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Shadows of Drones:

Escalating Risks as Drone Attacks Test Kurdistan's Stability Amid Geopolitical Turmoil

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Editorial

Where are the conflicts going?



By | *Dr. Salar Othman*

The tension hangs heavy across Kurdistan, Iraq, and Iran, as recent attacks have plunged the region into a state of unease. This volatile climate, rife with uncertainty, not only raises security concerns but also threatens economic stability.

The sheer scale of the attacks, targeting vast geographical areas and pursuing far-reaching goals, suggests the involvement of major political and security players, potentially setting the stage for significant developments.

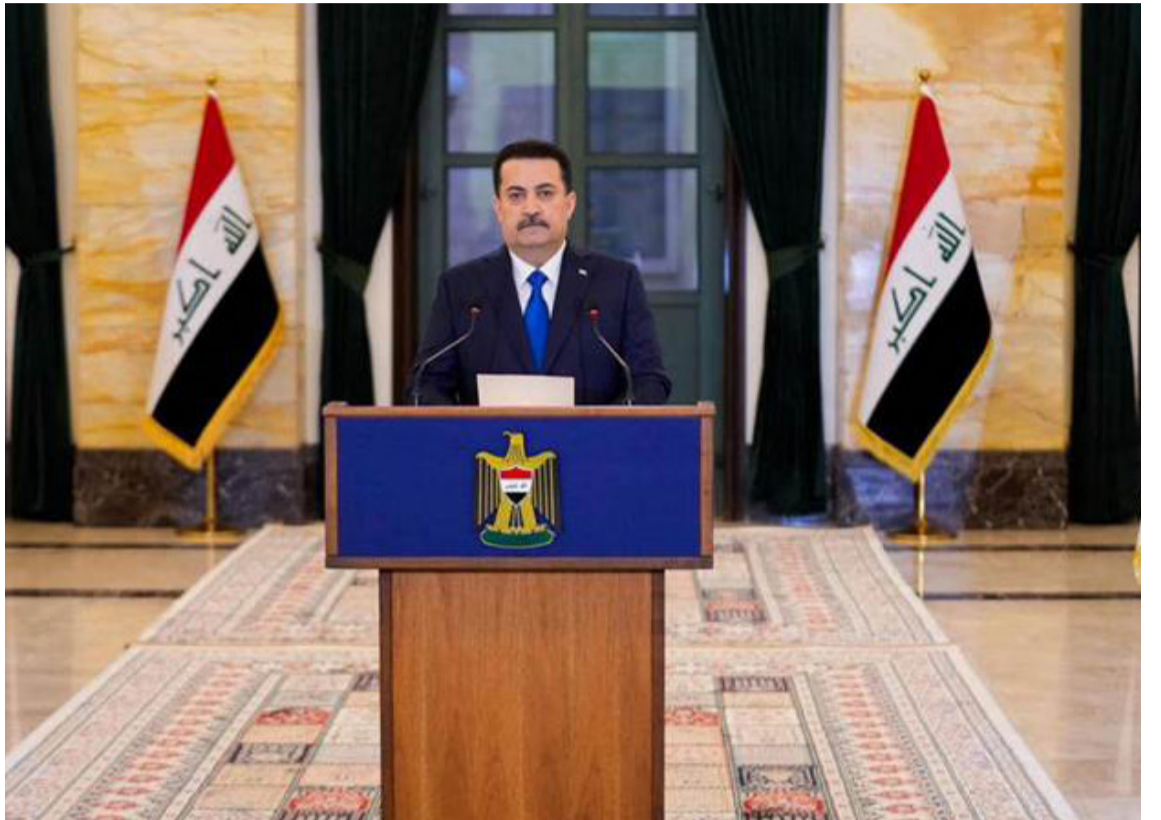
Beyond the immediate violence, broader dynamics are at play. Iraq and the Kurdistan Region are, in a sense, a global chessboard where countries like Iran and Turkey engage in complex maneuvers. It is precisely in this context that I urge the Kurdistan Region to adopt a cautious and vigilant approach, anticipating the unexpected.

The reasons for this stance are twofold. Firstly, power within Iraq remains dispersed, often residing in the hands of illegal, non-state actors who operate with impunity, capable of threats, attacks, and instigation.

Secondly, the Kurdistan Region itself lacks internal unity, even on the fundamental issue of defending its autonomy, its regional government, and its legitimate institutions. (Doubt is warranted at this stage!)

This discord is further exacerbated by the Iraqi government's recent actions towards the Kurdistan Region, its institutions, and the rights, salaries, and lives of its citizens is unprecedented and stands in stark contrast to the actions of any responsible state towards its citizens.

