillon & Yousef, 2009).

Suggested Solutions: Applying European Lessons to the Middle East

Regional Integration through Functional Cooperation

Following the European model, regional integration in the Middle East could begin with functional cooperation in specific sectors where common interests are clear. Water resources management presents a particularly promising area, as all countries in the region face water scarcity challenges that will intensify with climate change. Establishing a Middle Eastern Water Authority, similar to the European Coal and Steel Community, could create institutional frameworks for cooperation while addressing a critical shared need (Kibaroglu, 2015).

Energy infrastructure provides another potential area for functional integration. Despite political differences, countries in the region have incentives to develop inter-connected electricity grids and gas pipelines to optimize resource use and enhance energy security. The existing Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Interconnection Authority could be expanded to include a wider range of countries, creating tangible benefits while building habits of cooperation (Darbouche & Fattouh, 2011).

Trade liberalization represents a third avenue for functional integration. Intra-regional trade in the Middle East remains among the lowest in the world as a percentage of total trade, suggesting significant untapped potential. Reducing tariff and non-tariff barriers between Middle Eastern countries could stimulate economic growth while increasing the costs of conflict through greater economic interdependence (Hakimian & Nugent, 2004).

Inclusive Democratic Institutions

European experience demonstrates that lasting peace requires democratic institutions that protect individual rights regardless of

ethnic or religious identity. While immediate democratization across the Middle East seems unlikely, incremental reforms that expand political participation and protect minority rights could help reduce tensions over time (Diamond, 2010).

Federalism and devolution of power to regional or local authorities could address demands for autonomy from ethnic and religious communities without threatening state sovereignty. Iraq's constitution already incorporates federalist principles, although implementation has been problematic. Similar arrangements could potentially address Kurdish aspirations in other countries while maintaining territorial integrity (O'Leary, 2005).

Constitutional guarantees for minority rights, enforced by independent judiciaries, are essential for building trust in shared institutions. The protection of religious freedom, language rights, and cultural expression should be enshrined in legal frameworks and actively enforced. European institutions like the Venice Commission could provide technical assistance in constitutional design and implementation based on their experience with diverse societies (Grote & Röder, 2016).

Economic Development and Social Cohesion

Addressing economic disparities both between and within countries is crucial for long-term stability. A Middle Eastern Development Bank, modeled on the European Investment Bank, could finance infrastructure projects that connect divided communities while promoting balanced development across the region. Such an institution could combine capital from oil-rich Gulf states with technical expertise from more industrialized economies (Henry & Springborg, 2010).

Youth unemployment requires particular attention through education reforms, entrepreneurship support, and labor market policies. The European Union's Youth Guarantee program, which ensures that all young people receive quality employment offers or continuing education opportunities, could provide a model for addressing this critical challenge (Dhillon & Yousef, 2009).

Social cohesion can be strengthened through educational and cultural exchange programs similar to Europe's Erasmus program. University partnerships, joint research initiatives, and youth exchanges could help overcome stereotypes and build understanding across ethnic and religious boundaries. Such people-to-people contacts complement formal institutional arrangements and create constituencies for continued cooperation (Noutcheva & Aydin-Düzgit, 2012).

International Support and Frameworks

Europe's integration process benefited from external support, particularly from the United States through the Marshall Plan. Similarly, international actors could play constructive roles in facilitating Middle Eastern cooperation through financial assistance, technical expertise, and diplomatic engagement. However, such support must

respect local ownership of the integration process rather than imposing external models (Balfour & Youngs, 2015). International organizations like the United Nations could provide forums for negotiation and dispute resolution, while regional bodies like the Arab League could be strengthened to take on more substantive roles in conflict prevention and resolution. The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), with its emphasis on inclusive security dialogues and confidence-building measures, may offer useful lessons for developing regional security architecture in the Middle East (Pinfari, 2009).

Conclusion

The European Union's evolution from a continent devastated by nationalist conflicts to a zone of peace and prosperity offers valuable insights for the Middle East, despite the significant differences between these regions. Europe's experience suggests that enduring peace requires both institutional frameworks that protect individual rights regardless of identity and economic integration that creates shared interests in continued cooperation. These processes take time—European integration has unfolded over more than seven decades—and require visionary leadership willing to look beyond immediate political constraints (Muasher, 2014).

The path toward greater cooperation in the Middle East will inevitably reflect the region's unique historical, cultural, and political characteristics rather than simply replicating the European model. Integration may begin with modest functional cooperation in areas like water management, energy infrastructure, and trade before potentially expanding to more sensitive political and security domains. The key insight from Europe is not the specific institutional form but the underlying principle: creating structures where cooperation becomes more beneficial than conflict for all parties involved (Lynch, 2016).

While the challenges facing the Middle East are enormous, from religious extremism to authoritarian governance to external intervention, the costs of continued fragmentation and conflict are even greater. The humanitarian catastrophes in Syria, Yemen, and elsewhere demonstrate the urgent need for new approaches based on cooperation rather than competition. Just as Europeans found a way forward from the ruins of World War II, the peoples of the Middle East have the capacity to build more peaceful and prosperous futures through gradually deepening cooperation across religious, ethnic, and national boundaries (Muasher, 2014).

The transformation will not be easy or quick. It will require sustained commitment from regional leaders, constructive engagement from international actors, and active participation from civil society. Most importantly, it will need a shift in mindset from zero-sum thinking to recognition of shared interests in stability, prosperity, and human dignity. The European experience, with all its accomplishments and limitations, offers hope that

such transformation is possible, even in regions with long histories of division and conflict.

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Sectarian Securitization: Understanding Security Politics in the Middle East Through the Copenhagen School Lens

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The landscape of security studies has undergone a dramatic transformation since its inception following the two World Wars. What began as a field focused primarily on external military threats to sovereign states has evolved into a complex discipline that examines how societies construct, perceive, and respond to various forms of insecurity. This evolution has been particularly pronounced in the Middle East, where sectarian divisions have become increasingly politicized and securitized, fundamentally altering the region's political dynamics.

The traditional understanding of security, rooted in realist theories of international relations, viewed threats as objective realities that states must confront through military means. However, contemporary security theorists, particularly those associated with the Copenhagen School, have challenged this notion by introducing the concept of "securitization" – the process by which issues become framed as existential threats requiring exceptional measures, regardless of their objective threat level.

This theoretical framework proves particularly relevant when examining the Middle East, where sectarian identities have been transformed from religious and cultural markers into political tools used to justify extraordinary policies and regional interventions. The case of Iraq, with its complex sectarian landscape and post-2003 political reconstruction, serves as a compelling example of how securitization theory can illuminate the mechanisms through which religious differences become politicized security concerns.

The Evolution of Security Studies: From State-Centric to Society-Centric Approaches

The Traditional Phase: State Security and Military Threats

The early development of security studies was deeply influenced by the geopolitical realities of the Cold War era. During what scholars term the "golden age" of security studies (1955-1965), the field was characterized by what Paul D. Williams describes as the "Four S's": State, Strategy, Science, and Status Quo. This approach placed the sovereign state at the center of security analysis, viewing it as both the primary referent object of security and the main actor responsible for providing protection against external threats.

In this framework, security was synonymous with national security, and military capabilities served as the primary means of ensuring state survival in an anarchic international system. The focus remained firmly on interstate dynamics, with internal security issues receiving relatively little attention unless they had direct implications for external relations. This state-centric approach reflected the broader dominance of realist theory in international relations, which emphasized power competition and the pursuit of national interest as the driving forces of world politics.

The Broadening and Deepening of Security

The limitations of traditional security studies became increasingly apparent as the international system evolved beyond the bipolar confrontation of the Cold War. The 1970s marked what Stephen M. Walt identifies as the beginning of a renaissance in security studies, coinciding with the end of the Vietnam War and increased funding for security research centers. This period witnessed the emergence of new theoretical perspectives that challenged the state-centric orthodoxy and introduced broader conceptualizations of security. Barry Buzan's seminal work "People, States, and Fear" (1983) played a crucial role in this transformation by proposing that security should be understood as the interaction between five distinct sectors: military, political, economic, social, and environmental. This multisectoral approach recognized that threats could emerge from various sources and affect different levels of social organization, from individuals to entire civilizations.

The shift from a narrow focus on military threats to a broader understanding of security challenges reflected changing global realities. Issues such as environmental degradation, economic instability, mass migration, and identity conflicts increasingly demanded attention from security analysts. This expansion of the security agenda necessitated new theoretical frameworks capable of addressing the complex interplay between different types of threats and various levels of analysis.

The Copenhagen School and Securitization Theory

The Copenhagen School, represented by scholars such as Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, and Jaap de Wilde, introduced one of the most influential innovations in contemporary security studies: securitization theory. This approach fundamentally reconceptualized security by shifting attention from the objective nature of threats to the subjective processes through which issues become constructed as security concerns. According to securitization theory, security is not an inherent quality of particular issues or phenomena but rath-

er the outcome of discursive practices that frame certain developments as existential threats requiring urgent and extraordinary responses. The theory identifies three key components in the securitization process: the securitizing actor (typically political elites who make security claims), the referent object (the entity claimed to be under threat), and the functional actors (the audience that must accept the security claim for securitization to be successful).

The concept of "community security" emerged as a central element of the Copenhagen School's framework, focusing on the survival of collective identities rather than just state institutions. Community security addresses situations where social groups perceive threats to their traditional patterns of language, culture, religion, and national identity. This shift from national security to community security proves particularly relevant for understanding sectarian dynamics, as it highlights how identity-based communities can become both subjects and objects of security discourse.

Understanding Sectarianism: Religious Heritage as Political Identity

Historical Foundations and Contemporary Manifestations

The sectarian divide in Islam traces its origins to the immediate aftermath of Prophet Muhammad's death in 632 CE, when disagreements arose regarding legitimate succession and religious authority. The supporters of Ali ibn Abi Talib (later known as Shia) believed that leadership should remain within the Prophet's family, while others (later known as Sunni) argued that the leader should be chosen from among the Prophet's close companions based on consensus and merit.

However, it is crucial to distinguish between these historical religious differences and contemporary political sectarianism. While the original theological disputes were genuine matters of religious interpretation and practice, modern sectarianism represents a fundamentally different phenomenon – one that instrumentalizes religious identity for political purposes and transforms ancient grievances into contemporary security concerns.

Contemporary sectarianism involves three interconnected elements that distinguish it from simple religious affiliation. The religious element manifests through historical narratives of victimization and suffering, particularly prominent in Shia collective memory through commemorations of events such as the martyrdom of Imam Hussein at Karbala. These religious narratives provide emotional and symbolic resources that political actors can mobilize for contemporary purposes.

The Construction of Sectarian Identity

The identity element of sectarianism involves the transformation of religious affiliation into a comprehensive social and political marker that shapes individual and group behavior. As scholar Azmi Bishara notes, sectarianism becomes "the dissemination of religious heritage as a fundamental marker of modern political identity." This process involves the selective appropriation of historical religious symbols and narratives to construct contemporary political boundaries and loyalties.

Sectarian identity differs qualitatively from religious identity in its political implications and social functions. While religious identity can remain a pri-

vate matter of personal belief and practice, sectarian identity becomes a public marker that determines political allegiances, social relationships, and security perceptions. The sectarian individual does not merely belong to a religious community but is defined by that belonging in ways that extend far beyond matters of faith and worship.

The historical-political element of sectarianism involves the reinterpretation of past events and conflicts through the lens of contemporary political needs. This process of historical reconstruction serves to legitimize present-day political arrangements and justify particular policy choices. However, it is important to recognize that such reconstructions often distort historical realities to serve contemporary political purposes.

Sectarianism as Security Discourse

The transformation of religious differences into security concerns represents the core mechanism through which sectarianism becomes politically operationalized. This process involves framing sectarian identity not merely as a cultural preference but as an existential necessity requiring protection against threatening "others." Such framing enables political elites to justify extraordinary measures, including discriminatory policies, military interventions, and authoritarian governance practices.

The securitization of sectarian identity depends on the construction of threat narratives that portray other sectarian communities as existential dangers to the survival and well-being of one's own community. These narratives often draw on historical grievances and contemporary political developments to create a sense of imminent danger that requires immediate and decisive action.

The Intellectual Framework of Sectarian Securitization
From National to Community Security

The Copenhagen School's shift from national security to community security provides a valuable framework for understanding how sectarian identities become securitized. Community security focuses on the survival of collective identities and traditional patterns of social organization, making it particularly relevant for analyzing identity-based conflicts and security concerns.

In the context of sectarian securitization, communities defined by religious affiliation become both the referent objects of security (the entities claimed to be under threat) and the sources of security provision (through sectarian political organizations and militias). This dual role creates complex dynamics in which sectarian communities simultaneously seek protection from and pose potential threats to other communities.

The concept of community security also highlights the subjective nature of threat perception in sectarian contexts. Unlike traditional military threats, which can be measured in terms of capabilities and intentions, threats to community security are largely perceptual and discursive. They depend on the ability of securitizing actors to convince their audiences that particular developments pose existential dangers to the community's survival and well-being.

Language, Discourse, and Threat Construction

Securitization theory emphasizes the central role of language and discourse in constructing security realities.

According to Ole Wæver, security is fundamentally "a speech act" – a discursive practice that brings threats into existence through the very act of articulating them. This linguistic understanding of security proves particularly relevant for analyzing sectarian securitization, where threat construction relies heavily on religious and historical narratives rather than empirical assessments of military capabilities.

The discursive construction of sectarian threats involves several interconnected processes. First, securitizing actors must identify and frame particular developments as threats to sectarian community survival. This framing process draws on religious symbolism, historical narratives, and contemporary political events to create compelling threat scenarios that resonate with the target audience.

Second, the discourse must establish clear boundaries between the threatened community and the threatening "other." This boundary-drawing process involves emphasizing differences between sectarian communities while downplaying similarities and shared interests. The result is a polarized understanding of social relations in which compromise and cooperation become difficult if not impossible.

The Role of Political Elites

Political elites play a crucial role as securitizing actors in the process of sectarian securitization. These elites possess the authority, credibility, and communication channels necessary to disseminate securitizing discourse and convince their audiences of the validity of their threat claims. Their effectiveness depends on their ability to understand and manipulate the cultural symbols, historical narratives, and emotional attachments that resonate with their target communities.

The success of elite securitization efforts depends on several factors. First, elites must possess sufficient credibility and authority within their communities to make believable security claims. This credibility often derives from religious learning, historical association with the community's struggles, or demonstrated commitment to communal welfare.

Second, elite discourse must be tailored to the cultural context and historical experiences of the target audience. This requires sophisticated understanding of community narratives, symbols, and emotional triggers that can be mobilized to support securitization claims. The timing of securitization efforts also proves crucial, as major political developments or crises can create windows of opportunity for successful threat construction.

Drivers of Sectarian Securitization: Enabling Conditions and Structural Factors

Weakness of Democratic Institutions

The absence or weakness of democratic institutions creates favorable conditions for sectarian securitization by limiting opportunities for peaceful conflict resolution and political participation. In contexts where democratic channels for addressing grievances are unavailable or ineffective, sectarian appeals may provide alternative mechanisms for political mobilization and resource allocation.

The Iraqi case illustrates how the absence of democratic heritage and institutional capacity can facilitate sectarian politics. Following the 2003 overthrow of the Baathist regime, Iraqi political elites relied on sectarian categories to organize the new political system, distributing power and resources

according to presumed demographic balances rather than democratic principles or policy preferences.

This sectarian approach to post-conflict reconstruction created several problematic dynamics. First, it institutionalized sectarian categories as legitimate bases for political organization, making it difficult to develop cross-cutting political identities based on shared interests or policy preferences. Second, it created incentives for political entrepreneurs to mobilize sectarian loyalties rather than build broad-based coalitions around common goals.

The weakness of democratic institutions also affects international efforts to promote political development and conflict resolution. External democracy promotion programs often fail to address sectarian dynamics directly, focusing instead on formal institutional arrangements that may be captured by sectarian elites for their own purposes.

State Failure and Legitimacy Crises

The synchronization of sectarian legitimation with state failure creates particularly dangerous conditions for sectarian securitization. When state institutions lose their capacity to provide security, services, and governance, alternative sources of authority and legitimacy become more attractive to both elites and ordinary citizens.

Sectarian organizations often possess several advantages in contexts of state failure. They typically maintain strong social networks and institutional capacity that enable them to provide services and protection when state institutions cannot. They also draw on religious and cultural resources that provide meaning and identity in times of uncertainty and upheaval.

The Iraqi experience demonstrates how state collapse can accelerate sectarian mobilization. The dissolution of the Iraqi army and bureaucracy created security vacuums that sectarian militias rushed to fill. Similarly, the destruction of state service delivery systems created opportunities for sectarian organizations to provide healthcare, education, and social welfare services, thereby building popular support and legitimacy.

This dynamic creates a vicious cycle in which state weakness enables sectarian mobilization, which in turn undermines efforts to rebuild effective state institutions. Sectarian organizations have little incentive to support state-building efforts that might reduce their own influence and autonomy.

Regional Revisionist Powers

The presence of revisionist powers in the regional system provides external support and encouragement for sectarian securitization. Revisionist states seek to alter existing power balances and institutional arrangements, often through support for proxy forces and client organizations in other countries.

Iran exemplifies this dynamic through its efforts to build a network of sectarian allies across the Middle East following the 1979 Islamic Revolution. Iranian strategy involves supporting Shia communities and organizations in various countries, providing them with financial resources, military training, and ideological guidance to advance Iranian regional interests.

This external support serves multiple functions for both Iran and its sectarian allies. For Iran, sectarian networks provide asymmetric capabilities that compensate for conventional military weaknesses and

enable power projection beyond Iranian borders. For local sectarian organizations, Iranian support provides resources and protection that enhance their domestic political positions.

The effectiveness of revisionist strategies depends on the existence of receptive audiences and favorable local conditions. Sectarian securitization creates such conditions by convincing communities that they face existential threats requiring external assistance for survival. This perceived vulnerability makes communities more willing to accept foreign support, even when such support comes with strings attached.

Regional Security Complex Dynamics

The Middle East functions as what Copenhagen School theorists term a "regional security complex" – a geographical area where security dynamics are so interconnected that individual state security cannot be understood in isolation. The sectarian dimension of this regional complex creates particular patterns of alliance and enmity that transcend national boundaries.

The Shia regional security complex encompasses Iran as the leading Shia-majority state, along with significant Shia populations and organizations in Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, Yemen, and other countries. This complex is characterized by shared sectarian identity, overlapping security concerns, and coordinated responses to perceived threats from Sunni-majority states and organizations.

Regional security complex dynamics create several effects that facilitate sectarian securitization. First, they enable the portrayal of local sectarian conflicts as part of broader regional struggles between sectarian blocs. This framing raises the stakes of local disputes and justifies more extreme measures in response to perceived threats.

Second, regional dynamics provide external validation and support for local securitization claims. When sectarian communities see co-religionists in other countries facing similar challenges or threats, it becomes easier to believe that their own security concerns are legitimate and urgent.

Third, regional competition creates incentives for sectarian outbidding, in which political elites compete to demonstrate their commitment to sectarian causes and their willingness to take extreme measures to protect community interests.

Case Study: Iraq and the Institutionalization of Sectarian Politics

Historical Context and the Baathist Legacy

The roots of contemporary Iraqi sectarian politics can be traced to policies implemented during the Baathist period, particularly under Saddam Hussein's rule. While Iraq had not experienced significant sectarian conflict prior to 2003, the Baathist regime gradually deepened ethnic and religious divisions through discriminatory policies and the strategic use of identity-based appeals.

During the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988), the Baathist regime mobilized Sunni identity and Arab nationalism to build support for the war effort and to legitimize authoritarian governance practices. This period saw the gradual transformation of religious and ethnic identities from cultural markers into politically relevant categories that affected access to state resources and protection. The regime's approach to identity politics was instrumental rather than ideological. Saddam Hussein and his associates used sectarian and ethnic appeals when conve-

nient for maintaining power and building coalitions, but they did not consistently favor one group over others. However, the cumulative effect of these policies was to politicize identity categories and create precedents for sectarian governance.

Post-2003 Sectarian Institutionalization

The collapse of the Baathist regime in 2003 created both opportunities and challenges for Iraqi political reconstruction. International and Iraqi actors faced the complex task of building new political institutions while managing the legacy of authoritarianism and the immediate security challenges created by foreign occupation and insurgency.

The decision to organize the new political system along sectarian lines represented a crucial turning point in Iraqi political development. Beginning with the formation of the Iraqi Governing Council, political power was distributed according to presumed demographic balances between Sunni Arabs, Shia Arabs, and Kurds. This approach, while intended to ensure inclusive represen-tation, had several unintended consequences.

First, sectarian quotas institutionalized identity categories as the primary basis for political organization, making it difficult to develop alternative forms of political identity and organization. Political parties increasingly organized around sectarian appeals rather than policy platforms or ideological commitments.

Second, the sectarian distribution of power created incentives for demographic manipulation and territorial control. Political groups had strong incentives to maximize their claimed demographic share and to establish exclusive control over territories populated by their co-sectarians.

The Spiral of Sectarian Violence

The institutionalization of sectarian politics contributed to escalating cycles of violence that further entrenched sectarian divisions and securitization dynamics. Beginning with attacks on religious targets and escalating to broader campaigns of ethnic cleansing and territorial control, sectarian violence transformed Iraq's social geography and political possibilities.

The violence served multiple functions in the sectarian securitization process. First, it provided empirical evidence for threat claims made by sectarian leaders. Communities that might otherwise have been skeptical of securitization discourse found it difficult to ignore the reality of sectarian targeting and violence.

Second, the violence created practical necessities for sectarian organization and mobilization. Communities required protection from sectarian attacks, and sectarian militias emerged as the most readily available source of such protection in the absence of effective state security forces.

Third, sectarian violence created fait accompli that were difficult to reverse through political means. Demographic changes produced by ethnic cleansing, the destruction of mixed neighborhoods, and the establishment of sectarian-controlled territories created new political realities that constrained future possibilities for non-sectarian governance.

Implications and Future Pros-

pects

The Persistence of Sectarian Securitization

The analysis presented in this study suggests that sectarian securitization in the Middle East is likely to persist as long as the enabling conditions identified above remain in place. The weakness of democratic institutions, the synchronization of sectarian legitimacy with state failure, the presence of regional revisionist powers, and regional security complex dynamics create a mutually reinforcing system that sustains sectarian politics.

However, the theory also suggests that changes in these enabling conditions could reduce the effectiveness and appeal of sectarian securitization. Strengthening democratic institutions, improving state capacity and legitimacy, reducing external interference, and addressing regional security competition could create more favorable conditions for non-sectarian political development.

Policy Implications

The findings of this analysis have several important implications for policymakers seeking to address sectarian conflicts and promote political stability in the Middle East. First, efforts to combat sectarian politics must address the underlying structural conditions that enable securitization rather than focusing solely on the symptoms of sectarian conflict.

Second, democracy promotion efforts must take sectarian dynamics seriously and develop strategies that actively pro-

mote cross-cutting identities and interests rather than simply assuming that democratic institutions will naturally moderate sectarian competition.

Third, regional security cooperation and conflict resolution efforts must address the role of external powers in supporting and sustaining sectarian mobilization. Regional solutions to sectarian conflicts may require broader agreements on spheres of influence and rules of competition among regional powers.

Conclusion

This analysis has demonstrated the value of applying Copenhagen School securitization theory to understand sectarian dynamics in the Middle East. By focusing on the discursive construction of security threats and the social processes through which issues become securitized, this approach provides insights into how religious differences become transformed into political conflicts requiring exceptional measures and policies.