Iraqi Security Disputes Pentagon Claims, PM Sudani Urges Respect for Sovereignty Amidst Coalition Strikes



Iraqi Security Denies Involvement in US Attack on Hashdi Shaabi

The Iraqi Security Information Cell refuted claims made by Pentagon spokesman Patrick S. Ryder regarding the collaboration between Iraqi security forces and the United States in a recent attack on a Hashdi Shaabi (Popular Mobilization Forces) headquarters in Baghdad.

In contradiction to Ryder's statement asserting cooperation with Iraqi partners, the Iraqi Security Information Cell firmly stated that they had no prior knowledge of the US attack. The Pentagon spokesman had mentioned, "We will continue to work closely with Iraqi partners, and we know that Iraqi security forces at times continue to assist us in locating these groups," expressing gratitude for the alleged support.

The incident occurred on January 4, 2023, at 12:00 pm Baghdad time when US forces

conducted an attack on Mush-taq Jawad Kazim, also known as Abu Taqwa, resulting in his and his deputy's demise. The Iraqi security media cell categorically denied any coordination with Washington in this operation.

Prime Minister Sudani Warns of Coalition Attacks

Iraqi Prime Minister Muhammed Shia Sudani issued a warning about the dangers posed by coalition attacks on Hashdi Shaabi headquarters. Speaking about the presence of coalition forces in Iraq, he emphasized that such attacks are terrifying and stated that the coalition's presence should end once the excuses for their deployment cease.

Sudani, addressing a ceremony commemorating the anniversary of the killing of

Qassem Soleimani and his companions, asserted the government's capability and readiness to make decisions safeguarding Iraq's sovereignty and stability.

"No one can violate Iraqi sovereignty, and only the government can enforce the law," Sudani declared, condemning the coalition's attack on Hashdi Shaabi headquarters as a dangerous act.

The recent drone strike targeted the headquarters of the 12th Brigade of the Nujaba Movement in Baghdad. Media sources affiliated with Hashdi Shaabi reported casualties, with three leaders killed and six others wounded in the attack. The incident further escalates tensions in the region, raising concerns about the implications of such coalition actions on Iraq's internal stability and sovereignty.

Shadows of Drones: Escalating Risks as Drone Attacks Test Kurdistan's Stability Amid Geopolitical Turmoil

Stark Warning: Anticipating Future Attacks, Calls for U.S. Intervention and No-Fly Zone Reinforcement to Safeguard Kurdistan

The escalating conflict in Iraq poses a significant threat to the Kurdistan Region and regional stability. International pressure and coordinated efforts are crucial to de-escalate tensions, protect civilians, and address the underlying political and military dynamics fueling the attacks.

- **Surge in Militia Attacks:** Since October 2023, over 150 attacks targeting US and coalition forces, civilian buildings, and Peshmerga bases have been reported across Iraq and Syria.

- **Targets in Kurdistan:** Kurdistan has witnessed several drone attacks, including attempts on Erbil International Airport and the Peshmerga headquarters in Pirmam.

- **International Response:** The US military has retaliated against armed groups, launching targeted strikes on Hezbollah and Nujaba movement positions.

- **Iraqi Government Stance:** While Iraq condemns the attacks, it avoids directly criticizing Hashdi Shaabi groups and calls US counter-strikes violations of sovereignty.

- **Kurdistan's Call for Action:** The Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) blames the Iraqi government for failing to prevent attacks and urges stronger international protection.

- **Regional Risks:** The escalation threatens Iraq's stability, potentially forcing a US intervention and fueling further chaos.

The Kurdistan Region stands at a critical juncture, grappling with a multifaceted crisis fueled by escalating militia attacks, geopolitical complexities, and the ominous specter of drone warfare. The recent surge in armed militia assaults on the Kurdistan Region has prompted a call to action.

In an exclusive interview with the Kurdish media, an Iraqi opposition leader underscored the urgent need for transformative measures within Iraq to restore stability. He drew a compelling link between recent militia attacks on U.S.

interests and those targeting the Kurdistan Region, highlighting the intricate dynamics at play. As the U.S. military responds to these threats, Israel simultaneously targets Hezbollah, accentuating the interconnectedness of regional conflicts.

Delving into the historical context, the opposition leader traced the Iraqi government's origins to militia groups, a factor perpetuating a series of administrations undermining Kurdish decision-making in Baghdad. The marginalized Sunnis, weakened Shiite voice, and unchecked militia control underscore the precarious state of Iraq's governance, justice, and financial institutions.