The case of sectarian securitization illustrates several broader themes in contemporary security studies. First, it demonstrates the importance of moving beyond objective threat assessment to understand how security concerns are socially constructed and politically mobilized. Second, it highlights the central role of identity and discourse in contemporary security dynamics, particularly in regions where state institutions are weak or contested.

Third, it shows how local security dynamics are embedded in broader regional and international systems that provide both constraints and opportunities for political development. Understanding these multi-level interactions is essential for developing effective responses to contemporary security challenges.

The sectarian conflicts that have plagued the Middle East in recent decades represent neither ancient hatreds nor inevitable clashes between religious civilizations. Instead, they reflect the political mobilization of identity categories under specific historical circumstances and structural conditions. This understanding provides hope that sectarian conflicts can be addressed through appropriate political and policy responses, even as it suggests that such responses must be comprehensive and sustained to be effective.

The transformation of the Middle East's political landscape over the past two decades demonstrates both the power of securitization processes to reshape political possibilities and the potential for alternative approaches to security and governance. As the region continues to grapple with the legacy of sectarian politics, the insights provided by securitization theory may prove invaluable for understanding both the sources of current conflicts and the possibilities for future peace and stability.
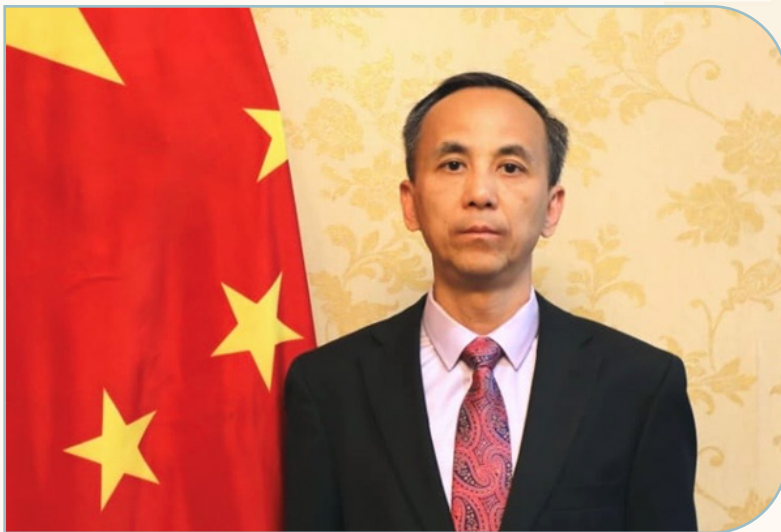

Center for Future Studies

Global Security Initiative: The Path to Resolving the Middle East Security Dilemma

Liu Jun

Consul General of the People's Republic of China in Erbil

Currently, the international situation is marked by complex and intertwined changes, and the world has entered a new period of turbulence and transformation. In response to the escalating geopolitical conflicts and the continued expansion of the security deficit, President Xi Jinping of China has proposed the Global Security Initiative, which provides guidance for fostering international consensus, improving global governance, and addressing the humanity's security challenges. After three years of efforts, this China's Proposal, rooted in the principles of harmonious coexistence, has received widespread acclaim from the international community, garnering support from more than 120 countries, regions, and international organizations. It has been incorporated into over 120 bilateral and multilateral political documents, serving as a concrete manifestation of the vision of a community with a shared future for mankind.

Breaking the Deadlock: Upholding Multilateralism and Enhancing Global Governance
From the protracted Russia-Ukraine conflict and the Palestine-Israel conflict to the volatile situation in Syria and escalating tensions in the Red Sea, the world is grappling with severe security challenges, further exacerbating global uncertainty. Against this backdrop, the Global

Security Initiative, guided by the Chinese philosophy that "dialogue prevails over confrontation, cooperation transcends rivalry, and win-win outcomes replace zero-sum games", rejects ideological divisions and exclusive blocs, opposes ideological confrontation, and aims to eliminate the root causes of global instability fundamentally, offering a viable solution for a troubled international community.

As a permanent member of the UN Security Council (UNSC), China has consistently exemplified the essence of multilateralism through concrete actions. In February this year, as the rotating president of the UNSC, China convened a high-level meeting on "Upholding Multilateralism and Reforming and Improving Global Governance". During the meeting, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi comprehensively elaborated on China's four-point proposal for building a fair and just global governance system: upholding sovereign equality, ensuring fairness and justice, promoting solidarity and cooperation, and maintaining an action-oriented approach. From championing a global governance philosophy of extensive consultation, joint contribution, and shared benefits to advocating for an equal and orderly multipolar world, China's proposals have drawn widespread attention and positive responses from UN bodies and member states, serving as a blueprint for restructuring the international system.

Alleviating Crisis: Advancing Lasting Peace Through Dialogue and Consultation

For a long time, the Middle East, plagued by colonial legacies and ongoing external interventions, has been trapped in a "security quagmire", with its people suffering the ravages of war. Guided by the Global Security Initiative, China advocates for sustainable development as a means to achieve sustainable security, pioneering a new path that transcends traditional governance paradigms. China has remained committed to advancing political solutions to regional hotspot issues, actively facilitating mediation and dialogue to advance comprehensive and lasting peace across the Middle East. In recent years, under China's mediation, Saudi Arabia and Iran achieved a historic reconciliation, triggering a wave of détente across the Middle East. Additionally, 14 Palestinian factions signed the Beijing Declaration, marking the end of a 17-year-long political divide. Last month, China, Russia, and Iran held a trilateral meeting in Beijing, issuing a joint statement. During the meeting, Foreign Minister Wang Yi proposed a five-point initiative for appropriately addressing the Iranian nuclear issue in the new context, injecting greater stability into the Middle East peace process and once again demonstrating China's responsibility as a major power.

Fortifying Foundations: Deepening Belt and Road Cooperation for Sustainable Development

Security is the prerequisite of development, while development is a guarantee of security. Like most countries in the world, China has endured the trials of both hot and cold wars, deeply understanding the preciousness of peace and the value of development. Only when people live in stability and prosperity, and nations achieve sustainable development, can a solid foundation for lasting peace be established. By promoting universally beneficial, inclusive economic globalization, China joins hands with countries worldwide to pursue a path of peaceful development, having endorsed by the majority of the international community. China continues to advance high-quality Belt and Road cooperation, bringing tangible benefits to more than 150 countries. Against the backdrop of sluggish global economic recovery, China and its Belt and Road partners have shared development opportunities, with trade growing against global economic headwinds, rising by 6.4% in 2024, making China and partner nations key drivers of global economic

growth. Notably, China-Iraq economic and trade cooperation has been particularly strong, with bilateral trade volume surging to $54.2 billion, marking a 9% year-on-year increase, in which the Kurdistan Region of Iraq also plays a significant role in driving this progress.

This year marks the 80th anniversary of the Victory in the World Anti-Fascist War. While the world has remained largely stable since the end of World War II, the Middle East has continued to experience war and conflict, persisting as a geopolitical hotspot. The region has long faced slow economic development, geopolitical tensions, terrorism, refugee crises, and climate change. Situated at the strategic crossroads of the Middle East, the Kurdistan Region (KRI) holds unique geopolitical significance and vast development potential. Under the strategic guidance of the Global Security Initiative, China remains committed to deepening pragmatic cooperation with the KRI across various fields, contributing to regional security and sustainable development, and fostering lasting peace and stability in the Middle East.

In confronting the complex and evolving international landscape and security challenges, the global community must draw lessons from history and work together for a shared future. Guided by the vision of common, comprehensive, cooperative, and sustainable security advocated by the Global Security Initiative, we must break free from the shackles of bloc politics and confrontational alliances, reject the hegemonic logic of prioritizing one's own security at the expense of others, and resolve disputes through dialogue and consultation on an equal footing. The international community should seek to bring conflicts, such as the Palestine-Israel conflict, back under the multilateral consultation framework of the United Nations, respect the right of regional countries to choose their own development paths, and balance the legitimate security concerns of all parties. Only by upholding the concept of common security, moving beyond bloc politics and external interference, and building an inclusive security architecture based on fairness and justice can a new political pathway emerge for resolving deep-seated issues like the Palestine-Israel conflict, ultimately achieving lasting peace and stability in the Middle East and beyond.

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The Dissolution of the PKK
and Its Impact on the Middle East and the
Kurdistan Region of Iraq

Siamak Bahrami

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The Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), since its establishment in 1978 as a leftist political-military organization, has played a key role in the political, social, and security developments of the Middle East region. In 2025, in a historic move, the organization dissolved itself at its Twelfth Congress following Öcalan›s call in May 2025. The main question of this article is: What are the intellectual roots of this dissolution, and what impacts does this event have on the Middle East in general and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq in particular? The hypothesis is based on the premise that the roots of this dissolution are influenced by structural changes at both international and regional levels on one hand, and by internal discursive developments within the PKK and Turkey itself on the other hand. The effects of this event in four dimensions—security, political, economic, and geopolitical—can impact the position of Kurds in the Middle East and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

Introduction

The dissolution of the Kurdistan Workers' Party is not merely the dissolution of a military or political institution, but represents a change in discourse at the Middle East regional level. The conditions for transitioning from a military, crisis-creating, violence-seeking, and security-oriented discourse to a political-economic, civil, and peace-seeking discourse in the Middle East did not emerge overnight. Rather, structural requirements at the level of the international system and the capitalist system on one hand, and changes in the in-

tellectual nature of non-state forces and governments on the other hand, have played a fundamental role in this transition. Everyone has understood that the times are different and they need actions and behaviors compatible with the requirements of the current era. However, the nature of these macro developments and how they have taken shape is the subject of this article. At the same time, examining the effects of this process on political, economic, and geopolitical issues is also important, especially the analysis of these issues in relation to Kurds and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq holds particular prominence for us.

In this regard, to analyze and explain these conditions, we first attempt to examine the nature of changes at international and regional structural levels and their relationship with the dissolution of the PKK. Subsequently, we will show how intellectual developments within the PKK and the Turkish state have guided them toward the path of peace. In the next section, the effects of this dissolution on the position of Kurds in the Middle East and the Kurdis-

tan Region in three thematic areas—political, economic, and geopolitical—will be examined.

A. Developments at the Structural Level

When we speak of structure, we consider both the nature of structure from the perspective of power distribution and from the perspective of dominant trends in the capitalist system. At the same time, we examine structure in two dimensions: international and regional.

1.Structural Developments: From Power Distribution to Power Pluralization

The international system after the 1990s, influenced by technical and information revolutions, artificial intelligence, and normative revolutions, has been undergoing fundamental changes. The distributive power order pattern that had been dominant since the Congress of Vienna is changing and gradually institutionalizing toward a pluralistic power order pattern. In the distributive order pattern, the state was the main and exclusive actor, and the structure could be defined based on the type

of power distribution among major powers. Moreover, it was these states that had the ability to distribute power among non-state actors, and they could reclaim this power from them at will. In fact, non-state actors lacked the capacity to institutionalize power. These actors, at best, sought to create governance structures that could ultimately be defined within the framework of centralized state norms. Whether violent or civil non-state actors ultimately dreamed of creating an ideal state.

However, in the pluralistic power pattern, the state as an exclusive actor is becoming less prominent. At the same time, non-state actors possess the capacity to acquire and institutionalize power, and their dream is no longer to create governance in the form of state institutions but to think beyond that. Under such circumstances, non-state actors do not need solely armed struggle or the creation of military formations to gain power and legitimacy, but can acquire authority through alternative and less costly means. At the same time, they have found multiple communication

channels to attract audiences and no longer need heroic and violent actions to excite public opinion toward themselves. Therefore, they are gradually abandoning costly military methods and trying to develop their desired institutions through non-military means. The dissolution of the PKK can also be viewed from this perspective (Bahrami, 2020: 137-145).

These developments have certainly also affected regional levels. Actors like the PKK saw how institutionalized and historical actors such as Hezbollah and Hamas were weakened due to technologi-cal developments. Therefore, before they could collapse, they dissolved themselves. The growth of other non-state actors with more civil ideas resulting from power pluralization caused the PKK to reach the realization that its actions no longer corresponded with the new structural requirements at the regional level.

2. Developments in the Nature of the Capitalist System: From Violence to Stability

Changes toward power pluralization have caused new currents such as technology companies, artificial intelligence, and clean energy to become dominant currents in the capitalist system and gradually replace traditional currents in the capitalist system. Unlike traditional currents of the capitalist system that needed crisis-creating actors and a level of violence in places like the Middle East to gain profit, new currents of capitalism need stability, peace, and diversity in economic corridors and full utilization of the economic capacity of different regions to gain profit.

The Chinese Belt and Road corridor, the American-Arab

IMEC corridor, the Arab Development Road, the Turkish Caliphate Road, the Iranian North-South corridor, the Turkish Zangezur corridor, and others are various types of new economic corridors that need stability, peace, and control of military actors to maintain profit and its smooth flow. Any actor that does not understand these new conditions will face legitimate consensus from other actors and ultimately be eliminated. Therefore, new actors are obligated to adapt themselves to the new requirements in dominant currents of profit-making in the capitalist system.

B. Intellectual Developments in the PKK and the Turkish State

1. Intellectual Developments in the PKK

First, let us discuss the intellectual developments within the PKK. This movement, from its establishment on November 27, 1978, founded by Abdullah Öcalan in the city of Lice, Turkey, was formed within the framework of Marxism-Leninism ideology, and its main goal was to create a socialist state in the Kurdish-populated regions of southeastern Turkey (Gunter, 2013). In this regard, being socialist had more priority than being Kurdish for the PKK. The PKK introduced Kurds as an oppressed nation that faced discriminatory and repressive policies from the Turkish state (Özcan, 2006). In the early 1990s, this movement moved toward the idea of creating Greater Kurdistan in the form of romantic nationalism and pure militarism (White, 2015). During this period, the PKK's strategy transcended Turkey, and socialism came under the influence of nationalism. In the mid-1990s, the PKK, from being a secular and even non-religious party, moved toward religious rhetoric in the face of the wave of Islamism in Turkey and tried to present a combination of Islam, socialism, and nationalism to its target society (Jongerden & Akkaya, 2011).

After Öcalan›s arrest and America's invasion of Iraq, the dominant current in the PKK underwent transformation again. In the early 2000s, Öcalan presented the concept of democratic confederalism (Öcalan, 2011). This concept, which was inspired by the ideas of Murray Bookchin, an American theorist, emphasized democratic self-governance, gender equality, and peaceful coexistence of different ethnic groups within existing borders. This version of democratic confederalism, which still considered armed struggle as a way to achieve Kurdish aspirations, was Öcalan›s specific interpretation of Bookchin that tried to create a balance between socialism and nationalism. The development of PKK satellite movements with this same view occurred in Iraq, Iran, and Syria.

After the Arab Spring developments, democratic confederalism underwent further changes. The spread of democratic and liberal tendencies in these revolutions caused a re-reading of this idea. This re-reading now tried to place elements of liberalism alongside the two pillars of socialism and nationalism, although developments after 2010 gradually weakened the socialist elements and romantic nationalism within the PKK. In confronting liberalism, socialism and especially romantic nationalism were in the process of self-moderation.

After Öcalan›s statement in February 2025 and the dissolution of the PKK in May 2025, the transition to a form of civil nationalism, social socialism, and economic liberalism in the intellectual nature of the PKK appears more evident (Akkaya & Jongerden, 2014). This is where the process of local rights has replaced institutional autonomy.

2. Intellectual Developments in Turkey

Until the 2000s, Turks, within the framework of the idea of a centralized Turkish state, imposed every conceivable limitation on the Kurds. For them, Kurds essentially had no external existence. However, with the arrival of the Justice and Development Party, new intellectual developments were taking shape in Turkey. They were attempting to present a new interpretation of Ottomanism that could be called neo-Ottomanism. This new concept tried to merge four historical and existing discourses in Turkey and create a balanced combination called neo-Ottomanism. This conceptual combination was composed of pan-Turkism, Islamism, secularism, and Kurdish discourse. They tried not only to accept the Kurdish issue but also to resolve it within a new concept. The peace project also began from this time.

The Justice and Development Party tried to use the positive and connecting potentials of these four discourses to create effective and lasting peace capacity in Turkey. Neo-Ottomanism initially started well but later faced challenges. This concept initially began with inspiration and Turkey was supposed to be a city on hills that others would also draw inspiration from. However, with the Arab Spring developments, this process became deviated, and Turkey gradually went astray in three stages: non-coercive activism, coercive activism, and the coward bully model (Bahrami, 2016: 32), to the extent that both the peace project in Turkey was undermined and ultimately the July 15, 2016 coup against Erdoğan took shape. However, Turks, learning from these conditions, are once again returning to the same inspirational model of neo-Ottomanism. To achieve this model and create legitimacy abroad, Erdoğan desperately needs peace with the Kurds.

Both PKK developments and developments in Turkey have been inspired by structural requirements and cannot be examined separately from them. Turks have now become one of the most powerful actors in the Middle East region, trying to recreate the Middle East by creating a common understanding of balance along with Saudi Arabia's bin Salman and Persian Gulf countries. In these circumstances, they need the revival of neo-Ottomanism and consequently peace with the Kurds more than anything else, although this revival can also help Erdoğan regain power.

C. Effects of This Dissolution on the Middle East and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq

The dissolution of the PKK is merely the dissolution of one of the institutions under the KCK umbrella, and this umbrella organization has multiple political, economic, charitable, cultural, and social wings (Gunes, 2012) that can continue to exist as an institution. An institution that has merely set aside its military wing. On the other hand,

the PKK has shown that it has always been a creator of new plans and ideas as an active actor and a knowing subject that has forced others to react to it. The idea of PKK dissolution has also been one of the peace-seeking actions of this movement that has not only created new legitimacy for the KCK but has also shown that this movement possesses high capacity for understanding and adapting to existing or emerging trends and processes of international structure and the capitalist system, and is acting in a pragmatic manner.

Therefore, it can be said that the dissolution of the military wing is not only a matter of setting aside weapons in accordance with macro peace processes at international and regional levels but can also create the following effects and consequences in the Middle East region:

1. Shaping a Reformist Political-Social-Economic Discourse

With the dissolution of the military wing, the KCK's focus will be more than ever on raising civil struggle for democratization, decentralization, expanding participation inclusion, human rights concerns, economic, cultural, environmental, and women's rights (Öcalan, 2013). In fact, through this action, the KCK aims to create a new reformist political-social-economic discourse that will not only affect its branches in Syria, Iran, and Iraq but will also influence the tendencies of other Kurdish and non-Kurdish military movements in the region. This means that militarism and violence as a method of struggle are losing color in the Middle East under the influence of this new discourse. The cantons of northern and eastern Syria have been a clear example of this transformation (Knapp et al., 2016).

2. Impact on the Type of Power Distribution in the Middle East

Turks, from the beginning of the 2000s and in three periods of intermittent negotiations in 2005, 2008, and 2012 (Çiçek, 2017), tried to add to their power at the regional level through a kind of soft internal balance. Although those negotiations were unsuccessful, the recent dissolution, if successful, can change the type of power distribution in the Middle East in favor of the Turks. In fact, this not only means deepening neo-Ottomanism and inspirational policy but will also open new doors for Turkey as an effective political and economic actor that will enhance this country's position in competition with other rivals.

Resolving the Syrian crisis and Turkey's transformation into the region's economic hub and center of diplomatic interactions are initial examples of this transformation. In this new structure, Turks will face new economic rivals such as Israel, Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Iran (in case of successful negotiations and change of approach). Freedom from military issues and creating stability within Turkey will increase this country's power in competition with these external rivals, especially since Turkey is considered an important geo-economic transfer hub in the region.

Existing crises in Iran internally and regionally and Israel's preoccupation with Hamas, Hezbollah, and Iran have given Turkey a freer hand in the region. On the other hand, this PKK action can help im-

prove Kurdish-populated areas and play an active economic role in the region's economic corridors. The existence of a Kurdish axis in Iraq, Syria, and Turkey, and perhaps Iran, with appropriate organization and with a democratic and peace-loving theory will mean enhancing legitimacy and an important position for them in economic corridors. This issue can also help reduce tensions between Syrian Kurds and Turks and Syrians and eliminate existing sensitivities about them so they can play their effective economic and democratic role in the future of Syria and the Middle East. The Kurdish axis can play a balancing role in confrontation with Shia and Salafi axes in the region's future as a crisis management and geo-economic axis.

3. Priority of Economy over Security in the Middle East

The interests of the international system and regional countries and movement toward a kind of interest balance indicate that economic priorities are set to replace security-political priorities in the region. The dissolution of the PKK is an active and ideal action by an apparently ideological, very coherent, and military actor that can best limit Turkish securitization discourses regarding Kurds and Turkey's radical militarism in the region. This is something that, given Turkey's poor economic conditions, is considered a Turkish need itself.

Turkey today is considered one of the most key economic actors in the region that no longer has time to waste in military arenas (International Crisis Group, 2025). This country is forced to compete economically with new economic corridors such as IMEC, North-South or INSTC, Khusravi-Latakia, and others through creating the Zangezur corridor, Caliphate Road, Basra-Ceyhan, and participation in the Chinese Belt and Road corridor. Iran and Israel, along with India, Saudi Arabia, UAE, and others, are trying to make massive corridor investments that will affect Turkish interests.

The future world of the Middle East is a world of corridor competitions and technological investments, and there is no time for chronic military conflicts. Any actor that does not accompany this transformation is doomed to isolation and poverty. Corridors need peace for activity, not war. The PKK was also forced to abandon militarism in this framework to play an effective economic role. This action can be effective on other Kurdish and non-Kurdish military actors in creating a civil approach and liberation from securitization discourses in the region. At the same time, existing governments, by recognizing the role of these peace-loving actors and liberation from security concerns, will set aside their securitization discourses in favor of economy and common interests.

Governments will subsequently try to create economic proxies instead of political and security proxies. No longer will countries be accused of using ethnic groups in their foreign policy, which has been one of the main crises of the Middle East, influenced by comprehensive balance theory, but an economic competition will govern these relations.

4. From Radical Nationalism to Radical Democracy

The discourse discussed above can have numerous

effects, especially in the field of radical nationalism in the region. The spread of this discourse and its reliance on a kind of radical democracy alongside the centrality of mutual economic and cultural interests can help reduce chronic conflicts and hostilities that were formed in the name of nationalism in the region. Liberation from bilateral securitization policies, both by dominant governments and subordinate ethnic groups, through this discourse can lead to the emergence and emphasis on mutual cultural and economic interests and end historical and fruitless conflicts.

Emphasis on civil movements from below and reform policies from above that have the capacity to reach each other in mutual economic interests and welfare issues can fuel a wave of radical democracy in the region that ends ethnic nationalism and war over linguistic and identity superiority in the region. Promoting decentralization policies and expanding cultural rights can be an appropriate start for this matter—a policy that Rojava cantons pursue and is supported by the PKK.

The interests of the capital-ist system in crisis management and replacing stability in the Middle East for better performance of economic corridors and technological investments can play an effective role in reducing radical nationalist tendencies on both sides, both dominant governments and subordinate movements. The centrality of welfare can facilitate movement in this direction. The PKK policy for dissolution can be described as a movement in favor of radical democracy and welfare in confrontation with radical ethnic nationalism and militarism. This can also help moderate radical state nationalists such as Turks, Arabs, and Iranians.

D. Effects of Dissolution on the Kurdistan Region of Iraq

The Kurdistan Region of Iraq, as a growing region with a specific governance system, played a constructive role in the reconciliation process between Turkey and the PKK. Although these efforts in the past were formed with comprehensive emotions and with Masoud Barzani's intervention, this time they participated in this process without those emotional aspects.

The Kurds of Iraqi Kurdistan, who once dreamed of a referendum and creating a Kurdish state, now act with more caution. This region, although it will be affected by the above-mentioned effects, will also be specifically affected by this dissolution process. We will examine these aspects in the following.

1. Political Effects

According to reports, approximately 3,000 to 3,500 PKK forces (out of a total of 4,000 to 5,000) were stationed in the Kurdistan Region. The withdrawal of these forces or the reduction of their militarism not only changes the balance of power in favor of the KDP but may also place these strategic and extremely beautiful tourist areas under the control of these forces. The PKK's withdrawal means the end of an intra-Kurdish political conflict between these two movements.

The constructive role of the Kurdistan Region in the peace process will, on the other hand, increase the key position and international and regional trust in this region as a crisis management area. Alongside these issues,

the Kurdistan Region, as an extremely important actor within Iraq and among Kurds, will gain more centrality. The Kurdistan Region of Iraq can become the beating heart of the Kurdish axis. On the other hand, the dissolution of the PKK will reduce the increasing political and military interventions of Turkey and other countries in this region. For example, in 2024, Iran and Turkey signed an agreement for security cooperation against the PKK and affiliated groups, which included intelligence sharing and joint operations (Euronews, 2025).

The effects of the KCK's social-political-economic discourse on this region are also not unexpected. In fact, its spread among Kurds can direct the Region toward extensive civil reforms to increase internal and regional legitimacy and lead this discourse. The PKK's democratic ideas may henceforth encourage Regional leaders to complete and make these ideas more fruitful. This new discourse may also distance Regional Kurds from traditional nationalism networks and gradually set aside the idea of a Kurdish state in favor of a democratic, peace-lov-

ing, and economic Kurdish axis.

Promoting decentralization ideas in the Middle East region and human rights and environmental slogans may henceforth be led by the Region. Focus on solving the Kurdish issue in a democratic way without tension and by avoiding militarism may be their next agenda. But certainly, the most important effect of this dissolution is the Kurds' reconsideration for creating a Kurdish political-economic-cultural axis with northern Iraq as its beating heart. They can play a constructive role in the final process of dissolution from the perspective of weapon delivery and hosting banned PKK leaders in Turkey. Henceforth, the Region can appear as a more reliable partner in regional and international negotiations (International Crisis Group, 2025). At the same time, it can allocate an appropriate share of changes in regional power distribution to itself.

2. Economic Effects

In 2024, Turkey managed approximately 80% of Kurdistan Region's oil exports through the Ceyhan pipeline, which had a value of over $12 bil-

lion annually (World Bank, 2025). Turkey's military attacks against PKK positions in the Region, especially in border areas, often caused disruption in economic activities, including border trade and infrastructure projects. For example, in 2023, Turkish airstrikes on PKK-controlled areas in the Kurdistan Region led to the temporary halt of oil exports worth $1.5 billion (Euronews, 2025).

The dissolution of the PKK can lead to a reduction in these attacks and strengthen economic stability in the Region. In addition, foreign investments in energy and infrastructure sectors are expected to increase. According to a World Bank report, the Kurdistan Region, in case of political and security stability, can attract $5 billion in foreign investment annually by 2030 (World Bank, 2025). For example, in 2024, Turkey invested $1.2 billion in military and infrastructure projects in the Region, which will be further strengthened with the PKK's departure (Euronews, 2025).

In 2024, trade between Turkey and Iraq reached $20 billion, a major part of which was conducted through the Kurdistan Region (World

Bank, 2025). Reducing military tensions can make trade routes safer and help develop infrastructure projects such as the natural gas pipeline between Turkey and Iraq, which has a capacity to transfer 10 billion cubic meters of gas annually.

However, what has a more vital dimension for the Region is participation in new economic corridors in the region. With the end of the military crisis in northern Iraq and southeastern Turkey as well as Syria, Iraqi Kurdistan can be the leader of a Kurdish economic axis that has an active role in the corridors of Chinese, Americans, Iranians, and Turks in the region. The geo-economic position of Kurdish-populated areas from the perspective of transferring these corridors is considered an exceptional opportunity for the welfare of these areas. At the same time, the tourist attractions of Kurdish-populated areas, especially the Qandil Heights, can become a huge source of income and capital attraction for Kurds and the Region.

3. Security Effects

From a security perspective, the dissolution of the PKK can lead to a reduction in Turkey's military attacks on the Kurdistan Region. In recent years, Turkey has conducted an average of 200 air and ground attacks annually against PKK positions in the Region, resulting in hundreds of deaths, including civilians, and financial damages worth $500 million (International Crisis Group, 2025). Reducing these attacks can improve border area security and help return Kurdish refugees, whose number in the Region reaches about 100,000.

The security vacuum resulting from the PKK's dissolution in these areas is the next problem that, if not filled, may be exploited by radical religious forces. In 2014, PKK forces played a key role in defending Sinjar against ISIS and saved about 50,000 Yazidis (Knapp et al., 2016). However, on the other hand, opponents of the peace project may still not accept this process and create security problems in these areas, which is not acceptable to Southern Kurds.

Alongside this issue, competition between the Party and Yekiti movements to fill the military vacuum in PKK-controlled areas may itself cause security challenges in the Kurdistan Region. If Northern Iraqi Kurds can solve these minor challenges, this is a historic opportunity for them to place these strategic areas in the heart of the Kurdish political axis in the best way with a reasonable policy and use them.

4. Geopolitical Effects

The dissolution of the PKK can strengthen the Kurdistan Region's geopolitical position as a regional actor. The Region can use this opportunity to mediate between Turkey, Iran, and Syria with the Kurds of these countries and establish its role as a legitimate and trusted diplomatic center. However, Regional Kurds should pay attention to diversifying their political and economic relations with different countries and not put all their eggs in the Turkish basket, for example.

More important than becoming a diplomatic center for solving Kurdish issues, the Region should become a regional crisis management center as an idea-generating actor with a far-sighted view. Strengthening the Kurdish axis in political, cultural, and

economic dimensions and highlighting its importance for managing regional crises and economic corridors can further add to the geopolitical position of the Kurdistan Region. This actor, both individually and as part of an axis, can become one of the active actors in the field of balance in the region and between major actors such as Iran and Turkey. At the same time, beyond regional balance, it should try to improve its international position by attracting international capital and creating a kind of mutual economic dependence.

Conclusion

What has been examined in this article showed that the dissolution of the PKK was not merely the elimination or annihilation of a military institution, and that too in the form of merely a single political will and overnight decision-making. On one hand, structural requirements from the perspective of the dominance of the pluralistic power pattern and needs arising from the profit-seeking of dominant currents in the capitalist system were the macro causes of this transformation, and on the other hand,

discursive and intellectual developments within Turkey and the PKK show the micro causes of this decision.

Alongside this issue, the dissolution of the PKK merely indicates the elimination of militarism in the KCK approach, and this institution can be a creator of new peace-loving ideas in the Middle East that also affects other governments and non-state actors. At the Middle East level, this dissolution can be influential in discursive fields, power distribution, the nature of nationalism, and economy as a dominant priority, and in the field of the Kurdistan Region, it can leave effects in security, political, economic, and geopolitical dimensions.

Finally, various actors in the Middle East are transforming from political-security actors to economic-political actors, and any actor that does not accept these peace-loving requirements will not only be isolated but will also be in danger of elimination.

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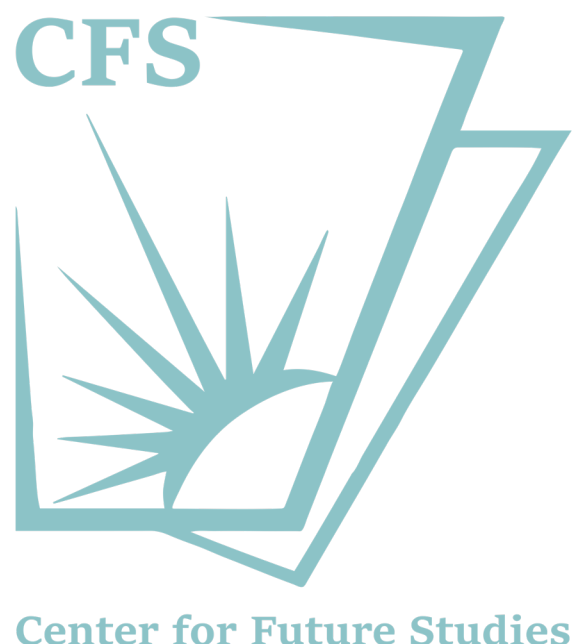
Center for Future Studies

Our Borders: From the Sykes-Picot Legacy to the Question of Identity

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We live today in a world governed by concepts of the modern state: sovereignty, law, citizenship, and diplomatic representation. Image Credits: AP File

Since World War I laid down its burdens, the Middle East had been preparing for the opening of new wounds. The Ottoman defeat in the war (1918) was not merely the fall of an empire, but a historical opportunity for Western powers to redraw the map in service of their interests. Thus emerged the first poisonous seeds of what came to be known as "modern borders," which were born not from the will of peoples, but from the ink of colonial diplomats who sat in closed rooms to determine the fate of entire nations.

The Sykes-Picot Agreement, which took place in 1916 between Britain and France, with Russian blessing, did not draw final borders but rather defined spheres of influence. Iraq was included within Britain's "Red Zone," but the borders we know today did not yet exist. What followed was a series of agreements and bilateral arrangements: with the emerging Saudi state (the Uqair Agreement of 1922), with France in Syria, then with Iran, Turkey, and Kuwait. The maps multiplied, but the rule remained: no borders except according to the colonizer's interests.

The number of agreements that affected Iraq's map reached approximately eight major agreements, the most dangerous of which were those that divided influence without reference to the will of the inhabitants. The San Remo Conference, the Treaty of Lausanne, then

the 1930 Treaty—all of these established a young Iraqi state, surrounded by a network of caution and suspicion with its neighbors. Thus, Iraq's borders were not solely the product of Sykes-Picot, but rather a compound result of war events, imperial conflict, oil interests, and shifts in the balance of power. Perhaps what most embodies the colonial mood of that time is what Churchill sarcastically recounted one day about drawing borders in the region, when he said: "I sat with a map surveyor and drew the borders of Jordan and Iraq with a straight line while sipping a glass of whiskey." Geography was not drawn based on people's reality, but to the rhythm of the victorious power's mood.

However, in recent years, a saying has begun to circulate in some intellectual and religious discussions: "We are religious, and religion does not recognize borders." This statement deserves pause, not because it is new, but because it is sometimes presented as if it carries a final solution to the complexity of political geography, while in reality it is a statement that needs calm deconstruction and careful examination, especially when placed in confrontation with concepts of state, sovereignty, and national identity.

Islam, like other major religions, does not prevent the existence of political entities and regulatory borders. The Prophet (peace be upon him) established a state with territories and borders, appointed governors, and organized relations between the Muhajirun (emigrants), Ansar

(helpers), and Jews. The Caliphs after him maintained the idea of the state and established an administrative system based on regions and borders, not on chaos. There is nothing in Islam that negates the existence of the state; on the contrary, there is what obliges the preservation of order, souls, and rights.

On the other hand, Islamic political heritage harmonized—in its spirit—with the developments of the age. We live today in a world governed by concepts of the modern state: sovereignty, law, citizenship, and diplomatic representation. State borders are part of its legal personality and are an organic condition for membership in the international community. The United Nations Charter, rules of international law, and the principle of non-interference with the territorial integrity of states—all are systems that govern our world and ensure, relatively, the absence of chaos, and hold states accountable for sovereignty within their borders.

Religion, whatever it may be, does not isolate humans from their realistic context. Humans are not beings floating in the air. They are children of place, language, environment, topography, the air they breathed, the river from which they drank, and the land in which their ancestors were buried. Religion guides the spirit, yes, but it does not cut the roots. Indeed, all religions sanctify the land, connect faith with stability, giving with belonging, and responsibility with place. British political geographer Halford Mackinder expressed this when he saw that "whoever controls the heartland controls the destiny of the world," indicating that understanding geography is not a neutral matter, but part of managing the political destiny of states. But the question that should be posed boldly and clearly is: what idea is intended to be passed through the repetition of the saying "religion does not believe in borders"? Is the intention to demolish the concept of the modern state? To cancel national sovereignty? To fragment homelands from within in the name of brotherhood that transcends geography? This statement, which appears idealistic on the surface, is in reality a tool for penetrating national consciousness and stripping generations of any sense of rooted belonging to land, history, and society.

And if we hypothetically assumed—just hypothetically—that we accepted the idea of abolishing borders: how would we arrange social participation? How would we distribute wealth? Who manages, and who is held accountable? Who plans, and who executes? Can a state with strategic location, oil, water, and civilizational depth be surrendered merely for transcendent religious or linguistic affiliation? And would societies that have invested centuries in building their institutions, elites, and consciousness accept to dissolve into fragmented, poor, marginalized entities merely for the sake of slogans?

The question here is not about justice and equality, but about reality and managing complexity. Hypothetical talk about a "world without borders" is beautiful in literature, theater, and intellectual seminars. But in politics, it

is deadly. Because it works slowly, like digging under foundations, until buildings collapse from within. Thus arise generations that feel no homeland, do not realize the value of land, do not look to the future from a collective standpoint, but drift behind loose slogans that rob them of their identity without their knowing.

Patriotism is not the opposite of religion; rather, it is a practical translation of attachment to security, responsibility, sacrifice, construction, and it is the cornerstone of any successful civilizational project. As Hannah Arendt said: "The loss of belonging to a state is the loss of the right to have rights." A human without a state is not only without borders, but without identity and without protection. And whoever dismantles this bond between humans and their land does not build unity, but produces a lost flock, easy to lead from outside the borders, toward the unknown.

Iraq today is not the child of Sykes-Picot, but the child of bitter struggle, long resistance, and political consciousness accumulated across generations. Its geography, though shaped by an external hand, has today become part of its national identity and regional responsibility. In a world buzzing with geopolitical transformations, homelands cannot be managed with a "preaching" mentality, but with the mind of the state. And borders, however painful their history, remain part of an international social contract without whose respect the world order cannot stand.

This is how we protect our homelands: with thought, not slogans; with consciousness, not emotion; and with faith that understands reality, not one that escapes from it.

Tourism and Its Economic and Social Importance in Iraq: A Case Study of Sulaymaniyah Province in the Kurdistan Region

Shanaz Amer Badran – Goran Qader Hamafaraj

Tourism is considered one of the most prominent economic and social sectors in the world, as it has become one of the drivers of sustainable development that contributes to creating employment opportunities, promoting economic growth, developing infrastructure, and enhancing cultural understanding among peoples. With the growing global interest in this sector, developing countries, including Iraq, have begun to realize the importance of investing in tourism as a tool for economic diversification and reducing dependence on natural resources, particularly oil. However, tourism in Iraq has not yet reached the optimal level of utilizing its potential due to a set of challenges related to infrastructure, the political and security environment, as well as the absence of clear policies for developing this sector.

In this context, the Kurdistan Region, especially Sulaymaniyah province, is considered one of the most prominent Iraqi areas that has witnessed relative development in the tourism sector in recent years, as the province hosts a group of natural and cultural landmarks, in addition to its diverse climate and distinguished geographical location. However, this development also faces multiple obstacles, including weak investment in both public and private sectors, limited external promotion, and the absence of an integrated strategic vision.

This research aims to provide a comprehensive academic analysis of the concept of tourism, its importance and types, and its economic and social impacts, with a special study of the tourism reality in Sulaymaniyah province, the obstacles that hinder the development of this sector, and proposing a set of recommendations for developing tourism in the region. This research adopts the descriptive-analytical methodology, based on a set of studies, research, and reports issued by local and international bodies, in addition to governmental data. Through this work, we seek to contribute to developing the tourism vision in Iraq in general, and the Kurdistan Region in particular, by highlighting the available potential and exist-

ing challenges, in an attempt to provide a practical and strategic framework for advancing the tourism sector.

First: Brief Overview of Tourism (Definition, Importance, Types, and Economic and Social Impacts)

1. Definition of Tourism

Definitions of tourism have varied according to the different schools and approaches that have addressed it; however, most of them agree that it is a human activity related to the movement of individuals from their usual places of residence to other places for purposes not related to permanent work. The World Tourism Organization defined tourism as "the activities of people who travel and stay in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year, for leisure, business, or other purposes not related to the exercise of paid work in the place of destination." This definition highlights tourism as an economic, social, and cultural activity in which humans interact with different places, times, and cultures.

2. Importance of Tourism

Tourism is considered one of the most vital sectors in the global economy, contributing approximately 10% of the global gross domestic product and providing direct and indirect employment opportunities for hundreds of millions of individuals. The importance of tourism lies in multiple aspects:

• **Economically**: It contributes to generating national income, attracting foreign

investment, and stimulating related industries such as hotels, restaurants, and transportation.

• **Socially**: It enhances communication between peoples and contributes to spreading a culture of tolerance and acceptance of others, while supporting the preservation of cultural heritage by transforming it into a source of income.

• **Developmentally**: It serves as a catalyst for developing infrastructure and services in tourist areas, which has a positive impact on local populations.

3. Types of Tourism

Tourism types vary according to the purpose of travel and the nature of the activity practiced, and among the most prominent are:

• **Leisure Tourism**: The most widespread type, practiced for the purpose of rest and recreation.

• **Cultural Tourism**: Focuses on visiting archaeological sites and museums and learning about local customs and traditions.

• **Religious Tourism**: Practiced to visit holy places and perform religious rituals.

• **Eco-Tourism**: Aims to interact with the natural environment within a framework of respecting and preserving it.

• **Business and Conference Tourism**: Includes business trips to participate in conferences and economic events.

• **Medical Tourism**: Undertaken by individuals for the purpose of receiving treatment in places known for their medical services.

It is worth noting that Iraq, especially the Kurdistan Region, possesses multiple components that allow for the development of all these types to varying degrees, making it fertile ground for tourism investment if adequate infrastructure and institutional support are available.

4. Economic Impacts of Tourism

Tourism is considered one of the most important sources of foreign income for countries and plays a pivotal role in stimulating the local economy through:

• Creating direct employment opportunities in hospitality and travel sectors. • Supporting small and medium enterprises related to tourism services. • Increasing demand for local products and traditional crafts. • Stimulating investment in infrastructure such as airports, hotels, and roads.

International experiences have shown that every million tourists can create more than 2,000 direct and indirect job opportunities in developing countries, highlighting the enormous potential that tourism can provide in countries like Iraq.

5. Social Impacts of Tourism

In addition to its economic impact, tourism contributes to bringing about social and cultural transformations, including:

• Enhancing cultural awareness and exchanging values and customs between peoples. • Raising the standard of living for local populations in tourist areas. • Reducing rural-to-urban migration by developing remote areas through tourism. • Contributing to preserving cultural heritage by investing in it.

However, tourism may also leave negative effects in the absence of regulation, such as environmental pollution or negative impact on local val-

ues, necessitating the need for balanced development policies.

Second: Tourism in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq with Focus on Sulaymaniyah Province

1. General Overview of Tourism in the Kurdistan Region

The Kurdistan Region is considered one of the most prominent tourist areas in Iraq due to its relative stability, geographical and climatic diversity, and its geographical location that makes it a point of attraction for tourists from inside and outside the country, especially from Iran, Turkey, and Gulf states. The Regional Government has paid increasing attention to the tourism sector, especially after 2006, through establishing the Kurdistan Tourism Authority and preparing strategic plans to improve infra-structure and basic services, and develop tourist sites.

Official statistics indicate that the number of tourists who visited the region reached more than 4 million in 2022, with expectations of this number rising in the coming years if an encouraging political and economic environment is available. The region's main cities, such as Erbil, Sulaymaniyah, Duhok, and Halabja, include a diverse range of tourist attractions, ranging from natural, cultural, historical, and recreational sites.

2. Tourism Reality in Sulaymaniyah Province

Sulaymaniyah is considered one of the most important tourist destinations in Kurdistan, due to its cultural and natural richness and its hosting of prominent literary and artistic centers and muse-ums. The tourism sector in the city is witnessing remarkable development in infrastructure, with an increasing number of hotels, resorts, and restaurants. Sulaymaniyah's mountainous location, green nature, moderate climate, and the hospitality of its people have contributed to making it a preferred destination for visitors from various regions of Iraq and beyond.

Main Tourist Sites in Sulaymaniyah Province:

Sulaymaniyah province is distinguished by numerous different tourist sites. The following table shows some of the most important and prominent tourist sites in the province, and their diversity between natural, historical, and recreational sites:

No.	Tourist Site	Site Type	Description and Benefit
1	Sulaymaniyah Museum	Archaeological Museum	Displays artifacts from prehistoric and post-historic eras, considered the second largest museum in Iraq.
2	Red Security Building Museum (Amna Soraka)	Historical Museum (Human Rights)	Documents the crimes of the former regime against the Kurdish people, serving as a witness to the tragedies of Anfal and torture.
3	Kurdish Heritage Museum	Cultural Museum	Displays Kurdish heritage, traditional crafts, and manuscripts, reflecting the cultural identity of the region.

No.	Tourist Site	Site Type	Description and Benefit
4	Sulaymaniyah Bazaar	Traditional Market	An economic and cultural center reflecting the city's commercial and traditional character since the 18th century.
5	Goizha and Azmar Mountain	Natural Area	Visited by tourists for climbing and hiking, considered a popular destination for nature and adventure lovers, providing panoramic views of the city.
6	Public Garden, Azadi Garden, and Hawari Shar Garden	Natural Gardens	Extensive gardens that can be described as urban parks, used for outings, family gatherings, tourism activities, and other occasions.
7	Chavi Land Park	Amusement Park and Game City with Cabins	A comprehensive entertainment complex at the foot of Goizha Mountain, featuring games, cafes, and panoramic tours.
8	Doukan Lake	Doukan Dam Site	A famous tourist lake providing water activities, restaurants, and resorts.
9	Sarjinar Resort	Sarjinar Garden and Spring	A natural area characterized by enchanting beauty visited by tourists to spend their time and enjoy their vacations.
10	Ziwe Resort	Mountainous Area	A tourist area visited by tourists to enjoy natural scenery and moderate climate in summer and see snow in winter.
11	Qizqaban Cave	Archaeological Site	Located in the Jami Razan area and contains archaeological carvings.
12	Grand Mosque in Sulaymaniyah	Religious and Archaeological Site	One of the oldest mosques in Sulaymaniyah, built with the city's construction and was a high-level religious center, also containing tombs of prominent figures in Sulaymaniyah, especially the Hafid family.

Table No. (1) Some of the Most Important and Prominent Tourist Sites in Sulaymaniyah

Tourism Infrastructure Features in Sulaymaniyah (Tourism Facilities)

Recent statistics from the General Directorate of Tourism show that Sulaymaniyah includes an increasing number of tourism facilities, with special attention to the hotel sector, where the number of rooms in hotels, furnished apartments, and tourist villages reaches 7,813 rooms and the number of beds reaches 19,239 beds. There are also many upscale cafes as well as other facilities. The following table shows details of tourism facilities in Sulaymaniyah province:

No.	Type of Tourism Facility	5 Stars	4 Stars	3 Stars	2 Stars	1 Star	Total
1	Hotel	9	10	31	25	31	106
2	Furnished Apartments (Motel)	0	0	19	35	63	117
3	Tourist Village	1	2	2	6	10	21
4	Tourist Umbrellas	0	0	0	0	4	4
5	Tourist Restaurants	0	19	30	10	11	70

6	Restaurant and Bar	8	13	26	15	25	87
7	Park	0	0	0	0	3	3
8	Tourist Cabins	0	0	0	0	4	4
9	Tourist Clubs	0	2	1	1	0	4
10	Cafeteria	1	10	24	52	154	241
11	Fast Food	0	4	28	25	18	75
12	Tourism Companies	0	0	0	0	69	69
13	Tourism Offices	0	0	0	0	110	110
14	Tourism Agencies	0	0	0	0	11	11
15	Spa	0	0	0	0	1	1
16	Alcoholic Beverage Store (Retail)	0	0	0	0	99	99
17	Alcoholic Beverage Store (Wholesale)	0	0	0	0	12	12
18	Cinema	0	0	0	2	0	2
19	Amusement Park	0	0	0	1	1	2
20	Event Hall	0	1	2	1	6	10
21	Game Hall (Skating)	0	0	0	0	1	1
22	Game Hall (Ping Pong)	0	0	0	0	1	1
23	Massage	0	0	0	1	0	1
24	Marina	0	0	0	0	1	1
25	Kiosk	0	0	0	0	7	7
26	Seasonal Kiosk	0	0	0	0	6	6

Table No. (2) Types and Numbers of Tourism Facilities in Sulaymaniyah for 2025

Development of Tourism Projects in Sulaymaniyah

The General Directorate of Tourism in Sulaymaniyah supervises the implementation of tourism projects in the province, which shows the extent of tourism development in the province. The following are the projects that are under direct implementation by the General Directorate of Tourism in Sulaymaniyah for 2025, with a total cost of approximately 6,371,000,000 Iraqi dinars, as shown in the following table:

No.	Location	Project Name	Purpose	Cost
1	Central District	Facilities and Prayer Area/6 units	Service for visitors to Hawari Shar Garden	194,676,000
2	Central District	Solar Lighting near Peshro Tunnel	Service for visitors to Goizha and Azmar Mountain	151,425,000
3	Central District	Tourist Entry Point Services	Service for visitors to Sulaymaniyah Province	7,660,000

4	Central District	Family Tourist Club in Sarjinar	Service for visitors to Sarjinar Tourist Resort	1,680,000,000
5	Central District	Khor Tourist Complex	Service for visitors to Sarjinar Tourist Resort	2,000,000,000
6	Central District	Service Project	Service for visitors to Sarjinar Tourist Resort	500,000,000
7	District (Central, Doukan, Darbandikhan)	16 Small and Medium Projects	General tourist services	407,000,000
8	Doukan District	Supply and Installation of Seating	Tourist services in the district	17,906,000
9	Doukan District	Supply and Installation of Pergolas on Doukan River Banks	Tourist services in the district	24,750,000
10	Doukan District	Zoroaster Cabins	Tourist services in the district	150,000,000
11	Doukan District	Zhiwar Tourist Project	Tourist services in the district	300,000,000
12	Doukan District	Sheds and Gardens/1	Tourist services in the district	300,000,000
13	Doukan District	Sheds and Gardens/2	Tourist services in the district	300,000,000
14	Doukan District	Venezia Project	Cabins for tourist services in the district	400,000,000
15	Doukan District	Bir Mol Project	Cabins for tourist services in the district	400,000,000
16	Doukan District	Sheds and Gardens	Tourist services in the district	300,000,000
17	Darbandikhan District	Humidity Treatment for Tourism Directorate Building	Tourist services in the district	2,650,000
18	Darbandikhan District	Solar Lighting for South Complex Road	Tourist services in the district	70,181,500
19	Darbandikhan District	Sirwan/1 Tourist Project	Tourist services in the district	300,000,000
20	Darbandikhan District	Sirwan/2 Tourist Project	Tourist services in the district	350,000,000
21	Mawat District	Tourist Services Extension to Sarsol Mawat	Tourist services in the district	45,000,000
22	Mawat District	Six Facilities and Prayer Area	Tourist services in the district	38,568,000
23	Mawat District	Supply and Installation of Pumps for Sarsol Waterfalls	Tourist services in the district	60,450,000
24	Qardagh District	Platforms and Seating Chairs	Tourist services in the district	49,000,000

Table No. (3) Tourism Projects Under Implementation in Sulaymaniyah for 2025

3. Obstacles Facing the Tourism Sector (Public and Private)

A. In the Government Sector

Some factors and causes that hinder serious work in the tourism field can be identified as follows:

• **Strategic Planning**: The need for a comprehensive and integrated vision for tourism development, with tourism projects often relying on individual initiatives or random investment.

• **Incomplete Infrastructure**: Deteriorating condition of roads leading to tourist areas, and lack of public utilities such as water and electricity in some resorts.

• **Administrative Bureaucracy**: Difficulty in obtaining licenses for new tourism projects due to bureaucracy, and lack of government incentives for investors.

• **Limited Media Promotion**: Weak advertising campaigns directed internally and externally, limiting the attraction of international tourists.

B. In the Private Sector

• **Lack of Expertise and Trained Personnel**: Many private tourism projects are managed in traditional ways that lack international standards in service and management.

• **Limited Financing**: Difficulty for investors to obtain adequate financing due to the absence of banking support dedicated to the tourism sector.

• **Coordination with Government Agencies**: The need to establish an effective partnership between public and private sectors in designing and managing major projects.

4. Proposed Recommendations for Developing Tourism in Sulaymaniyah

Based on the above analysis, several basic recommendations can be presented for developing tourism in Sulaymaniyah province:

1. **Prepare a comprehensive tourism strategy** that includes clear objectives for tourism development in the short, medium, and long term, with the involvement of local authorities and the private sector.

2. **Improve infrastructure**, especially roads and public services, in active tourist areas.

3. **Launch international promotional campaigns** in partnership with media and tourism companies to market Sulaymaniyah province as a distinguished tourist destination.

4. **Establish tourism training institutes** aimed at preparing specialized personnel in hotel services, tourist guidance, and tourism management.

5. **Provide investment incentives** including tax exemptions and loan facilitation, to encourage the private sector to enter quality tourism projects.

6. **Develop rural and eco-tourism** by providing support to local communities that possess natural resources suitable for tourism development.

7. **Establish a joint tourism council** that brings together representatives from local government, private sector, experts and academics in tourism, and civil society to follow up and evaluate tourism development plans.

Conclusion

It is clear from this research that tourism does not represent merely a recreational or secondary sector in the economy, but has become a strategic element in sustain-

able development at both economic and social levels, and a fundamental pillar for diversifying sources of national income, providing employment opportunities, and enhancing cultural identity. International experiences have shown that investment in tourism can bring about structural transformation in the economies of developing countries, if directed within a comprehensive and integrated vision.

In the Iraqi context, and despite the political and security challenges that have afflicted the country for decades, the opportunity still exists to advance the tourism sector, especially in relatively stable areas such as the Kurdistan Region. It has been shown through the case study of Sulaymaniyah province that this city possesses all the required tourism components, from stunning nature, rich cultural history, developing infrastructure, and an open social environment. However, obstacles still exist, whether at the level of weak government planning, absence of professional training, or limited private investment, necessitating that concerned authorities establish clear and practical policies to stimulate growth

in this sector. Furthermore, involving local communities, expanding partnership between public and private sectors, and intensifying international promotion constitute fundamental steps for advancing tourism in Sulaymaniyah and making it a model that can be generalized in other Iraqi provinces. Thus, activating the tourism sector in Sulaymaniyah not only benefits the city's residents and its local economy, but can also contribute to drawing a new image of Iraq as an important cultural and natural tourist destination in the region.

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How Our Educational System Fails Society

Muhammad Al-Waeli

Muhammad Al-Waeli is an Iraqi political and social commentator with a PhD in Human Resource Management. His work and insights focus on the intersections of politics, media, education, and development, reflecting a deep commitment to advancing dialogue and progress in these fields. Through rigorous analysis, he examines contemporary challenges facing Iraq and the broader Middle East region, offering nuanced perspectives on governance and societal transformation

The root problem in our education system is that instead of being designed to fulfill society's needs, it adheres to outdated standards and ideals. Image Credits: Getty Images

Our education system is designed so that students with the highest grades in the high school final exams compete for limited seats in public universities, with medicine and engineering schools being the most sought after while other academic fields are seen as less attractive. While the students to get into medicine and engineering are amongst the brightest and most hard working, the dominant culture makes those who do not get into these schools feel inferior. The same culture also berates students whose grades would allow them to go to the mentioned schools but chose other faculties based on their personal interests. This bias towards certain professions and academic fields and the looking down towards others causes an imbalance with serious consequences.

The main flaw in our education system

The root problem in our education system is that instead of being designed to fulfill society's needs, it adheres to outdated standards and ideals. Doctors and engineers play incredibly important roles, but society needs a specific number of professionals in these areas while the goal of most students in high school is to get in medical and engineering schools. This has at last three serious consequences:

1. Students do not necessarily choose based on their interests, but rather based on the opinions and pressure of parents and relatives,

misinformation about the prospects in a given field, but most importantly a mindset the deems medical and engineering specializations more important and prestigious than others. The obvious truth is that our society seems to fail grasping is that all specializations are important and needed, even if the needs vary in terms of quantity. As a result, many other important specialization are neglected and our society and economy does not function properly.

2. There is going to immense pressure to students who are genuinely interested in the fields of medicine and engineering, and the requirements are going to be increased to unnatural levels. This will make task for them very hard and they will demoralized if they fail to join these schools. The same students might be forced to join an academic field ranked less in our education system but that does not interest them, taking away the dream specialization of other students, and this goes on to other academic fields.

3. The students who enter medicine and engineering based on the prestige it earns them in society might not be happy in their jobs after graduating and certainly will not be innovative and creative the same way as those who are genuinely interested in these professions. These students will have costed the state and society a lot without them being able to give back in full.

The negligence towards management studies

One example that showcases the point made above is administrative sciences, a group of completely underrated specializations although of strategic importance to a society. Whether business, government, or nonprofit, management represent the basis that is required for societies to achieve their goals. Garry Hamel, one of the most prominent management thinkers in the world, describes management as the 'technology of human accomplishment'. He perceives management as the most important invention in the 20th century, because through the development of its tools, methods, and techniques, the human race was able to achieve great things like going to the moon, building the internet, or eradicating diseases. All these accomplishments required leadership, planning, budgeting, hiring, motivation, and many others activities associating with the administrative professions. In fact, management, and that includes all related areas like business, accounting, marketing is amongst the most studied subjects in the world today.

In our societies, we do not see management as a noble or even important profession. People usually judge the importance or popularity of the a subject based on the degree required to get into the corresponding colleges, and the associated grades to do that are not necessarily high in our educational settings. This shallow treatment of management as a profession costs society immensely, starting with the prosperity of doctors and engineers that our educational system favors.

The consequences of neglecting management studies

Ignoring management studies has many consequences, amongst them:

Enabling brain drain. Since

decades the Middle East is witnessing a brain-drain that deprives it of its educated human capital. While this region need this strategic capital to rebuild after the many wars it has witnessed, the educated people, especially the doctors and engineers that our educational system produces in masses, look for opportunities to leave and settle in developed countries that are able to harness their intellect and competencies. Organizations are infiltrating our societies in every aspect.

One of the major reasons why our educated elite leaves our countries is the lack of respect, fair treatment, and opportunity they perceive in these organizations, and it is managers who design, run, in our case destroy these organizations. When there are not enough competent managers who are able to provide a safe, supportive, and stimulating environment for its human resources, then highly educated employees will leave and seek to settle in countries where their

talent is acknowledge and their knowledge respected. If our hospitals or engineering firms are mismanaged, then it is logical for our doctors and engineers wanting to move to other countries. Preventing reverse immigration. It is the same work conditions that also dissuade expats with highly needed expertise to return to their home countries and contribute to its development. While many affluent professional would love to return to their home country and at least

partially contribute in making a difference even if the pay is low compared to where they live, it is usually the toxic organizational cultures and the dominating unprofessionalism in our countries that holds them back.

Hindering reformative efforts. We are also wasting important talent and opportunities by not cultivating the profession of management. When we do not have well-educated competent managers, we lose the capacity to run our countries and societies effectively and efficiently. Everyone feels that excruciating grip of bureaucracy, but without enough competent administrative expert we cannot streamline and simplify the many cumbersome and unnecessary administrative routines. Everyone talks about the over-bloated public sector in the Kurdistan Region and the rest of Iraq as well as the pressure to create even more government jobs but without enough innovative business managers we cannot have enough businesses to generate wealth and tackle unemployment. We suffer from many crises but without enough altruistic nonprofit leaders we cannot solve problems that neither government nor business can or is willing to tackle and we cannot hold our rulers, judiciary, or the media accountable. Importantly, good managers are [capable to find the best talents in people and capitalize on them](). In our societies however, talent is wasted, partially because of the lack of good management.

Enabling undemocratic practices. The biggest negative impact that this negligence towards the profession of management results in is in my opinion that the current situation indirectly support the notions of the existence of a chosen elite that is entitled to run the affairs of our society. When there is a group of people who believes that leadership and administration of society is their birth right and a bestowed talent from above, then the foundation of democracy suffers. One of the basic principles of a democracy is that power is shared and that all citizens have the right to partake in the administration of their communities and economies. Without the adequate institutions and proper support that equips people, on an equal basis, with the competencies required to manage its government, businesses, and nonprofits, the aforementioned democratic right will not be achieved and there will always be an elite that is entitled to rule, and the masses that are expected to follow. We we accept that [education enables democracy](), then the prosperity of management education and profession will provide a fundamental basis to democratize the process of running society through making it more participatory.

It is not only management
This article focused on the profession of management but many arguments can be made also about the professions of teaching or authoring. Sadly, our society looks down on people join the fac-

ulty of education to become teachers or who go to the faculty of literature to become writers, when these two professions play the most important role is shaping the mindset of generations and preparing them for the future.

What we really need
The world embraces all types of knowledge and profession, and adhering to our current mindset will only hold us back. Our education system is in need of urgent reform, and it should prioritize changing the current mindset in society about different specializations. Our society should also work on creating jobs for each profession and specialization and make it attractive to young people to enter different areas.

Kurdish Language

in Iraq's Legal System: Constitutional Promises and Implementation Challenges

Kfuture Magazine– Editor in Chief

The recognition of Kurdish as an official language in Iraq alongside Arabic represents one of the most significant linguistic rights achievements in the Middle East. Enshrined in the 2005 Iraqi Constitution, this status theoretically grants Kurdish equal standing in all governmental functions, including the judiciary, legislative bodies, and public administration. Article 4 of the constitution explicitly states: "The Arabic language and the Kurdish language are the two official languages of Iraq," and further guarantees "the right of Iraqis to educate their children in their mother tongue such as Turkmen, Syriani, and Armenian in government educational institutions in accordance with educational guidelines, or in any other language in private educational institutions."

However, despite these constitutional guarantees, the implementation of Kurdish language rights within Iraq's legal and judicial systems remains profoundly inadequate. This discrepancy between constitutional promise and practical reality represents not merely a linguistic issue but a fundamental challenge to the principles of equal citizenship, access to justice, and self-governance that underpin Iraq's post-2003 political order.

This article examines the gap between the constitutional status of Kurdish and its practical implementation in Iraq's legal and judicial systems. It explores the historical context of Kurdish language suppression, analyzes the current barriers to implementation, and proposes potential pathways toward a more linguistically inclusive legal system that honors both constitutional commitments and the multicultural reality of contemporary Iraq.

Historical Context: Kurdish Language Suppression and Recognition
From Marginalization to Constitutional Recognition
The Kurdish language has endured a turbulent history in Iraq, marked by periods of severe repression and gradual recognition. Under the Ba'athist regime (1968-2003), Kurdish faced systematic suppression as part of broader policies of Arabization and centralization. The Arabization campaigns were particularly intense in oil-rich regions like Kirkuk, where Kurdish toponyms were changed, Kurdish-language education was restricted, and Kurdish speakers faced discrimination in public employment and services.

Dr. Amir Hassanpour, a renowned scholar of Kurdish linguistics, documented how "the Ba'athist regime pursued a policy of linguistic genocide against the Kurdish population, systematically undermining the institutional basis for Kurdish language transmission and development" (Hassanpour, 1992). These policies included the prohibition of Kurdish publications, the removal of Kurdish language from school curricula in disputed territories, and the forced relocation of Kurdish-speaking populations.

The 1991 Gulf War and subsequent establishment of the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) in northern Iraq created a semi-autonomous space where Kurdish language could develop relatively free from central government interference. The KRG introduced Kurdish as the language of government, education, and courts within its territory, creating a bifurcated system where Kurdish functioned as the official language in the Kurdish region while remaining marginalized in federal institutions.

The 2003 U.S.-led invasion and the subsequent constitutional process presented a historic opportunity for Kurdish language rights. The ensuing 2005 Constitution, drafted with significant Kurdish political participation, elevated Kurdish to an official language alongside Arabic throughout the entire country. This constitutional recognition represented a watershed moment in Iraqi history and an unprecedented linguistic rights achievement in the Middle East.

The Constitutional Framework

The 2005 Iraqi Constitution contains several provisions that establish the legal framework for Kurdish language rights:

• **Article 4(1)**: "The Arabic language and the Kurdish language are the two official languages of Iraq."

• **Article 4(2)**: "Each region or governorate may adopt any other local language as an additional official language if the majority of its population so decides in a general referendum."

• **Article 4(4)**: "The Turkmen language and the Syriac language are two other official languages in the administrative units in which they constitute density of population."

• **Article 4(5)**: "Each region or governorate may use any of the two official languages."

Additionally, Article 125 states: "This Constitution shall guarantee the administrative, political, cultural, and educational rights of the various nationalities, such as Turkmen, Chaldeans, Assyrians, and all other constituents, and this shall be regulated by law."

These provisions create a relatively robust framework for linguistic rights, placing Kurdish on equal legal footing with Arabic and creating mechanisms for the recognition of other minority languages. However, the implementation of these constitutional guarantees has faced significant challenges, particularly in the legal and judicial domains.

Current Challenges in Implementation
Legislative Gaps

Despite the constitutional recognition of Kurdish as an official language, there has been a marked absence of comprehensive legislation to implement this status within the judiciary and legal system. While the Kurdish Regional Government has established Kurdish as the primary language of courts within its territory, federal courts outside the Kurdish region continue to operate almost exclusively in Arabic. In 2014, the Iraqi Parliament passed the Official Languag-

es Law, which was intended to regulate the implementation of the constitutional provisions on language rights. However, the law contained significant ambiguities regarding judicial proceedings and legal documentation. According to legal scholar Dr. Saad Al-Bayati, "The law fails to provide clear mechanisms for the implementation of Kurdish language rights in federal courts, leaving crucial procedural questions unanswered" (Al-Bayati, 2016). For instance, the law does not adequately address:

- The right to submit legal documents in Kurdish to federal courts
- The provision of Kurdish-Arabic interpretation in federal courts
- The translation of legal precedents and jurisprudence into Kurdish
- The status of Kurdish legal education and its recognition for judicial appointments

These legislative gaps have created a situation where Kurdish language rights remain theoretical rather than practical in many areas of Iraq's legal system.

Scenario: The Case of Karwan Majid

Karwan Majid, a Kurdish-speaking resident of Kirkuk, was involved in a property dispute with an Arabic-speaking neighbor in 2019. When Karwan attempted to file his case in Kurdish at the local civil court, he was informed that all submissions must be in Arabic, despite Kirkuk's significant Kurdish population and the constitutional status of Kurdish. Karwan, whose Arabic proficiency was limited, was forced to hire a translator at considerable personal expense to prepare his legal documents.

When the case proceeded to court, the proceedings were conducted entirely in Arabic. Although a court-appointed interpreter was eventually provided, the translation was often incomplete, missing crucial legal terminology and nuances. Karwan later discovered that key aspects of his testimony had been improperly translated, potentially affecting the outcome of his case.

"I felt like a foreigner in my own country," Karwan later recounted. "The constitution says Kurdish is an official language, but in practice, I couldn't use my mother tongue to seek justice."

This scenario illustrates the practical barriers that Kurdish speakers face in accessing justice, even in areas with significant Kurdish population outside the Kurdistan Region. The absence of standardized procedures for handling Kurdish language cases creates inconsistent practices across different courts and regions, often depending on the discretion of individual judges and court officials.

Institutional Barriers

Beyond legislative gaps, there are significant institutional barriers to the implementation of Kurdish language rights in the legal system:

1. Shortage of Bilingual Legal Professionals

There is a critical shortage of legal professionals proficient in both Kurdish and Arabic, particularly in federal institutions. Legal education outside the Kurdistan Region is conducted almost exclusively in Arabic, with minimal Kurdish legal terminology training. This creates a professional environment where even Kurdish-speaking lawyers, judges, and court officials often lack formal training in Kurdish legal terminology.

Professor Rebwar Karim, a legal scholar at the University of Sulaymaniyah, notes that "the absence of standardized Kurdish legal terminology across different dialects further complicates the situation, creating inconsistencies in legal interpreta-

tion and application" (Karim, 2018).

2. Lack of Translation Resources

Federal courts lack adequate translation resources for Kurdish legal documents and proceedings. The limited number of qualified legal translators often results in delays, increased costs, and potential misunderstandings in legal proceedings involving Kurdish speakers.

A 2022 study by the Iraqi Legal Aid Society found that only 8% of federal courts outside the Kurdistan Region had permanent Kurdish-Arabic translators on staff, despite constitutional requirements for bilingual service provision (Iraqi Legal Aid Society, 2022).

3. Centralized Legal Database Systems

Iraq's legal database systems, which contain critical legal precedents, jurisprudence, and statutory interpretations, are predominantly in Arabic. The limited availability of these resources in Kurdish creates an information asymmetry that disadvantages Kurdish-speaking legal professionals and citizens seeking to understand their rights and obligations.

Regional Disparities

Implementation of Kurdish language rights varies significantly across different regions of Iraq:

Kurdistan Region

Within the Kurdistan Region, Kurdish serves as the primary language of government, education, and judicial proceedings. Courts operate primarily in Kurdish, with translation services available for Arabic speakers. This creates a situation where Kurdish speakers have full access to justice in their mother tongue within the region but face barriers when engaging with federal courts or institutions.

Disputed Territories

In disputed territories like Kirkuk, where both Kurdish and Arabic communities have significant populations, the implementation of language rights is particularly inconsistent. Despite constitutional provisions, many local courts operate exclusively in Arabic, with limited accommodations for Kurdish speakers.

Federal Institutions

In federal institutions and courts based in Baghdad, Kurdish language rights are often the most limited, with minimal accommodation for Kurdish speakers despite the constitutional status of the language. This creates a significant barrier for Kurdish citizens seeking to engage with federal legal institutions.

Psychological and Social Impact

The marginalization of Kurdish in Iraq's legal system has significant psychological and social consequences beyond the immediate practical barriers:

Trust in Institutions

When Kurdish speakers cannot access justice in their mother tongue, it undermines their trust in legal institutions and the broader state infrastructure. This trust deficit has significant implications for post-conflict reconciliation and state-building efforts.

Research by the International Crisis Group indicates that language barriers in accessing justice rank among the top concerns for Kurdish communities outside the Kurdistan Region and contribute to perceptions of continued marginalization despite constitutional guarantees (International Crisis Group, 2018).

Identity and Dignity

Language rights are intrinsically connected to identity and dignity. The inability to use one's language in legal proceedings can be experienced as a form of cultural erasure and second-class citizenship.

As noted by sociolinguist Dr. Jaffer Sheyholislami, "When a state recognizes a language officially but fails to implement this recognition in critical domains like the judiciary, it sends a powerful message about which citizens are fully included in the national community" (Sheyholislami, 2015).

International Comparisons: Multilingual Legal Systems

To contextualize Iraq's challenges and identify potential solutions, it is instructive to examine successful multilingual legal systems in other countries. These comparative examples offer valuable insights into practical implementation strategies for linguistic inclusion in judicial proceedings.

Canada: Official Bilingualism in Legal Proceedings

Canada's bilingual legal system, accommodating both English and French, provides a relevant comparison for Iraq. The Official Languages Act of 1969 and subsequent amendments have created a comprehensive framework ensuring equal access to justice in both official languages.

Key elements of the Canadian system include:

- **Judicial Bilingualism**: The right to be heard by a judge who speaks the official language of one's choice without an interpreter in federal courts and in certain provincial courts.

- **Documentation Parity**: All federal legislation, regulations, and Supreme Court decisions are published simultaneously in both languages with equal legal authority.

- **Interpreter Services**: Mandatory provision of interpreters for witnesses and

defendants in their official language of choice.

• **Legal Education**: Support for legal education in both official languages, including specialized terminology training.

Professor Linda Cardinal, a specialist in language policy at the University of Ottawa, notes that "Canada's success stems not from the mere declaration of bilingualism but from consistent investment in the institutional infrastructure necessary to make language rights practical and accessible" (Cardinal, 2016). This observation holds particular relevance for Iraq, where constitutional declarations have not been matched by institutional implementation.

Spain: Asymmetric Federalism and Co-official Languages

Spain's model of asymmetric federalism, where different autonomous communities have varying degrees of linguistic autonomy, offers another instructive parallel. In regions like Catalonia and the Basque Country, regional languages hold co-official status with Castilian Spanish.

The Spanish system includes:

• **Regional Autonomy**: Autonomous communities determine language policies within their territories while maintaining compatibility with national frameworks.
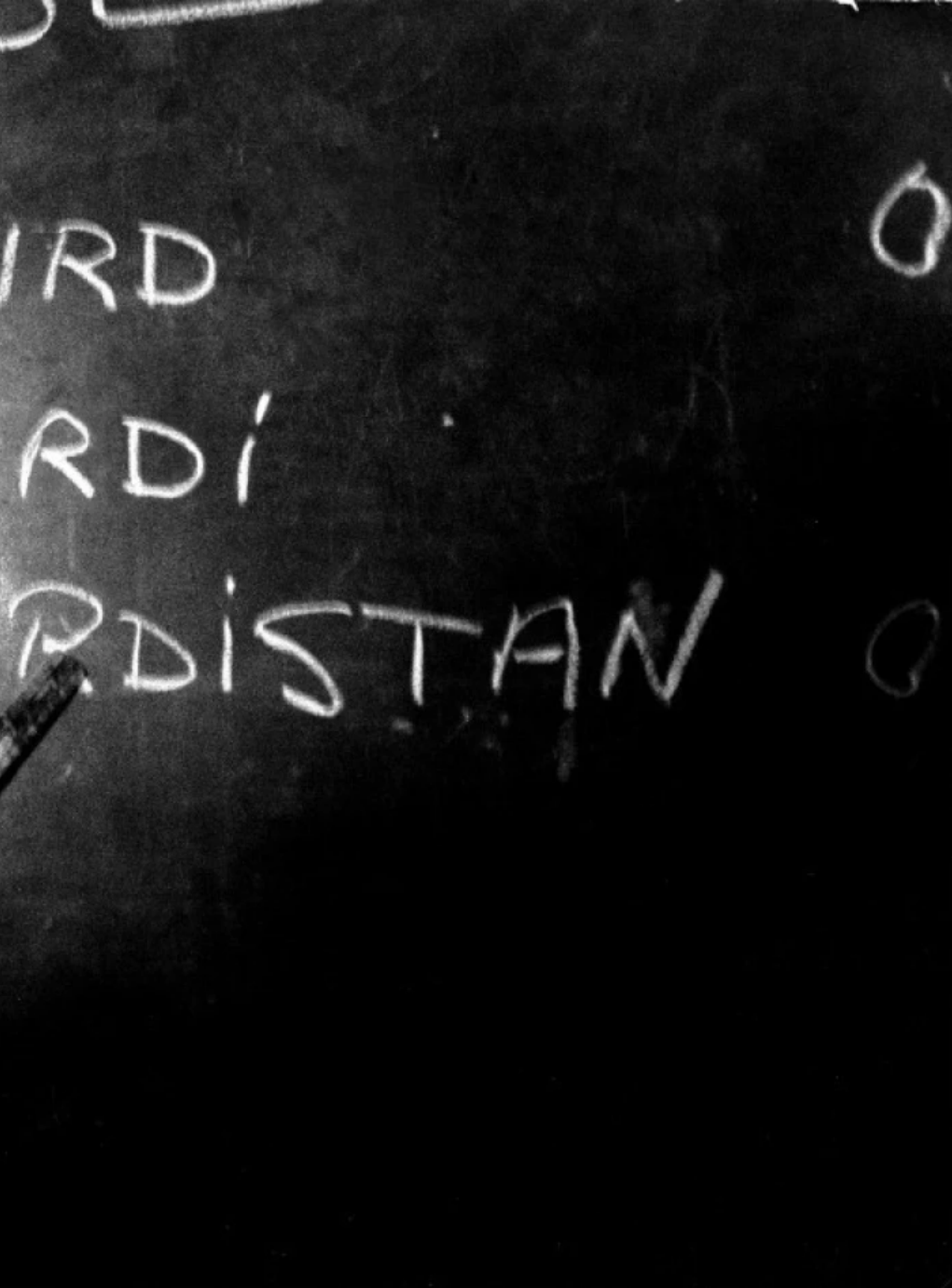
• **Judiciary Recruitment**: Preference or requirements for bilingual judges and court officials in regions with co-official languages.

• **Territorial Application**: Different linguistic regimes apply in different territories, providing flexibility while maintaining rights.

The Spanish model demonstrates how asymmetric implementation can accommodate regional linguistic diversity within a unitary state framework. This approach might be particularly relevant for Iraq's complex regional dynamics, especially in disputed territories.

Switzerland: Multilingual Federalism

Switzerland's multilingual

federal system, accommodating German, French, Italian, and Romansh, offers insights into managing linguistic diversity in a federal context.

Key features include:

- **Territorial Principle**: Language rights are primarily implemented on a territorial basis, with cantons determining their official language(s).
- **Translation Infrastructure**: Robust translation services and multilingual publication of all federal legal documents

.**Proportional Representation**: Efforts to ensure proportional representation of language communities in federal institutions, including the judiciary.

Switzerland's experience highlights the importance of clear jurisdictional boundaries and robust translation infrastructure in maintaining linguistic rights within a federal system.

Critical Domains Requiring Implementation

While comprehensive implementation of Kurdish language rights across all legal domains is the ultimate goal, certain areas require priority attention due to their immediate impact on fundamental rights and access to justice.

Criminal Proceedings

Perhaps no area of law has more direct consequences for individual rights than criminal proceedings. The right to understand charges, evidence, and proceedings in one's native language is fundamental to due process and fair trial rights.

Scenario: The Case of Shilan Ahmed

In 2021, Shilan Ahmed, a Kurdish woman from Sulaymaniyah, was arrested in Baghdad on suspicion of fraud. Throughout her initial detention and interrogation, all proceedings were conducted exclusively in Arabic, despite her repeated requests for Kurdish translation. The police report and charging documents were provided only in Arabic, which Shilan could not read adequately.

When her case reached

court, a translator was provided, but the individual had no specialized legal training. Critical terms like "intent," "fraudulent misrepresentation," and "culpable knowledge" were inconsistently translated. The court-appointed defense lawyer, who spoke only Arabic, struggled to communicate effectively with Shilan about the details of her case.

"I couldn't properly defend myself because I couldn't fully understand what I was being accused of," Shilan later reported. "By the time a proper translation was provided, critical deadlines for challenging evidence had passed."

This scenario illustrates how language barriers in criminal proceedings can fundamentally undermine fair trial rights. Article 14 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Iraq is a signatory, explic-

itly guarantees the right to be informed of charges in a language one understands and to have the free assistance of an interpreter if necessary. Criminal proceedings are particularly critical because:

- They often involve complex legal terminology that requires specialized translation
- They frequently involve urgent time constraints and deadlines
- The consequences of misunderstanding can include wrongful imprisonment

Family Law

Family law matters, including divorce, child custody, and inheritance, have profound and lasting impacts on individuals and families. These cases frequently involve emotional testimony and nuanced cultural contexts that can be lost in translation.

In Kurdish communities, family disputes often involve complex references to cultural practices and community norms that may not have direct Arabic equivalents. Without proper Kurdish language accommodation, courts may miss crucial context for fair adjudication of these sensitive matters.

Dr. Nazand Begikhani, a researcher on gender and law at the University of Bristol, observes that "women are particularly disadvantaged by language barriers in family courts, as they are statistically more likely to have limited education and formal language acquisition opportunities in post-conflict societies" (Begikhani, 2019).

Property and Land Disputes

In post-conflict societies, property and land disputes take on heightened significance, particularly in regions that experienced forced displacement and demographic engineering. In formerly Arabized regions like Kirkuk, many Kurdish residents hold property documentation in Kurdish from pre-Arabization periods or from the post-2003 era.

The inability to present and authenticate these documents in Kurdish creates significant barriers to property restitution and dispute resolution. This has particularly affected Kurdish communities attempting to reclaim properties after returning to areas from which they were forcibly displaced during the Ba'athist era.

Pathways to Implementation

Based on international best practices and Iraq's specific context, several strategic approaches could advance the implementation of Kurdish language rights in the legal system:

1. Comprehensive Legislative Framework

Iraq requires detailed implementing legislation that moves beyond general principles to specific procedural requirements. Such legislation should address:

- **Court Procedures**: Clear protocols for accepting submissions in Kurdish, providing interpretation, and conducting bilingual proceedings.
- **Document Authentication**: Processes for authenticating Kurdish-language legal documents without requiring translation.
- **Recruitment Criteria**: Lan-

guage requirements for judicial appointments in bilingual regions.

- **Resource Allocation**: Dedicated budget lines for translation services, Kurdish legal resources, and language training.

Dr. Sherko Kirmanj, a scholar of Iraqi governance, argues that "without specific implementing legislation that includes enforcement mechanisms and accountability measures, constitutional language rights remain aspirational rather than operational" (Kirmanj, 2020).

2. Institutional Capacity Building

Significant investment in institutional capacity is essential to make language rights practical rather than theoretical:

Legal Education Reform

Law schools throughout Iraq should integrate Kurdish legal terminology and bilingual training into their curricula. This could include:

- Mandatory Kurdish legal terminology courses for law students in federal institutions
- Scholarships for bilingual legal education
- Development of standardized Kurdish legal dictionaries and terminology guides

Judicial Training

Existing judges and court officials require training and resources to implement language rights effectively:

- Continuing education programs on language rights and interpretation protocols
- Training on working effectively with interpreters
- Cultural competency training for judges working in linguistically diverse regions

Translation Infrastructure

A robust translation infrastructure is essential to support bilingual legal proceedings:

- Establishment of a specialized legal translation unit within the Ministry of Justice
- Development of technology-assisted translation tools for legal documents
- Creation of a certified legal translator credential with appropriate compensation

3. Asymmetric Implementation Strategy

Given Iraq's complex regional dynamics, an asymmetric implementation strategy could provide a practical pathway forward:

- **Regional Prioritization**: Initially focus implementation efforts on areas with significant Kurdish populations outside the Kurdistan Region.
- **Phased Approach**: Begin with critical domains like criminal proceedings before expanding to civil matters.
- **Pilot Programs**: Establish pilot bilingual courts in linguistically diverse areas to develop best practices.

4. Technology Integration

Technology offers promising solutions to address some implementation challenges:

- **Digital Translation Tools**: Development of specialized legal translation software for Kurdish-Arabic legal terminology.
- **Remote Interpretation Services**: Video interpretation services to address interpreter shortages in certain regions.
- **Bilingual Case Management Systems**: Court case management systems that accommodate both Kurdish and Arabic documentation.

The Iraqi Tech for Justice Initiative has demonstrated the potential of such approaches through pilot projects in Erbil and Kirkuk, where automat-

ed translation tools have reduced document translation time by approximately 60% (Iraqi Tech for Justice Initiative, 2023).

Civil Society and International Support

Civil society organizations and international partners can play crucial roles in supporting implementation efforts:

Legal Aid Organizations

Kurdish-speaking legal aid organizations provide vital support to citizens navigating the legal system. Enhanced funding and training for these organizations could significantly improve access to justice while institutional reforms progress.

Organizations like the Kurdish Legal Aid Network have developed innovative approaches, including mobile legal clinics that provide on-site translation and legal advice in underserved communities (Kurdish Legal Aid Network Annual Report, 2022).

International Technical Assistance

International organizations with expertise in multilingual legal systems could provide valuable technical assistance:

• Training programs for legal professionals based on international best practices
• Advisory support for legislative drafting and institutional design
• Monitoring and evaluation of implementation efforts

The United Nations Development Programme's Access to Justice Project has already supported similar initiatives in Iraq, though with limited focus on language rights specifically (UNDP, 2021).

Public Awareness Campaigns

Public awareness of language rights is essential to ensure citizens can effectively advocate for their rights. Civil society organizations can develop campaigns to:

• Educate Kurdish speakers about their constitutional language rights
• Provide practical guidance on requesting language accommodation in legal proceedings
• Document and publicize cases where language rights are violated
•

Case Study: Successful Implementation in Halabja

Despite the challenges, there have been notable successes in implementing Kurdish language rights in certain contexts. The city of Halabja presents a promising case study of effective implementation at the local level.

Following its designation as a separate governorate in 2014, Halabja implemented a comprehensive bilingual court system. Key elements of this system include:

• All court documents are accepted in either Kurdish or Arabic without requiring translation
• Court proceedings are conducted in the language chosen by the plaintiff, with interpretation provided
• All judges and court staff are required to demonstrate proficiency in both languages
• Legal resources and precedents are systematically translated and maintained in both languages

An assessment by the Iraqi Bar Association found that the Halabja model increased court efficiency by reducing

translation delays and improved public trust in judicial institutions (Iraqi Bar Association, 2020). This success demonstrates that effective implementation is possible within the Iraqi context when there is political will and adequate resource allocation.

Conclusion

The gap between the constitutional status of Kurdish as an official language and its practical implementation in Iraq's legal system represents not merely a linguistic issue but a fundamental challenge to equal citizenship and access to justice. While the challenges are significant, international examples demonstrate that multilingual legal systems can function effectively with proper institutional support and political commitment.

Moving forward, Iraq must transform constitutional promises into practical reality through comprehensive legislation, institutional capacity building, and strategic implementation approaches. This transformation requires not only governmental action but also the active involvement of civil society, international partners, and the legal community.

Dr. Karim Sinjari, former Minister of Interior for the Kurdistan Regional Government, aptly summarizes the imperative: "Language rights are not luxury items to be implemented after other priorities; they are fundamental to the legitimacy of the state and the dignity of its citizens. Without equal access to justice in one's mother tongue, constitutional promises of equality remain unfulfilled" (Sinjari, 2019).

The implementation of Kurdish language rights in Iraq's legal system represents an essential step toward healing historical injustices and building a truly inclusive state that respects the diversity of its population. It is, ultimately, not merely about language but about equal citizenship and the rule of law in a pluralistic society.

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Mustafa Zalmi:
A Kurdish Islamic Scholar and Thinker of a Different Caliber

Dr. Salar Abdullah Ahmad

Salar Abdullah Ahmad, (b.1983, Sharazoor), holds BA, MA, and PhD in Arabic and comparative literature. Lecturer at Salahaddin University, he researches Iraqi novels, genocide, translation, religion, and cultural identity. Tawgozi has published books, translations, and articles in Kurdish and Arabic, contributing widely to literary and cultural studies.

The first contact of the Kurds with Islam dates back to the early period of the Islamic call in the seventh century CE, during the era of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). Islamic historians have mentioned the name of a companion called Jaban al-Kurdi.

The relationship between the Kurds and Islam accelerated after the Islamic conquests in Persia and the mountainous regions (which include parts of Kurdistan). The first contact of the Kurds with the Islamic army occurred after the conquest of Hulwan and Tikrit. During the era of the Rightly-Guided Caliphs, particularly under Umar ibn al-Khattab, Islamic armies began entering Kurdish regions. This happened after Umar ibn al-Khattab ordered three armies under the general leadership of Iyad ibn Ghanam to conquer al-Jazira. Iyad himself marched with the second army to Edessa (al-Ruha), and after successfully capturing it, he returned to Nisibis and conquered it as well. He then headed north toward Kurdish areas such as Mardin and Diyarbakir. Islam gradually spread among the tribes and local populations, either through preaching or as a result of political and cultural interaction with the emerging Islamic state.

Since then, the Kurds have become an active part of Islamic culture and civilization, contributing to various fields such as jurisprudence, hadith, thought, philosophy, language, literature, Sufism, politics, and military affairs. They have prominent figures in all these fields, including: Sultan Salah al-Din al-Ayyubi, Ibrahim ibn Abd al-Karim al-Halabi, Ibn al-Khabbaz al-Arbili al-Mawsili, Ahmad ibn Uthman al-Sinjari, Majd al-Din Abu al-Abbas al-Arbili, Imam Majd al-Din Abu al-Sa'adat Ibn al-Athir al-Jazari, al-Hafiz al-Iraqi, al-Hasan ibn Asad ibn al-Hasan al-Fariqi Abu Nasr, Abu Abdullah al-Hadhbani al-Kurani, Abu al-Qasim
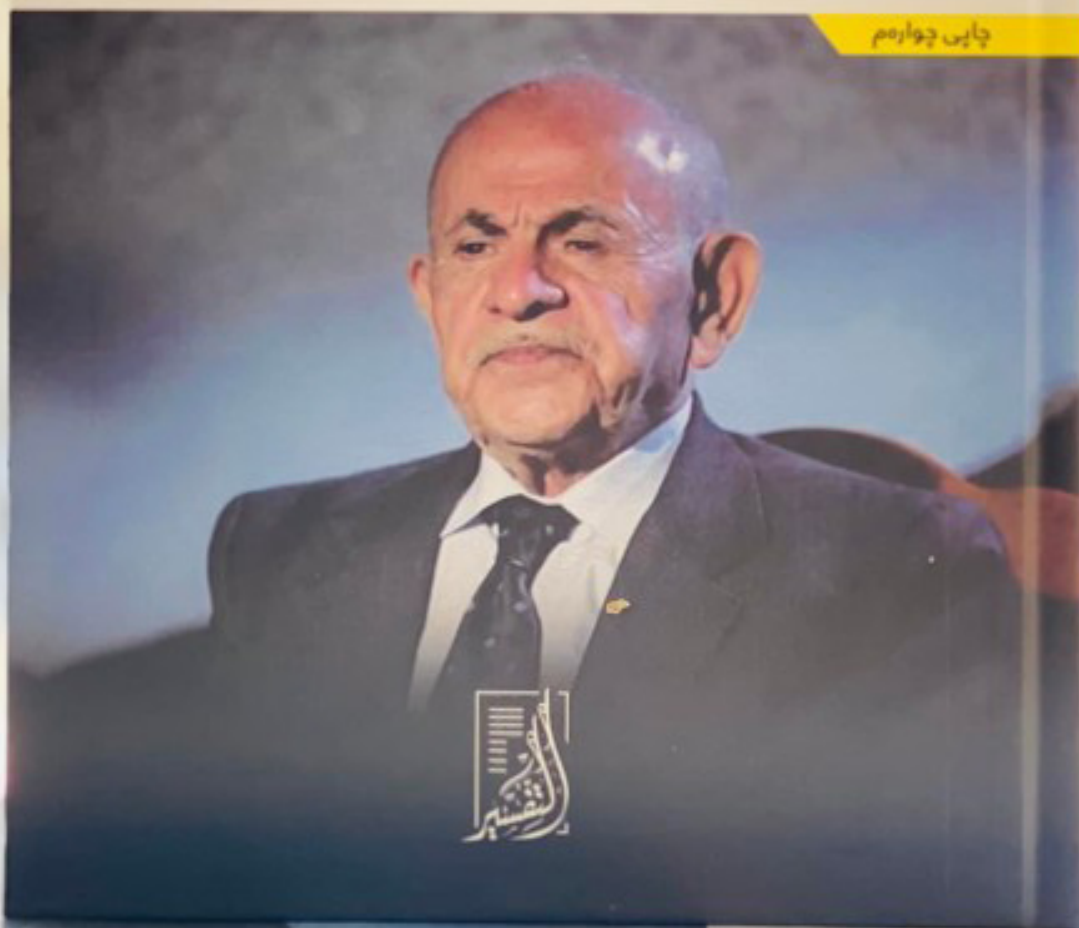
al-Thamanini, Ibn al-Salah al-Shahrazuri, Ibn Khallikan, Ibn al-Hajib, Abu Bakr al-Musannif al-Juri, Sheikh Ma'ruf al-Nudahi, Mawlana Khalid al-Naqshbandi, Ibn al-Qardaghi, Abdul Karim al-Mudarris, and Mustafa al-Zalmi, among others.

However, in this article, we focus on the biography of the scholar Mustafa al-Zalmi, who was truly of a different caliber. He strove with a critical mind and reformist spirit, leaving his distinctive mark in the fields of contemporary thought, law, and jurisprudence.

Birth and Upbringing

The Kurdish Islamic scholar and thinker Mustafa Ibrahim Amin al-Zalmi was born in 1924 CE—as recorded in the official government register—in the village of Zalm, which belongs to the Khormal district, located near Halabja governorate in South Kurdistan or the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. However, al-Zalmi himself mentioned that elderly men in his village told him he was born in 1920 CE.

Education and Degrees

Al-Zalmi grew up in a traditional religious environment that allowed him from childhood to attend non-governmental religious schools (Katatib)

called "Hujra" in Kurdistan in 1934. He studied rational and transmitted sciences such as grammar, morphology, literature, debate, logic, rhetoric, principles of religion, jurisprudence, principles of jurisprudence, philosophy, and astronomy under the guidance of prominent sheikhs in Kurdistan, including: Mulla Syed Arif al-Bir Khudri, Mulla Baqir al-Balki, Mulla Hama Amin al-Kani Sanani, and the late Mufti of Iraq, Mulla Abdul Karim al-Mudarris, among others.

When he completed his religious curriculum studies, Mulla Nurdin—brother of Mulla Muhammad Jali Zadeh, known as Mulla al-Kabir—granted him a scholarly license in Koya district in 1946. In the same year, Mulla Hama Said al-Dilzi granted him a scholarly license in Sulaymaniyah city. He then immediately began teaching in mosques and religious schools in Kurdistan until 1955, after which he worked as an army imam until 1972. Mustafa al-Zalmi also studied in official governmental schools and universities. He began this educational path, different from his previous one, by participating in external examinations for primary and intermediate levels. He then completed his prepa-

ratory stage in Baghdad in 1959 with excellence, leading to his acceptance into the College of Law in 1960. He obtained his Bachelor's degree in Law in 1965 from the University of Baghdad, and his Master's degree in 1969 in Islamic Sharia from the same university. He also received a Master's degree from Al-Azhar University in Comparative Jurisprudence in 1971, and a Master's degree from Cairo University in Law in 1973.

In 1975, he obtained his PhD in Comparative Jurisprudence with "honors" from Al-Azhar University. After several years, he earned his PhD in Law with "distinction" from the University of Baghdad in 2005. He then practiced teaching in Iraqi universities from 1976 to 2008. During these years, he progressed through academic ranks until he earned the title of "Distinguished Professor" and supervised more than 100 university theses and dissertations in philosophy, Sharia, and law.

The last degree Dr. Mustafa al-Zalmi received was an honorary doctorate granted by Saladin University in Erbil on March 3, 2015, in recognition of his continuous efforts in writing research in the fields of Sharia and law.

Scientific Contributions

Mustafa al-Zalmi wrote more than forty scientific papers in law, philosophy, principles of jurisprudence, and jurisprudence. Among the most prominent are:

1. Social Development in Islamic Sharia (paper presented at the Arab Sociologists Conference in 1980 in Baghdad)

2. The Principle of Legality (published in Comparative Law Journal)

3. The Basis of Criminal Responsibility (published in Comparative Law Journal)

4. Commentary on the Amendment to Personal Status Law (published in Comparative Law Journal)

5. The Principle of Crime Personality (Islamic Education Journal)

6. Spiritual Energy and Civilization (Iraqi Scientific Academy publications)

7. Human Rights in Islam (published in Bayt al-Hikma Journal)

8. Legal Logic (published in Saddam College of Law Journal)

9. Rules of War in Islam (published in Al-Jundi Journal)

10. Islamic Legislation and the Rulings it Addresses (published in the Institute of National and Socialist Studies and Law in Iraq: Thought and Civilization)

11. Observations and Suggestions on Iraqi Personal Status Law (published in Saddam College of Law Journal)

12. Dealing with Human Genes in Sharia and Law (published in Saddam College of Law Journal)

13. The Relationship between Sharia, Islamic Jurisprudence, and Law (published in Saddam College of Law Journal)

14. Legal and Sharia Characterization of Martyrdom Operations (Bayt al-Hikma Journal)

Scholar Mustafa al-Zalmi also authored a large number of books in the fields of law, Sharia, philosophy, and logic, some of which became adopted as curricula in several Arab and Islamic universities. In 2014, his complete works were compiled into a massive encyclopedia titled "Al-Kamil li'l-Zalmi fi'l-Sharia wa'l-Qanun" (The Complete Works of al-Zalmi in Sharia and Law). This encyclopedia comprises fifty books distributed across twenty-four volumes, as follows:

Book One: Principles of Jurisprudence in Its New Framework **Book Two:** The Extent of Will's Authority in Divorce in Laws, Legislations, and Customs over Four Thousand Years **Book Three:** Causes of Jurists' Disagreement in Legal Rulings **Book Four:** Clarification of Benefits in Explaining Rules in a New Style **Book Five:** Clarification for Removing the Ambiguity of Abrogation in the Quran **Book Six:** Textual Indications and Methods of Deriving Rulings in Light of Islamic Jurisprudence Principles **Book Seven:** Theory of Obligation to Return Undue Enrichment - A Comparative Study **Book Eight:** Obligations in Light of Logic and Philosophy **Book Nine:** Impediments to Criminal Responsibility in Islamic Sharia and Arab Criminal Legislations **Book Ten:** Collection of Legal Research **Book Eleven:** Collection of Quranic Research **Book Twelve:** Judges' Guide for Achieving Justice and Equality and (The Relationship between Logic and Law) **Book Thirteen:** Rulings of Inheritance, Bequest, and Transfer Rights in Comparative Islamic Jurisprudence and Law **Book Fourteen:** Causes Permitting Criminal Acts **Book Fifteen:** (Two books in one volume): Philosophy of Law and Legal Logic in Concepts **Book Sixteen:** (Two books in one volume) Collection of Legal Research **Book Seventeen:** Collection of Social Research **Book Eighteen:** Criminal Responsibility in Is-

lamic Sharia: A Comparative Study with Law **Book Nineteen:** Rulings of Marriage and Divorce in Comparative Islamic Jurisprudence **Book Twenty:** Introduction to the Study of Islamic Sharia in a New Style **Book Twenty-One:** Philosophy of Sharia **Book Twenty-Two:** Collection of Medical Research **Book Twenty-Three:** Philosophy of Legal Responsibility in Light of Aristotelian Categories **Book Twenty-Four:** Judgment of Quranic Rulings (Worship, Family Laws, and Financial Transactions)

Awards and Honors

Scholar Mustafa al-Zalmi received several awards, including: Distinguished Professor Award from the University of Baghdad (1985), Distinguished Professor Award from the Presidency of the Republic (1993), Scientific Production Award (1993), Distinguished Professor Award from Al-Nahrain University (1995), honor and certificate of appreciation from the Presidential Office, Book Badge with Award from the Presidency (1995), Science Award and Medal by Republican Decree No. 112 on June 6, 2002, Scientists' Honor Award from the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (2005),

Scientists' Honor Award from Al-Nahrain University (2006). On May 11, 2013, Sheikh of Al-Azhar Dr. Ahmad al-Tayyib honored him in a ceremony organized by the World Association of Al-Azhar Graduates at the Sheikdom headquarters, for his valuable efforts in establishing the moderation and balance of Islam. In Halabja city, he was honored by the General Directorate of Culture and Art in Sulaymaniyah.

Participation in Committees and Conferences

Scholar Mustafa al-Zalmi's role was not limited to the scientific and intellectual fields alone, but extended to tangible practical contributions in serving his society and homeland. He participated in several committees, conferences, bodies, and religious and cultural institutions, serving as an authoritative voice to be emulated in addressing issues of Kurdish society in particular and Iraqi society in general.

The following are names of several legal and constitutional committees in which he played an active role: Committee for Discussing the Iraqi Civil Code Project (1985, for 3 months), Committee for Reviewing Defi-

ciencies in Iraqi Laws (2002), Committee for Reviewing Deficiencies in the Criminal Procedures Code at the Judicial Institute (2003), Committee for Preparing Mechanisms for the New Iraqi Constitution (2005), Committee for the Missing, Martyrs, and Prisoners Law Project (1988).

This was in addition to legal meetings at the Ministry of Justice and several conferences inside and outside Iraq, such as: Arab Conference of Arab Sociologists held in Baghdad (1980), Ministry of Justice Conference to discuss legal issues held in Baghdad (1988), Arab Physicians Conference held in Baghdad (1989), Physicians' Union Conference held in Nineveh (Mosul) (1993), Scholars' Association Conference held in Mosul (2001), Human Rights Conference at Al-Zarqa University in Jordan (2002), Ankara Conference held in 2004, United Nations Conference on "Good Governance" held in Jordan (2005).

Death

Scholar Mustafa al-Zalmi passed away on Saturday, June 4, 2016, in Erbil city, at the age of ninety-one, leaving behind a massive scientific and intellectual legacy represented in his writings, re-

search, and bold opinions.

Personal Characteristics

Mustafa al-Zalmi's personality is characterized by traits that distinguish him from Muslim scholars in general and Kurdish scholars in particular, represented as follows:
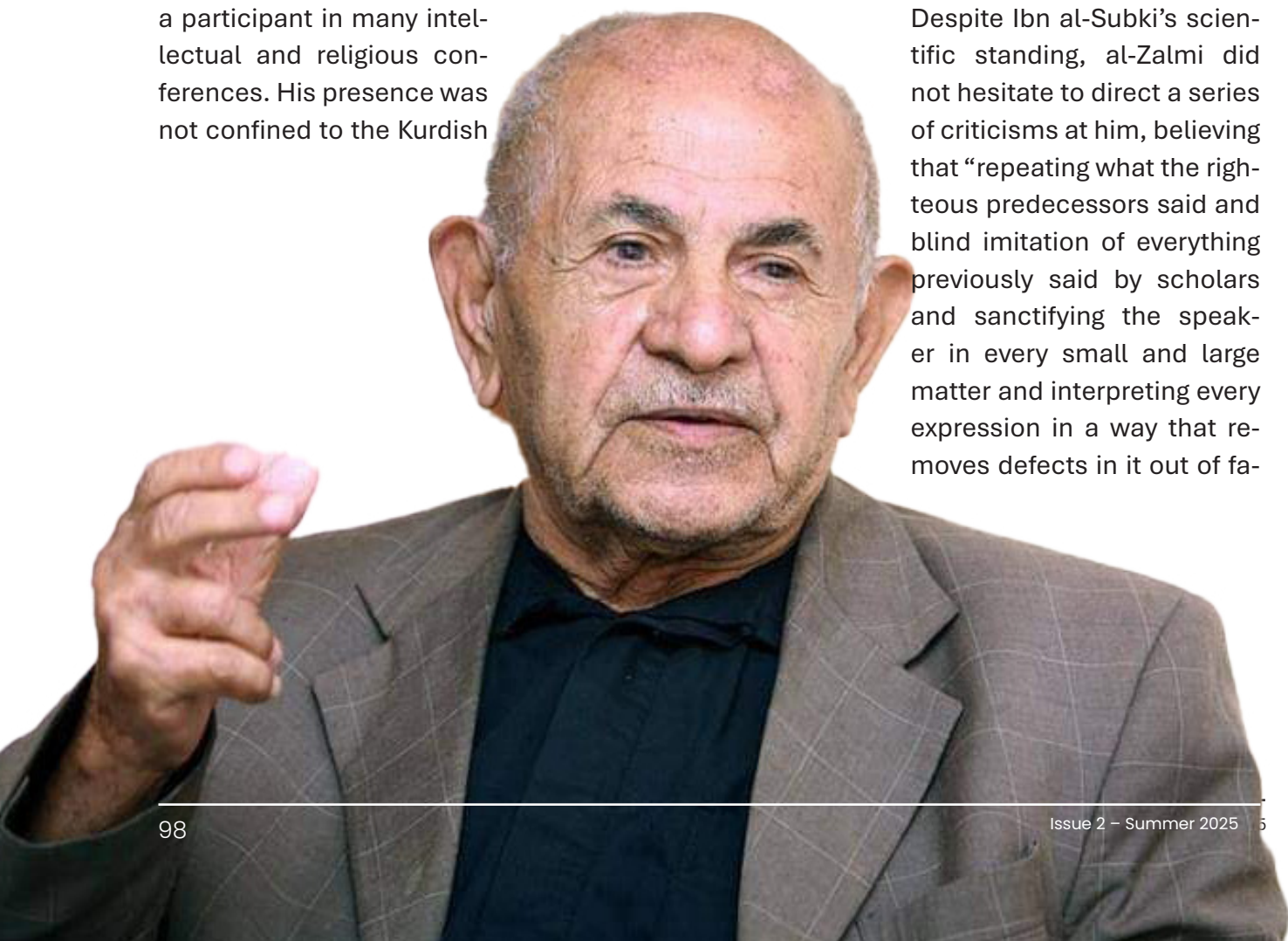
1. Critical Awareness

Al-Zalmi combined the depth of authentic traditional formation with openness to scientific circles and modern studies. He was—as we mentioned earlier—present in universities, a member of jurisprudential academies, and a participant in many intellectual and religious conferences. His presence was not confined to the Kurdish milieu alone, but his influence extended to the Arab and Islamic sphere in general through his writings, articles, and bold jurisprudential opinions.

Therefore, he was distinguished by a complex scientific personality that combines loyalty to authentic religious traditions with boldness in questioning them when necessary from a modern perspective. He carried advanced critical awareness, not content with mere reception, but always searching for the logic of the text, the spirit of Sharia, and its objectives.

Dr. Mustafa al-Zalmi was not among those who repeat the sayings of the ancients without scrutiny, but chose to move within texts with a liberated scholarly sense, based on the principles of Sharia and disciplined rules of inference. Perhaps the best example of this is his research titled "Methodological Errors of Ibn al-Subki in His Book Jam' al-Jawami'," where he directed scientific criticisms at the scholar Taqi al-Din Ibn al-Subki (727-771 AH), one of the most prominent Shafi'i scholars and judges of Damascus, and one of the influential figures in theology, principles of jurisprudence, comparative jurisprudence, and hadith.

Despite Ibn al-Subki's scientific standing, al-Zalmi did not hesitate to direct a series of criticisms at him, believing that "repeating what the righteous predecessors said and blind imitation of everything previously said by scholars and sanctifying the speaker in every small and large matter and interpreting every expression in a way that removes defects in it out of fa-

naticism for the opinion of its author, all of this was at the forefront of reasons for delaying the Islamic world from the train of scientific progress in all fields."

These views provoked opposing reactions from conservative trends that believe Ibn al-Subki is a religious authority whose methodology should not be challenged. They considered al-Zalmi's criticisms an attack on one of the pillars of jurisprudence principles. The President of the Supreme Council for Fatwa in the Kurdistan Region and Professor at Saladin University, Dr. Hassan al-Mufti, wrote a book titled "Criticism of al-Zalmi's Method and Refutation of His Objections to Issues from the Book Jam' al-Jawami'…" where he states that from religious and rational perspectives, they do not accept that repeating what the righteous predecessors said causes the delay of Muslims, because the righteous predecessors include the first centuries from the era of companions, followers, and their followers. The Noble Quran and authentic Sunnah have indicated their virtue, so based on this, the righteous predecessors—contrary to what al-Zalmi imagined—should be emulated and their sayings repeated, according

to al-Mufti.

Dr. al-Zalmi presented in his research a definition of Ibn al-Subki, his birth, death, writings, and methodological views, and showed his errors in defining jurisprudence, religious ruling, reason, and tradition, and showed some conclusions in that. He also showed Ibn al-Subki's error in obligation, duty, obligation, and license, and his disagreement with some jurists. Then he showed the difference between the definition of license and determination and showed his error in defining the general and Quranic abrogation, and abrogation of the Quran by Sunnah, as well as his error in abrogating religious ruling and abrogation by analogy, and provided evidence to prove that. Then he addressed the divisions of abrogation in terms of the abrogated, showing abrogated recitation without ruling, and finally the definition of analogy.

2. Rational Vision and Call for Reform

Al-Zalmi, despite his conservative Kurdish religious background, called for reforming religious discourse and purifying it from inherited interpretations that are not based on definitive text or sound reason. He possessed

a rational vision open to the developments of reality and the requirements of the age, believing that Islamic jurisprudence must be living and renewable, responding to contemporary social and legal challenges. This scholarly spirit made him approach thorny issues and issue fatwas and positions that may seem outside the ordinary, but stem from deep scientific scholarship. He believed in the mind's ability to understand religious text and interpret it in light of reality.

He believed that ijtihad is a necessity for renewing religion and not an intellectual luxury, and it is understood from his views that human jurisprudence needs constant review. He also called for purifying legislation from historical residues that hinder justice and equality, and that many rulings need reconsideration in light of developments in human reality. He was among those calling for judiciary and fatwa to be independent of political whims, and to be based on purposeful reason and the spirit of legislation, not on rigid textual literalism.

3. Moderation and Balance

Al-Zalmi worked to promote the concept of moderation and balance, and called for

peaceful coexistence between diverse community components, emphasizing that Islam calls for mercy, tolerance, and justice, and that true Islam is that which honors humans and preserves their rights, regardless of their ethnic or sectarian affiliation. He was among the defenders of women's rights, especially in inheritance.

4. Renewal

Renewal is among the most prominent characteristics of Mustafa al-Zalmi's scientific personality, particularly renewal in jurisprudence and its principles. He sought to liberate jurisprudence from sectarian stagnation and traditional closure, based on the major principles of Sharia, especially its higher purposes in justice, mercy, and removing hardship. He did not hesitate to review many inherited jurisprudential opinions and criticized some widespread jurisprudential rulings he saw as inconsistent with the reality of the age and the spirit of Islam.

He worked on rebuilding the science of jurisprudence principles with a modern perspective. In his book "Principles of Jurisprudence in Its New Framework," he mentioned methodologists' approaches in his writings and created a new style away from the traditional rigid approach. He presents views with a tripartite division (definitive, probable, ambiguous) instead of the usual binary or quaternary division, and establishes applied definitions that suit the requirements of the age. He shows tradition and its causes, importance, and danger, and modifies the fundamentals of arrangement and transmitted division of meanings within methodological sciences, making him subject to criticism from the traditional current that saw this as a breach of inherited methodological approaches.

Dr. Mustafa al-Zalmi was among those calling for modernizing educational curricula in religious institutions, as he criticized stagnation in religious education curricula. He recorded his observations about traditional religious studies curricula in pages from his book "Caravan of My Life," where he criticized the use of violence in teaching children. It is worth noting that al-Zalmi was the first to use a blackboard for teaching religious curricula in Kurdistan, specifically in his mosque in Sulaymaniyah city. He also taught his students pure sciences in contemporary methods, such as chemistry, physics, and algebra, alongside religious sciences.

This approach was not without opposition from some religious men who fabricated charges of political involvement against him with Muzahim Maher, who was serving as the governor of Sulaymaniyah at the time. However, Judge Sheikh Muhammad al-Khal strongly defended him.

Al-Zalmi called for establishing the role of reason in understanding Sharia, and emphasizing that fatwa is not merely rigid speech, but a trust and social responsibility. These initiatives were welcomed in youth and intellectual circles, who saw in him a model that combines authenticity and renewal.

5. Humility and Simplicity

Despite his scientific standing, al-Zalmi was known for his asceticism and humility. He was close to his students and people, loved guests and honored them, dealing with them with great humility. He also answered their questions and inquiries tirelessly. He lived his life away from luxury and seeking fame or hypocrisy.

6. Scientific Discipline and Methodological Rigor

Scholar Mustafa al-Zalmi was known for the accuracy of his research, his investigation of evidence, and his reliance on rigorous scientific verification in his books and research. He was also careful to document his statements and review original sources, with clear scientific criticism.

7. Independence in Thought and Position

He was not a follower of any political or religious party, but maintained his independence in opinion, even if it cost him isolation or exclusion. He was known for not compromising in religion or scientific positions.

8. Boldness in Presenting Opinions

Mustafa al-Zalmi was not a traditional jurist who repeated what predecessors said, but was the owner of bold and independent opinions who did not fear clashing with the familiar if he saw that this serves the nation's interest and achieves Sharia's purposes. He was known for positions and fatwas that stirred wide controversy in religious and media circles.

Among these was his position against the phenomenon of female circumcision in the name of religion, in his book "Female Circumcision: Its Harms and Prohibition in the Quran," where the author defined circumcision and showed its origin. He mentioned the narratives on which circumcision is based and that it differs according to time and place. Then he addressed the health harms that affect females in the future. Then he went to explaining the hadiths that contained the word circumcision, then provided fatwas of religious scholars on female circumcision and the law's position on them.

He declared his position saying: "It is not permissible to change Allah's creation in any organ of the human being who was created in the best form except in cases of necessity, and necessities are estimated according to their measure, and this is what the Noble Quran established in many verses. Female circumcision is a violation of the philosophy of the Noble Quran which indicates that humans were created complete with no increase or decrease." To support his opinion, he cited ten Quranic verses, including Allah's saying: "Who created you, then proportioned you, then balanced you? In whatever form He willed, He has assembled you."

In his book "Clarification for Removing the Ambiguity of Abrogation in the Quran," al-Zalmi discusses the issue of abrogation in the Quran and rejects the existence of any abrogated verse from both transmitted and rational perspectives. He responds to interpretations that claim the existence of abrogating and abrogated verses and proves that what was taken regarding abrogation is merely human scholarship and not real judicial change. The author proves with transmitted and rational evidence the non-existence of a single abrogated verse existing in the Noble Quran. He removes confusion between conditions of abrogation in general and conditions of abrogation in the Quran, and proves that abrogation, assuming its existence, would be lifting the contradiction existing between two verses, and confirms that this contradiction is not present in the Noble Quran.

In the same book, he responds to the evidence of abrogation supporters with logical and transmitted evidence, saying: "They used the occurrence of abrogation in the Quran as evidence for the occurrence of abrogation in the Quran, and in this reasoning there is circular reasoning or logical impos-

sibility because proving its occurrence depends on establishing its occurrence and establishing its occurrence depends on proving its occurrence."

These scholarly efforts received acceptance among a group of reformist thinkers, but they also brought widespread criticism from the traditional current, until his book was described as controversial. Nevertheless, al-Zalmi remained firm in his methodology, believing that sincere scholarship must first cause shock before opening a new horizon for understanding.

Professor Scholar Dr. Hassan Ali al-Dhanun, specialist in civil law, says in his introduction to al-Zalmi's book that the great professor did not content himself with defining the concept of abrogation and its conditions, scope and types, and presenting all these issues and research in a clear and wonderful presentation that can hardly be matched in any other reference, but undertook to review the verses that abrogation supporters claimed were abrogated.

He also expresses his admiration for al-Zalmi saying: "I thought that the era of our great jurists had ended long ago and became mere mem-

ories, but I see one of them living among us, talking to us and we talk to him, and we ask him and he pours his knowledge and literature upon us."

Professor Dr. Kamran Orhman Majid and researcher Alaa Baqi Sadiq see in a joint research that al-Zalmi "did not deny Quranic abrogation by the Quran, but denied abrogated ruling without recitation emphatically only, and some scholars preceded him to that."

There are other bold opinions that Mustafa al-Zalmi presented in media interviews or private gatherings or in other books, but we content ourselves with what we have mentioned, because presenting and discussing all his views requires numerous studies.

Al-Zalmi and the Integration of Kurdish and Islamic Identity

Mustafa al-Zalmi is considered one of the most prominent intellectual voices that combined Kurdish and Islamic identity simultaneously. He was a symbol of the convergence of Islamic thought with Kurdish experience. He contributed to enriching contemporary Islamic thought through his critical reading of jurisprudential traditions,

and at the same time, he did not neglect the specificity of the Kurdish issue, as he called for Kurdish rights to express their cultural and religious identity within the framework of justice and human rights.

Al-Zalmi was part of a generation of Kurdish Muslim thinkers who tried to renew religious discourse in a way that suits the requirements of the age, formulating balanced visions that combine preserving principles with recognizing the necessity of reform and renewal. Thus, he placed himself in a distinguished position within the course of Kurdish Islamic thought, which seeks to build a bridge between tradition and modernity.

His thought was also a bridge for communication between different Islamic currents, as he continued to present visions calling for unity and tolerance among Muslims, away from sectarian or ethnic conflicts, thereby reinforcing the moderate values of Islam that he always defended.

Scholar Mustafa al-Zalmi was proud of his national belonging and Kurdish identity without fanaticism, expressing this with calm and balance. He saw that serving the Islamic nation did not conflict with serving his Kurdish

people. He wrote in Arabic to spread knowledge, but remained connected to his people's issues. He met with Kurdish leader and founder of the Mahabad Republic, Judge Muhammad, and also worked in the September Revolution Relations Office in Cairo when Dr. Fuad Masum was responsible for the office. He had an old friendship relationship with the Iraqi President and founder of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, Jalal Talabani, dating back to 1963. It is mentioned that al-Zalmi was among the personalities Talabani consulted when founding the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan.

Thinker Mustafa al-Zalmi's expectations in the political field were correct. When he was a graduate student in Cairo, he attended a seminar by one of the Kurdish officials there. In his intervention, he expected an international conspiracy against the September Revolution, but the official was not convinced by his expectation. This actually happened after the signing of the Algeria Agreement in March 1975 between Iraq and Iran with Algerian mediation, which led to the complete collapse of the revolution.

In 2016, during a television interview with the author of this article, he expected the establishment of a strong state in the region in the future, where he said: From the day I developed Kurdish national feeling, I hoped that the Kurds would have a Kurdish government. Whoever visits me, I give him good news that in the future, after fifty years, the Kurdish government in the Middle East will be stronger than Arab, Persian, and Turkish governments. In the same interview, he urged Kurds to learn Arabic because it is the language of the Quran, English because it is a global language, and French because it is the language of law.

Conclusion

It can be said that Professor Dr. Mustafa al-Zalmi was a scholar of a special kind: humble, rational, scholarly, independent, courageous in presentation, controversial, firm in his knowledge, and a sincere religious reformer. He represented a unique case in contemporary Kurdish Islamic thought, combining adherence to religious principles with openness to the requirements of the age, attempting to build a bridge between tradition and modernity. He was not merely a traditional religious scholar, but was a renewing thinker who possessed the courage to criticize reality and present bold visions seeking to reform religious thought and the nation's society.

Despite the criticism and harsh critique he faced, his intellectual legacy remains of high value, deserving study and attention in the future and in our time when we suffer from rising waves of extremism, and the need for scholarly thought liberated from stagnation and fanaticism increases. Finally, we say: Mustafa al-Zalmi's journey remains a source of inspiration for everyone who believes that Islam is a religion of life and renewal, and that reason is the key to true understanding of religious texts.

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Why Religious Reform

Dr. Abid Khalid

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Several Islamic thinkers and movements have worked on reform and renewal for some of the interpretations and established practices among the believers of this religion itself. Image Credits: K24

Religious reform, in its simplest meaning, refers to the process of reviewing and changing religious beliefs, practices, or institutions, with the aim of returning them to their original form within that religion, or improving and adapting them to the new needs of different eras and various societies. However, carrying out this process is not as easy as this initial introduction suggests. Especially since for believers of any religion, the established doctrinal foundations and core moral values of their religion have a kind of truth and self-evidence that cannot be easily modified or changed, because the source of these foundations and values are either divine revelation and commands from God and His messengers (as in heavenly religions), or a kind of undeniable historical sanctity (as in earthly religions). Therefore, the issue of reform in any religion, from the perspective of its believers, is a difficult and to a large extent dangerous matter.

But outside the perspective of believers, whatever the source of religious principles and values may be, divine revelation or historical sanctity, they ultimately enter the realm of practice and implementation through human hands and according to human interpretations of these principles and values. It is humans who, according to their understanding of religious texts and according to the circumstances of the place and time in which they live, turn the principles and values of a religion into a way of life and a source of legitimacy for their behaviors and religious and worldly institutions.

Hence, although the source of any religion may be divine, the implementation of that religion and its practice by its believers is an entirely human and sociological act, which may, with the passage of time and depending on the different places of practice, cause the current opinions, practices, and institutions of that religion to experience failure, stagnation, and obsolescence. Then either it must give up its existence in the face of new ideas and values, or it must, through reform and renewal of its previous interpretations and understandings of its religion, revive and continue its religion.

Therefore, the issue of religious reform is the issue of reviewing human interpretations and understandings of religious principles and values, and the issue of renewing how they are implemented and practiced by humans, in order to correct and adapt them according to the new needs of the place and time in which they live.

In relation to Islam, besides the fact that the religion itself considers itself as a continuation and renewal of many of the heavenly religions before it, and promises
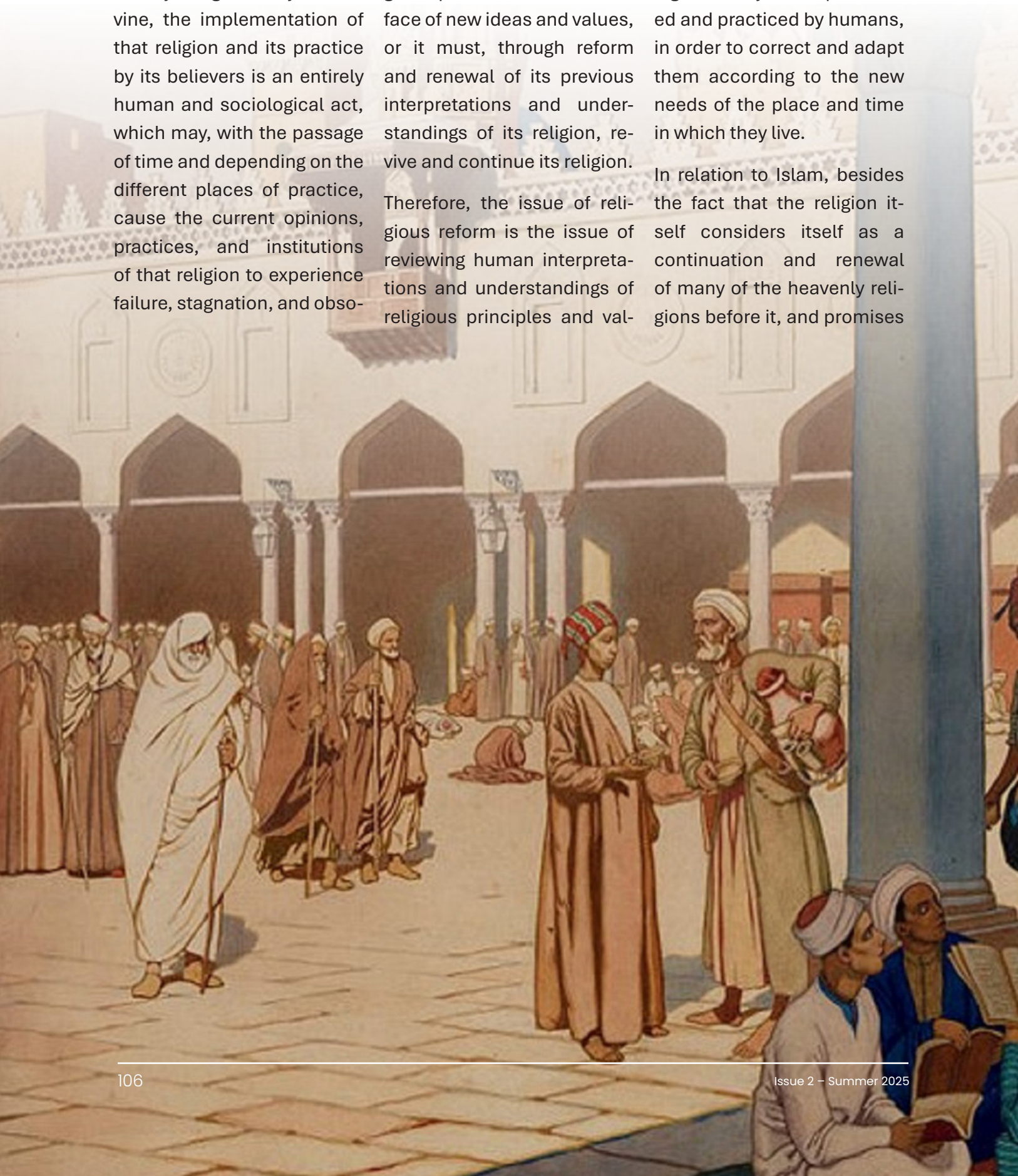
its believers the coming of a renewer at the beginning of each century; also during the past several recent centuries, several Islamic thinkers and movements have worked on reform and renewal for some of the interpretations and established practices among the believers of this religion itself. If at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, the weakening of the then religious political institution (Ottoman Caliphate) and confronting the oppression of colonialism and the massive spread of modern culture in Muslim societies were the reasons behind the emergence of the theses of (Tahtawi, Afghani, Abduh, and Muhammad Rashid Rida), then at the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century, the escalation of religious extremism and terrorism in the world, the failure and oppression of some of the current religious regimes in the region, the exposure of Muslim societies to the rapid waves of the information revolution and contemporary technology, are the sources of legitimacy for current reformist Islamic discourses.

HOW Iran Sees
the Turkey-PKK Peace Process

Dr. Zhilwan Latif Yar Ahmad

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the views and position of the Islamic Republic of Iran regarding the peace process between Turkey and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). Image Credits: Rudaw.net

This article sheds light on the views and position of the Islamic Republic of Iran regarding the peace process between Turkey and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). It is important to understand what Iran's concerns or satisfactions are regarding this process. Does Iran support it or oppose it? If it has concerns, what are these concerns based on? If it supports it, why?

The Peace Process: Why?

An important process called the peace and resolution process, which followed the PKK's announcement of laying down arms under the leadership of Abdullah Öcalan, is underway. This is certainly a complex, multi-faceted process that is subject to debate. It has many critics and supporters. At the Kurdish level, some view it as the failure of the Kurdish liberation movement and struggle, while others, who are more supporters of the PKK, make excuses for it. Some define it as a peace process and others as Kurdish surrender. However, the prevailing voice is that immediately, at the domestic level of Turkey, the Kurds of the north and west, party and government officials in the Kurdistan Region, Iraq and

the countries of the region, and at the international level, welcomed the initiation of the process. Of course, Erdogan and his party claimed from the beginning that they themselves were the owners of it.

This is not the first time that Turkey and the PKK have made peace. This is at least the third time that a peace process between Kurds and Turks has been underway in Turkey. The previous two times ended in failure. The first time, after the arrest of the leader of the Kurdistan Workers' Party, this group announced a unilateral ceasefire in 2002. The then leaders of the PKK ended the party's activities and immediately formed a new organization called the Kurdistan Freedom and Democracy Congress, which was supposed to continue resistance at the political level. A year later, the name of the organization was changed again, and in 2004 the PKK officially announced the breaking of the ceasefire and the resumption of armed struggle.

The second time was when the Justice and Development Party obtained an absolute majority of votes in the 2007 elections and formed a government alone. From that time, a series of solutions such as relative freedoms like the publication of Kurdish newspapers, magazines and books, the establishment of a television channel called TRT Kurdish, allowing edu-

cation in Kurdish, projects such as democratic opening and emptying the mountains and returning to society were put on the agenda. Talks began in Oslo in 2009. However, the first project of the second round of talks also failed. In December 2012, secret dialogue between the state and Öcalan was revealed. However, in July 2013, the killing of Sakine Cansız, Fidan Doğan and Leyla Şaylemez shook the foundations and disrupted the process, and in 2015 the complete failure of the process was announced. In the second process, in 2011, Professor Naser Entesar said that the peace process between Turkey and the PKK surprised Iran. He said: "It is clear that Iran did not anticipate this situation. Therefore, it can be said that Iran was completely caught off guard." It appears that Iran has also been caught off guard in this current peace and resolution process. To the extent that apart from a formal statement by Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, no clear Iranian position regarding the

peace process can be seen. This current process is different. On December 27, 2025, Öcalan's important message was read. The difference was not only in the demands of the message, but also in the change of circumstances. Also, the reasons for the change in circumstances. The most important reasons and needs of this current peace process for both sides can be summarized as follows:

– At Turkey's domestic level, Erdogan and his party's fear of not obtaining the necessary votes for the presidency this time and the need for self-preservation, which cannot achieve this need without obtaining the votes of the northern Kurds. Also, with this step, he can weaken the opposition front led by the CHP and prevent it from forming a new alliance with the Kurds.

– Turkey's fear of the project to change and redraw the new map of the Middle East under Israeli leadership to encircle Anatolia.

– At the regional level, follow-

ing Iran's failure to protect Bashar al-Assad and his regime, an opportunity arose for Turkey to control Syria. The current situation in Syria requires that through this agreement and new peace process, the Kurds of Rojava be weakened.

– Turkey's fear of Israeli cooperation with Kurds in all four parts of Kurdistan.

– Also, despair that it could end Rojava Kurdistan without the consent of America and the West.

– At the international level, Turkey can take a step closer to European Union membership and closer rapprochement with NATO through this peace.

– On the other hand, just as can be read in Abdullah Öcalan's messages, the PKK has reached an ideological dead end and cannot reproduce itself. Especially as reference is made to the emergence of another generation of urban and political activists in northern Kurdistan who have less belief in separatism, including Selahattin Demirtaş.

Considering all these factors and reasons above, it can be concluded that for both sides, and especially for Turkey, this process is a process of necessity.

Iran's Perspective on the Peace Process

Every process and project, especially in these four states where part of Kurdistan's territory is distributed among them, affects other states. Therefore, the peace process in Turkey can be a source of concern or satisfaction for Iranians. Below, we refer to the position of the Islamic Republic of Iran from three perspectives: Iran's field/proxies and diplomacy, where the proxies also fall into the field category.

It should not be forgotten beforehand that Iran's policy, media language, and decisions are not limited to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but rather Iran's position can be sought in the field. The field means the scope of activities of the Revolutionary Guards, which has dominated Iranian diplomacy from the time of Ahmadinejad to this moment. Therefore, Iran's position toward the peace process must be evaluated from both perspectives. Iran, in its only official

position and according to the foreign policy report of IRNA, through Ismail Baghaei, who represents Iran's "diplomacy," announced: "The Islamic Republic of Iran supports any process that leads to stopping terrorism and strengthening security in Turkey and hopes that this change will have a positive impact at the regional level as well." However, in the field, no Iranian position has been revealed. With this silence, Iran's field concerns can be estimated.

The third perspective for understanding Iran's policy consists of proxies. Iran in the field sometimes conveys its message and position regarding events through its proxies. For example, immediately after Erdogan's emergence and support for the peace process, in a current on the social network X, Qais al-Khazali, Secretary-General of the Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq group, regarding the PKK's laying down of arms, announced: "There is no longer any excuse for Turkey's military presence in Iraq," and requested Iraq and Parliament to take urgent measures for the complete withdrawal of Turkish armed forces. Ali al-Bandawi, a member of the Security and Defense Commission of the Iraqi Parliament, also said after the announcement of the PKK's laying

down of arms: "Despite laying down arms, Turkey has still not withdrawn its forces, and Iraq awaits Turkey's army withdrawal because there is no excuse left." From the position of the proxies, it appears that Iran had no preparation for the peace process, and after becoming aware of the process, it seeks to find how it can benefit from the situation in order to rhetorically approach that event.

What Does Iran Want?

To answer this question, there is no alternative but to search through Iranian media and announcements to understand Iran's concerns and position. The articles and speeches that have been published about this process have emphasized three main points through which Iran wants to somehow reproduce its discourse or not lose ground:

First, the pressure from Iraqi forces to remove Turkish forces from Iraqi soil, especially the Dohuk areas. Iran sees this agreement as an opportunity to pressure Iraq through its proxies to force Turkish forces to return to their own borders.

Second, emphasizing the point that Turkey is ultimately unreliable and implements a double-standard policy toward the Kurds. In several articles, it has been mentioned that Turkey has never been trustworthy. On one hand, it commits genocide against the Kurds in Rojava and even appoints trustees to Kurdish cities in northern Kurdistan and deprives them of their basic rights, and on the other hand, it periodically initiates a process called the peace process.

Third, what Erdogan is doing is merely a plan for his own survival and his ability to nominate himself again for another term through drafting a new constitution, which can only be achieved by obtaining the votes of Kurds within the Turkish Parliament. Iran's effort to minimize the process and remind that this process has been initiated several times before and ended without results. The fact that they have not made official statements about this is noteworthy. Either through official state channels, they refer to Erdogan's double-standard policy. For example, the Iranian Student Journalists Club website, in an article taken from Sky News international correspondent, refers to Turkey's dual policy toward Syrian Kurds on one hand and successive attacks against them on the other hand, and writes that it is unclear how real this change in Turkey's perspective is or whether it is aimed at achieving gains. One of the gains is Erdogan's opportunity to nominate himself again for the presidential election in 2028, which is impossible according to the current constitution, because he needs the 45 seats of the Kurds to conduct early elections.

Fourth, emphasizing the futility of four decades of bloody war between the PKK and Turkey and the failure of the Kurdish liberation movement. The best evidence is Öcalan's admission that the PKK has lost its meaning and must dissolve. Tasnim News Agency's emphasis on the

fact that Öcalan no longer wants federation, autonomy, independence, and not even administrative independence, and acknowledgment that these demands are the result of the futile practices of an extremist nationalist movement, and that such foundations do not answer today's questions.

Fifth, emphasizing the continuous divisions and dualities between the PKK leadership among themselves and Kurds in general. Also, that the Kurdish struggle did not begin with Öcalan to end with his surrender. Additionally, magnifying the differences of opinion and decisions of the Kurdish triangle, which consists of Abdullah Öcalan, the northern political forces, and Qandil. For example, emphasizing the statements of officials like Cemil Bayik when he refers to Qandil's demands in contrast to their commitment to the decisions and demands of the PKK leader. Also, what Öcalan says does not necessarily require Qandil to be bound by it.

These doubt-creating efforts have, of course, in the past led Turkey to consider Iran as one of the causes of the failure of successive peace processes in Turkey. Therefore, sometimes it escalated to war and mutual denunciatory statements, and Turkey blamed Iran, while Iran rejected it in every way. Even Turkey's accusation that Iran uses the PKK for its own interests and expansionist policy in the region. Turkey also refers to the relationship between Iran and the PKK. For example, just recently, Hakan Fidan criticized the meeting between Iranian military officials and Mazloum Kobani in a statement and asked Iran not to support Syrian Kurds, especially the YPG.

The sixth and final point, which is directly related to Iran's concerns, is Iran's suspicion about connecting PKK members with PJAK and uniting them and then inciting them to oppose the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Conclusion

According to the references mentioned above, the Islamic Republic of Iran has only once officially supported and welcomed the new announcement of peace between the PKK and Turkey. It appears that, like the second peace process, this time it has also been outside the circle and views the situation with surprise. Therefore, only through media close to fundamentalists or the position of proxies can we understand Iran's hidden position. In this agreement, Iran only wants not to be completely empty-handed and to have some kind of gain in the results of the agreement. We can say the most important points that Iran emphasizes are: through proxies, it pressures Iraq to remove Turkish forces from their country, because the excuse for their stay no longer exists. A kind of casting doubt on Erdogan and Turkey's good intentions toward Kurds in general and using them to extend his presidency and become a member of the European Union, and reflecting a kind of Iranian concerns about

connecting PKK forces with Kurdish forces in the east. Also, Iran's fear of Turkey becoming stronger, because one of the outcomes of these agreements is opening more doors to Turkey so that it can compete more strongly in the region than before without disturbing any Kurdish force. Finally, Turkey with these steps may be able to protect itself from the storm of regional changes and the new map of the Middle East.

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Center for Future Studies

Iraq and the Kurdistan

Region in the Face of Regional Wars and the New Policy of the US Administration

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Following the expansion of Middle Eastern complications and the spread of wars and conflicts, a significant portion of attention turns to an important and strategic region like Iraq and the Kurdistan Region, which continue to play an important role in Washington's regional strategies. In a manner that, despite regional problems and the outbreak of war between Iran and Israel, and the geopolitical and it's importance of Iraq and the proximity and hypothetical readiness for the complication of the political and economic situation of that country, the region still holds greater importance for the United States of America. Militarily and security-wise, Iraq is the connection between the Middle East and Asia. America's bases in Iraq, such as Ain al-Assad and Harir, are important areas for monitoring Iran and fighting terrorism. This is in addition to the fact that the Iran-Israel war permanently predicts the activation of Iranian proxy groups in Iraq. In this regard, the Kurdistan Region also remains as a reliable ally of America due to its geopolitical importance and influential economic position. Therefore, to reduce Iran's influence after the war, America tries to prevent the flow of weapons from Iraq to Lebanon and

Syria. At the same time, the Kurdistan Region's support for America provides at least a balanced role against Iran's influence in Iraq. Accordingly, Iraq and the Kurdistan Region become a strategic center for monitoring in America's administration agenda and a political ally for protecting political and economic balance against Iran.

Furthermore, the Iran-Israel war has increased the importance and value of Iraq and the Kurdistan Region several times, because Iraq and the Kurdistan Region could become the place for the unification of international rivalries. In this regard, the warming and disruption of relations between Baghdad and Erbil could become a cause for disrupting the stability of the region and disrupting America's interests, especially in the face of a rival Iran. America permanently sees Iraq and the Kurdistan Region as a geo-economic region for reducing support for Iran, while Iraq's oil and energy are one of the greatest partnerships and strategic interests of America.

Political and Strategic Foundations of the US Administration in the Middle East

Generally, the new policy of the Trump administration and America towards the Middle East operates on the basis of economic, political, and security aspects. In this regard, Mohammed Hussein believes that the Trump administration does not have a clear economic policy, especially regarding the Middle East, but rather has a special commercial policy that is somewhat aggressive towards the entire world. Through imposing customs on America's imported goods, it wants to correct the imbalance that exists in the United States of America's trade balance against the world. This is in the hope of reviving America's industrial sectors. To what extent this is true and how it can be done and what the cost and price will be are very complex questions and the subject of daily discussions of American institutions. Before we await the results of these customs policies, America and the world have already been subjected to a series of political and economic difficulties and constraints, which will largely have a heavy price for the world economy. Then this indirectly affects the Middle East and the world as well. It is expected that the troubles and complications that have been created due to Trump's customs wars, or will be created in the future, will slow down the world's economic growth, meaning it will lower the price of crude oil. This means reducing the value of the most important commercial commodity of the oil-exporting countries of the Middle East, especially Iraq. For example, the reduction of any dollar in the price of a barrel of oil in global markets reduces more than $1.26 billion from Iraq's annual budget.

On the other hand, America's policy in the Middle East changes according to regional and international conditions, but there are some unchanging and strategic foundations that direct America's policy in the region. In this regard, Yadgar Siddiq Gallali believes that with some changes that change from one administration to another administration, but the unchanging elements in America's policy in the Middle East, we can say first: ensuring Israel's

security. Second: controlling energy sources, such as oil and gas and the Strait of Hormuz and oil pathways to the world, confronting terrorism and preventing the spread of nuclear weapons. Along with these unchanging strategies, the Trump administration primarily focuses on profit for its country, and a significant retreat is evident in the field of democracy. It can be said that this second Trump administration, like the first time, has clearly retreated from democracy in the Middle East and has placed its economic interests ahead of democratic principles, meaning it has placed economy and economic strategy before any other subject. This trend is not surprising; it is a continuation of the path they have called "America First," meaning it gives importance to subjects that bring profit to America, not re-establishing regimes from outside.

Generally, Trump's administration deals with the countries of the region in three different ways. It sees wealthy and oil-rich countries as strategic partners and friends and always looks for them to invest in America or buy goods from American companies, as it has done in the Arab Gulf. The second group are rebellious countries, such as Iran, Palestine, Sudan, Yemen, and these are always dealt with from the perspective of Israel's politics and security. The others, which could be Iraq, Egypt, Turkey, and North African countries, are not very much the concern of this administration; they have maintained a normal relationship and stability with them to some extent.

The Middle East Between America's Unchanging Foundations and War Developments

The new policy of the Trump administration and America towards the Middle East, considering Washington's unchanging strategic foundations and the developments regarding the results of the Iran-Israel war, leaves a significant impact on the economic, political, and security situation of Iraq and the Kurdistan Region. In this regard, Dr. Biner Kurdi regarding the results of the Iran-Israel war and its impact on Iraq, and the transformation of these new influences, believes that this transfor-mation is the result of confrontations between Iran and Israel-America, which could have consequences on Iraq's political, security, and strategic situation. Iran after the 12-day war is not the same Iran as before the 12-day war. After the events of October 7 and the collapse of armed groups close to Iran in the Middle East, and with these new developments, Iran is in a position that it has not seen itself at this level since the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran until now. Its hegemony has been reduced in the entire Middle East, and according to statements by high-ranking American officials, its nuclear facilities have been completely dismantled. In the short term, these events make Iran give more importance to the survival of its regime and protect itself from the possibility of the collapse of its political system. Therefore, its interventions could be limited and it may not be able to interfere in the region's affairs as it used to. The disappearance of Iranian proxy groups and their non-involvement in these latest developments reflect the reality that perhaps an understanding has

been created that they too do not want their fate to be like Hezbollah, Hamas, and to some extent the Houthis. These groups could limit their activities in the short term and cannot carry out military activities and actions as they used to. But this does not mean that in a medium and long-term direction, and in the possibility of Iran's strengthening from its current situation, these groups will remain in this state of disappearance.

Along with this view, the Israel-Iran war could be a practical test of Iran's influence and position in Iraq. In this center, Dr. Yassin Taha sheds light on the fact that in this crucial development that lasted 12 days, Iraqi Shia armed groups connected to Iran and its axis were not de-

stroyed, and also did not participate in the war and did not implement their threats to support Tehran. The barriers to these groups' participation in war are diverse and a mixture of: imbalance of power balance, security, political and financial risks, along with the existence of internal barriers (Sistani – Sadr). But the conclusions of this non-participation give the impression that Iran does not own the mobilizing decision inside Iraq, or after the collapse of the Tehran-Mediterranean axis, it can no longer take risks with Iraq, especially since there are strong currents among Iraqi Shia who believe Iraq's interests come before Iran's interests.

America's View of the Middle East and Its Impact on Iraq and the Kurdistan Region

Considering the common approaches between different American administrations, the new American administration and Trump's foreign policy perspective is based on not giving importance to regime change and spreading democracy. In this regard, Yadgar Siddiq Gallali believes that in the new policy of the Trump administration, other countries should pay money for America's protection regardless of the nature of their political system. He believes that giving importance to values weakens America; profit and national interest should come before anything else, meaning profit is the new priority of the Trump administration's work. Therefore, the Trump administration has made a real retreat from the issue of democracy in the Middle East. Its decisions and positions are not just a reflection of a pragmatic decision, but it views democracy as an unproductive issue and does not succeed in it, while it sees authoritarian regimes as more suitable partners for making agreements and implementing "unconditional" agreements. The same agreements it has concluded in Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Qatar are the best evidence. Those countries and the observations about them in terms of human rights are not a place of importance for Trump's new administration. This administration does not want to solve problems through direct military intervention in the Middle East, but should protect its economic interests. From the same visit he made to Saudi Arabia, he saw Syria's leader and presented an economic package, so that post-Assad Syria, which was destroyed, could be rebuilt again with Gulf money, and in the same way, he wants to put great pressure on Iran to force it into an agreement, so that with the least military pressure, he forces it into a conditional agreement.

However, this new approach has a direct impact on the international market of Iraq and the Kurdistan Region. Therefore, in response to the question of whether Iraq and the Kurdistan Region can maintain their position in the sphere of America's new policy in terms of economic strength and capability, Mohammed Hussein points out that Iraq and the Kurdistan Region are also not part of Trump's friends and enemies' sphere to a great extent. They are not among the countries that became the subject of Trump's problems and issues, because they are not a major commercial partner of America. In 2024, all of Iraq's exports to America were worth $7.6 billion in crude oil. Trump decided to impose

39% customs duty on all Iraqi goods, but exempted crude oil and energy from these customs. Iraq fortunately escaped Trump's customs war without any headache and fatigue. On the other hand, America's imports to Iraq are still not very much and are close to $1.7 billion, out of a total of more than $70 billion in imported goods and services. Therefore, we did not become part of the commercial war that Trump initially started with close friends like Canada, India, and the European Union. Iraq and Kurdistan also have nothing else besides oil for export; or if there is, it is so small and little that it does not reach 2% of all Iraq's exports, such as the pomegranate exports of Halabja and the packaged dates of the southern governorates. This oil is also mostly sold in Asia and Europe.

He also believes that American events directly affect Iraq's oil buyers, such as China, India, Europe, etc. If Trump's customs troubles and complications weaken the industrial sectors of these countries and close the doors of American markets to them, their demand for oil will also decrease.

This will lower oil prices and Iraq will suffer from financial shortage. If we look, America and China together make up 44% of the economic output of the entire world (26% and 18%). With India, they become 55% of the entire world. When these are subjected to troubles and confrontation and customs war, the entire world is affected with them. Therefore, every country is harmed by the troubles and complications that Trump's commercial and customs policies have created. It is still too early to say that America's economy, or the world's economy, have been subjected to decline due to these policies. The data for calculating America's gross product for the second quarter of 2025 has not been published, and it is not clear how the situation will be in China and other industrial countries. But what is clear and obvious is that these troubles, complications, and concerns that Trump has created will have their price and will not pass without harm.

Iran-Israel-America Conflict: Impact on Iraq and the Kurdish File in the Kurdistan Region

The direct threats and competition from America in Iraq to reduce Iran's influence and that of pro-Iranian groups, particularly Hashd al-Shaabi, leave behind assumptions of direct impact following the Iran-Israel war. In this context, developments and outcomes also have such an impact on the Kurdish file in the Kurdistan Region. Therefore, Dr. Yasin Taha emphasizes that during the conflicts of war, Shia groups still protected themselves from direct confrontation with America or Israel during the 12-day Israel-Iran war. Despite America attacking Fordo, there were no pro-Iranian armed forces against America at a time when they had previously threatened to retaliate. This could reduce American attention on them. However, in general, Shias feel a cold, unannounced cooling of the Trump administration's relations with Iraq. This further encourages suspicion and the envisioning of worst-case scenarios. What increases these suspicions further is that an acting official is still managing the affairs of the American embassy in Iraq, and Washington continues to delay appointing an am-

bassador to its embassy in Baghdad. According to some American researchers, the reason for America's cooling toward Iraq is that the Trump administration "views Iran in Iraq through the same lens," and also does not see investment in Iraq as important. Baghdad is even being tested to see how much it can help in implementing sanctions on Tehran. It has even reduced its NGO projects in Iraq to the lowest level. This could be preparation for greater pressure on Iraq and Shia forces.

In support of the views that America wants to distance itself from interference and discord in Iraq, Dr. Binar Kurdi believes that Iraq is both a gateway next to Iran and America's gateway into Iran. The strategic competition of both America and Iran to have greater hegemony in Iraq is a clear matter. If those groups loyal to Iran attempt to harm American interests and try to get closer to Tehran, becoming a threat and danger to the region's security and stability, this is a red line according to senior American officials and the White House. In this situation, if America takes action and wants to target

these groups, this becomes a cause of political and strategic weakening of these groups, which could indirectly lead to some strengthening of the region if they can deal with a weaker Iraq with a unified front and one voice. However, if these groups have reorganized themselves and there is some form of backdoor diplomacy between them and America, which does not want turmoil in Iraq, this changes the balance of power and the supporters of these groups could become stronger politically and in terms of power.

Iraq and the Kurdistan Region: A Substitute Project for the American Administration

Iraq and the Kurdistan Region, in the face of this new American economic policy before and after the Iran-Israel war, are confronted with the assumption of producing broader cooperation and more intense political and economic relations. From this perspective, Yadgar Sadiq Gallali highlights that Iraq has an important geopolitical position in the global energy market as the second-largest oil producer

in OPEC. This creates favorable ground for attracting the attention of major American companies to make large investments in Iraq. Last year in April, Iraqi Prime Minister Sudani visited the United States and signed several major contracts with the previous American administration in the fields of electricity, energy, oil infrastructure, transportation, industry, and public works with American companies. In practice, some of these are now operational in Iraq, working in gas, oil, and electricity transmission, while some remain pending. It is important for Iraq to tell this new administration that we have done this and will continue, and Iraq provides favorable ground and gives you opportunities, and we need this. This step taken by the Kurdistan Region's Prime Minister last month after his visit to America, we cannot read as anything other than a step in the direction that the Kurdistan Region tells America, similar to Gulf countries, that the ground for investment by American companies is also favorable in Kurdistan, so they can come and invest billions of dollars in the energy sector. At the same

time, the sector that Iraq desperately needs is gas. Gas supply and electricity investment are two matters where America pressures Iraq not to import gas and electricity from Iran anymore and not to continue with this work, so that its pressures can be effective. Because Iraq's dependence on Iranian energy and Iraq's lack of independence had trapped it, and America's pressures could steal from obtaining dollars through that route and save itself from sanctions. Therefore, this step by the Kurdistan Region is parallel to America's new pressures and distancing from Iran. In this direction, they must invest in the Kurdistan Region, and their need for gas need not be from Iran—it can become an alternative to Iran and provide gas for the region and Iraq as well.

Apart from this, Mohammed Hussein reiterates that in normal circumstances, the Kurdistan Region, like Iraq and within Iraq, faces the consequences of the Trump administration's trade policy. According to Iraq's constitution, the federal Iraqi state's economic, commercial, and customs policy is also the framework for the Kurdistan Region's operation. Within this framework, we can understand the opportunities and challenges that have emerged for Kurdistan, Iraq, and the entire region, or may come in the near and distant future. What is observed is that the Kurdistan Region has made an initial effort to continue the trend of rebelling against Iraq's economic and commercial frameworks. Recent contracts with companies like Miran Energy and Western Zagros indicate such rebellion. At least this is a new round of the regional government's rebellion against the Iraqi framework, and it is not clear how far it will go. We have seen the rulings of Iraq's Federal Supreme Court and the International Chamber of Commerce arbitration court in Paris, what limits

they have set for the region's financial independence or independent oil export from Kurdistan. It is still too early to evaluate the consequences of this new round of conflict and the region's rebellion against the Iraqi framework. What the Iraqi side has done so far has been very harmful and painful for the people of Kurdistan. The market, economy, and private sector of Kurdistan are now paying the price. At least currently, the regional government and all its employees, farmers, and private sector producers (those who own industrial, agricultural, and livestock projects) have come under pressure from the Iraqi federal government. On one hand, salaries are not sent to them; on the other hand, it does not allow their agricultural and industrial products to reach the markets of southern and central Iraq.

Moreover, Mohammed Hussein believes that Kurdistan's economic situation changes under a set of political, administrative, and internal Iraqi dynamics, regardless of the circumstances. These have little connection to the new situation that the Trump administration has created in America and the world. Any effort to use Trump administration complications for strengthening the Kurdistan Region's position at the expense of the Iraqi federal state, as we saw in the recent gas contract drama, is a great risk to the Kurdistan Region's stability. The nature of the gas industry is such that it requires large capital, long-term buyers, and a stable market. This does not develop and grow in Kurdistan if the Iraqi state is an enemy. Today's Iraq is different from that of 2007. Therefore, it is important not to put all of Kurdistan at risk for temporary and small gains through some mistaken and reckless interpretations. Opportunities benefit the Kurdistan Region when they also open the door to the interests and friendship of the Iraqi federal government, not by creating enmity.

From the Iran-Israel War to a Regional Economic Agreement

Within the framework of new economic and political developments after the Iran-Israel war and the Trump administration's dealings after concluding agreements on oil and gas, what strong impact does this create on the relations between the "Coordination Framework" government and the Kurdistan Regional Government? In this regard, Dr. Binar Kurdi points out that the issue of oil, gas, and trade is an important pillar of the Trump administration and American foreign policy. Donald Trump has bet on conventional American intervention policies in security, democracy, politics, etc. What is important for Trump's current administration is stability in oil and gas prices in global markets and concluding major contracts like those with Saudi Arabia, Qatar, UAE, and other countries. In the case of greater commercial gains by the "Coordination Framework" government, this could lead to further strengthening of Baghdad. But does Iran also approve of the "Coordination Framework" government's excessive closeness to America? Does Iraq want to maintain the balance of its relations or not? The regional government needs to find its place in America's current foreign policy, but it should keep in mind the real-

ity that Trump turns his back on his closest friends for his own interests, including his complete non-support of Netanyahu regarding his demands concerning Iran.

Within the same framework of developments, Dr. Yasin Taha believes that natural gas contracts are a main cause of complicating the relations between the Kurdistan Region and Baghdad, but Shia parties try not to make this an excuse openly. The federal oil ministry, which initially strongly opposed the contracts, later had to give an explanation that they are not generally against investment with American companies, but insist that contracts should be through them. He also believes that the contracts that have been made have two problems for Shia forces: on one side, they are with America and somehow see legitimization of the UAE and Saudi Arabia by creating a position with the Trump administration; on the other side, they are against their centralist view for managing the oil and gas sector. This is apart from the fact that the federal court decision precedes, which invalidated the region's oil and gas law.

If there is no American intervention and pressure, then Shia parties will not overlook these contracts and will make them a subject of dispute. The first impact of this complication of relations appeared in the file of regional government employees' salaries, which was suspended. This situation has opened the door to other developments in the complication of relations between both sides, especially when some Shia forces claim that with the money from these contracts and through the available budget, some Kurdish sides are lobbying against them in America. Trump administration ministers welcomed the agreement concluded between two American companies and the Kurdistan Regional Government of Iraq, on the basis that this agreement strengthens investment opportunities for American companies in the Middle East as part of the maximum pressure strategy on Tehran. The agreement helps reduce Iraq's dependence on Iranian gas. There is a possibility that the United States, very likely some other international or regional parties, will try to mediate between

Baghdad and Erbil to reach a temporary solution similar to previous mediation and intervention in similar issues. In this way, a temporary solution might again be created that satisfies all parties from above, but without oil and gas law and constitutional resolution, those temporary solutions are one-sided and not radical.

The American Administration Between a United Iraq and Kurdistan Region Agreements

America's dealings regarding oil, gas, and dollars with Iraq leave a direct impact on the Kurdistan Region. Although America does not yet deal directly and outside a united Iraq with the region's oil and gas file, after the regional government's agreement with two companies close to America, suspicions about this file have increased. In this regard, Mohammed Hussein believes there is a major issue between America and Iraq. What exists is that Americans were displeased that their dollars were going from Iraq to sanctioned countries and entities, and for this they helped Iraqis themselves and Iraq's central bank develop

the country's banking system and gradually eliminate these American concerns. According to their assessments and official statements, American Treasury officials are satisfied with these Iraqi side efforts. Trump's administration, along with not wanting oil prices in global markets to rise so high as to create inflation problems domestically in America, depends on the continuation of a stable Iraq that puts about 3.3 million barrels of oil daily on the market. One way for American dollars to go to sanctioned countries through Iraq was Iraq's purchase of Iranian gas and electricity. Relying on American grants and permits, Iraqis used several methods to collect Iran's dollars in an Iraqi commercial bank account and later spend them to buy goods and medical needs for Iran itself. It appears Americans will no longer renew these permits and grants for Iraq. Therefore, it is not clear until when and how the Iraqi government can buy Iranian gas and electricity, although it desperately needs it. This is a problem for Iraq, not a problem between Iraq and America. Iraqis themselves must solve

it by finding other sources of gas and electricity and bringing more investment to Iraq's gas fields.

Also, regarding the Kurdistan Region, Yadgar Sadiq Gallali believes these steps are parallel to the pressures America puts on Iraq for energy independence. The efforts it makes for the Kurdistan Region's agreement with the federal government and energy and economic development should not be seen in the region as free support that will be outside the framework of the Iraqi government. We know the Kurdistan Region has been a beneficial ally to America and has been dealt with in the same way, but not as an independent entity. This means you have always been a beneficial ally, especially in counterterrorism and energy, and even American companies in the Kurdistan Region, but you are still within the framework of Iraq. In the past 27-28 months, this administration and the previous one in America have asked Iraq and the region to sit together at the negotiation table and resolve their issues within the framework of Iraqi law and constitution. Therefore, America deals with the

Kurdistan Region within the framework of Iraq, and any support must be within that framework. Therefore, the Kurdistan Region needs to resolve its tensions with Iraq. America wants this too and demands stability. Even with Iran, this new Trump administration's first action has been direct and indirect negotiations. This means America wants to distance itself from direct confrontation in the region and resolve issues for economic benefit. In this regard, the Kurdistan Region can also deal in this context, but within the framework of Iraq, and resolve issues by benefiting from international relations, especially America, within the framework of constitution and law with Iraq.

On the other hand, the pressures that the American administration has put on Iraq, especially regarding the dollar issue and dealing with Iran, whether this has been beneficial or a "reform development factor" for Iraqis. Mohammed Hussein emphasizes that this forced the Baghdad government to make many reforms in the banking sector and international commercial financing

system. For example, previously cash dollars were sold to merchants from a central bank window, or given to several suspicious banks that were all closed for dollar smuggling. Now several specialized private banks directly finance Iraqi merchants' imports through intermediary banks within the framework of the international SWIFT system. This ended the organized corruption that used to gain tens of millions of dollars daily from dollar-dinar exchange and forging import documents. Without American pressures, it would have been impossible even in dreams to imagine Baghdad's ruling class making these reforms. These same American pressures caused the oil ministry and Iraqi government to invest in oil fields to end the burning of associated gas, but rather use it for electricity generation. In recent years, they have made comprehensive contracts worth tens of billions of dollars "for oil production, recovery and use of associated gas, and then electricity generation" with Total Energy, BP, UAE's Hilal, and several other international companies. Without these American pressures, it would have been impossible for these Iraqi achievements to be realized.

Therefore, between economic efforts and the development of Iraq and Kurdistan Region disagreements, and in Iran's presence, America somehow looks at Iraq's partnership to establish a stable situation with the Kurdistan Region. Accordingly, Americans are not openly with those contentious disputes that now exist between Erbil and Baghdad. Perhaps through their embassy, or several levels of the State Department, they ask both governments to resolve. Their clear position is with cooperation and collaboration between Erbil and Baghdad. However, if Erbil and Baghdad themselves do not want this cooperation to happen, one should not expect much from the Trump administration. They will not come by force to impose solutions on any party. As some people in Kurdistan have mistakenly understood, they will not come to impose solutions and special situations on Baghdad for Erbil's sake. If the matter is interests, oil, and gas, then in southern Iraq they get much more than what exists in the Kurdistan Region. They see Iraq as a market of 46 million people, where 6 million are with the regional government and 40 are with the Iraqi federal government. It is important that the position of some people in the Trump administration, or cheap lobbyists in Washington, does not create wrong interpretations in Kurdistan. I repeat, the Kurdistan Region through cooperation and agreement with Baghdad can reduce most of the risks it has in developing its oil and gas sector. By creating common interests with Baghdad, it can better and faster advance its economy, ensure stability and sustainable development, and finally end today's uneven situation. The regional government's strength point is in Baghdad, in unity and cooperation among its political forces, not in Washington, Ankara, and other places.

Iraq and the Kurdistan Region in the Conflicts Between War and Ceasefire

The developments following the Iran-Israel war have created a significant impact on Iraq and Shiite groups, while in terms of America's direct readiness to stop the war and

calm the situation, the Kurdish card might be viewed as an alternative. Therefore, in response to the assumption of escalation and expansion of this relationship, Dr. Yasin Taha believes there is a statement from the US Secretary of State that emphasizes the protection of the Kurdistan Region's framework within Iraq's federalism without reference to any details. This statement later came under the shadow of the Israel-America war, and no movement followed in the file of withholding the Region's salaries, which creates major questions about the future phase.

Iraq has not taken many steps in the field of distancing itself from Iran and has not given such a pretext to fall under America's wrath, so it cannot be predicted that Kurdistan will become Baghdad's alternative. Also, for Americans, working in Baghdad is more important for guaranteeing Iraq's distancing from Iranian hegemony and protecting Israel's security, and any American vacuum in Iraq would be filled with Iranian hegemony, which is not a good choice for America.

Also, regarding the possibility of Iran and America's rapprochement concerning the ceasefire and later Iran's nuclear agreement, and the change in America's perspective toward Iraq, and then the assumption of that viewpoint that places the Kurds in a framework tied to the future of an Iraq close to Iran, Dr. Yasin Taha reaffirms that in recent years, many American statements and announcements emphasize the importance of protecting Iraq's federalism and stress the Region's role in that federal system for maintaining balance. From this perspective, it can be said that the importance of the Kurdistan Region to America is always greater than within Iraq's framework, which America cannot abandon due to the enormous expenses it has incurred in it. Additionally, abandoning and forgetting is problematic for America's allies in Jordan, Israel, and Gulf countries. This is apart from the fact that Iran is ready to fill the American vacuum similar to 2001 and Obama's era.

Regarding the economic aspect and post-Iran-Israel war developments in Iraq, Dr. Binar Kurdi believes that Donald Trump in his statements talks about wanting an Iran that has a good and stable situation. He currently appears not to want direct confrontational war with Iran. America's internal situation and his voter base have largely accepted this direction. There is a minority that thinks differently, but they have limited influence on America's foreign policies and Trump. At the same time, the existence of nuclear weapons is a red line for Washington, Trump, and Westerners. If Iran accepts and agrees to this condition, rapprochement and the possibility of agreement can exist. But even in that situation, Iraq remains a strategically and geopolitically important country for America.

The rapprochement between Iran and America could advance Iraq-America relations as well, and Iraq's position as a strategic gateway for both America and Iraq could be enhanced somewhat more. The Kurdistan Region has continuously been a power-balancing factor in Iraq and an ally in the war on terror and the overthrow of the Baath regime. Relations may see short-term ups and downs, but in the long run, it appears these relations are strategic and comprehensively important.

The Future
Submission Guidelines

The Future is a quarterly policy magazine published by the Center for Future Studies (CFS), focusing on analytical perspectives on Kurdish affairs and the political dynamics of Iraq, Iran, Turkey, and Syria. We seek thoughtful, forward-looking policy papers that offer deep insights while remaining accessible to a broad audience of decision-makers and engaged citizens.

Article Requirements

Topics

We welcome submissions that analyze current and emerging issues related to:

- Kurdish political, economic, and social developments.

- Regional dynamics in Iraq, Iran, Turkey, and Syria with relevance to Kurdish affairs.

- Security challenges and strategic considerations.

- Governance and institutional development.

- Economic policies and opportunities.

- Cultural and identity politics.

- International relations affecting the Kurdish regions.

Format

- Length: 2,500-3,000 words.

- Language: English (clear, concise, and accessible to non-academic readers).

- Style: Analytical rather than purely descriptive, with an emphasis on policy implications.

- Originality: Content must be exclusive to The Future and not previously published elsewhere.

Submission Process

Initial Pitch

Submit a 250-word proposal that includes:

- Working title.

- Central thesis and key arguments.

- Policy relevance and significance.

- Methodology and sources (if applicable).

- Your expertise on the topic.

Full Submissions

If your pitch is accepted, your final submission should include:

- Complete manuscript (properly formatted and proofread).

- 2-3 sentence author biography.

- Professional headshot.

Required Elements

All submissions must include:

- Clear thesis statement and policy recommendations.

- Evidence-based analysis with proper citations.

- References to all facts and data with hyperlinks to credible sources.

- If using data, provide raw data in Excel format with proper attribution.

- At least one original insight or perspective not commonly found in mainstream analysis.

Editorial Standards

- Factual accuracy is paramount; all claims must be verifiable.

- Analysis should be balanced and nuanced, avoiding partisan rhetoric.

- Forward-looking perspectives are encouraged, with attention to future implications.

- Avoid slander, defamation, and unsubstantiated allegations.

- Citations should follow Chicago Manual of Style format.

Visual Elements

We encourage authors to suggest:

- Infographics that illustrate key points.

- Maps relevant to the analysis.

- Charts or graphs that present data effectively.

- High-quality images (with proper permissions/credits).

Review Process

- Initial review: 2-3 weeks from submission.

- If accepted: Editorial feedback provided with revision requests.

- Final review: 1-2 weeks after receiving revisions.

- Publication: In the next available quarterly issue.

Contact Information

Submit your pitches via email to: editor@kfuture.media

Tourism and Its Economic and Social Importance in Iraq: A Case Study of Sulaimaniya Provincein Kurdistan Region

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