Issuing a stark warning to the Iraqi populace, he predicted further attacks, potentially rekindling terrorism, and chaos. He emphasized the looming threat prompting U.S. intervention and proposed reinstating the no-fly zone, fortifying the Kurdistan Region under international coalition auspices.

Former U.S. National Security Advisor John Bolton echoed these concerns, highlighting the persistent threat armed groups pose to Kurdistan's stability. Criticizing the Biden administration's response, Bolton called for increased pressure on the Iraqi government and allies to curb proxy armed groups.

The crisis deepened on December 30, 2023, when two drone bombers targeted a Kurdistan Peshmerga forces headquarters at the Pirmam-Erbil border. Although no casualties were reported, the incident intensified tensions. Prime Minister Masrour Barzani condemned the attack, calling it a terrorist act. He urged Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia Sudani to take swift action, initiating a comprehensive investigation.

Simultaneously, forces linked to the Hashdi Shaabi Board evacuated their Baghdad headquarters due to fears of repeated bombings. The killing of Abu Taqwa, commander of the 12th Brigade of the Nujaba



ba Movement, in a drone strike further heightened tensions. The U.S. military's drone attacks on Hezbollah battalions and the Nujaba movement's headquarters underscored the intricate geopolitical turn.

The Joint Network of Kurdistan Women's Organizations (JWO) joined the chorus of condemnation, denouncing drone attacks as a violation of the region's sovereignty. Urging the Iraqi federal government to prevent such assaults, the JWO warned of dire consequences if necessary, measures were not taken.

As the Kurdistan Region grapples with the escalating crisis, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) reported several drone attacks. Most attempts were thwarted, but the blame was attributed to the federal government for not preventing these assaults.

On December 2, 2024, a drone bomb aimed at the international coalition's military base at Erbil International Airport was intercepted. Another attempt on December 31, 2023, was thwarted. The Kurdistan Peshmerga forces headquarters in the Pirmam-Erbil border was targeted on December 30, 2023, causing no casualties.

While the federal government condemns the attacks, labeling them as terrorism, it refrains from assigning blame within the Hashdi Shaabi circle. The government characterizes U.S. attacks as violations of Iraqi sovereignty, adding a layer of complexity to an already intricate situation.

Understanding the Historical Context:

To comprehend the gravity of the situation, it's crucial to delve into the historical

context that has shaped the current geopolitical landscape of the Kurdistan Region. In his interview, the Iraqi opposition leader traced the roots of the Iraqi government to militia groups. This historical underpinning has far-reaching consequences, as successive administrations have actively undermined Kurdish decision-making in Baghdad.

The marginalization of Sunnis, weakening of the Shiite voice, and the unchecked influence of militias over governance, justice, and financial institutions have created a combustible mix. This has not only fueled internal strife within Iraq but has also paved the way for external actors.

The Interconnected Nature of Regional Conflicts:

The Iraqi leader highlighted that recent militia attacks on U.S. interests in Iraq are intertwined with the assaults on the Kurdistan Region. The U.S. military's response and Israel's simultaneous targeting of Hezbollah underscore the intricate dynamics at play in the Middle East. The fallout from one conflict spills into another, creating a chain reaction of violence and geopolitical maneuvering.

Former U.S. National Security Advisor John Bolton expanded on this interconnected nature, pointing to the influence of "Ayatollahs" as a driving force behind regional tensions.

U.S. Response and the Danger to Kurdistan's Stability:

Bolton's critique of the Biden administration's response sheds light on the

complexities faced by the U.S. in the region. Reluctance to confront the "ayatollahs" directly and a perceived lack of commitment to defend and protect the Peshmerga forces have left a void that armed groups are exploiting.

The U.S. military's drone attacks on Hezbollah battalions and the Nujaba movement's headquarters signify an attempt to disrupt the influence of proxy armed groups. However, as tensions escalate, the danger to the Kurdistan Region's stability becomes increasingly palpable.

Drone Warfare and its Ominous Shadow:

The use of drones in the recent attacks, notably the two drone bombers targeting Kurdistan Peshmerga forces headquarters, introduces a new dimension to the conflict. The precision and versatility of drones make them a potent tool for armed groups, threatening not only military installations but also civilian structures.

The Kurdistan Regional Government's assertion that most drone attacks were successfully thwarted indicates the region's resilience. However, the blame attributed to the federal government for failing to prevent these assaults adds a layer of complexity to the crisis.

Prime Minister Masrour Barzani's condemnation of the terrorist attack and his urgent call for action from Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia Sudani highlight the gravity of the situation. The evacuation of Hashdi Shaabi forces from their headquarters in Baghdad, coupled with the killing of Abu Taqwa in a

drone strike, further underscored the tensions on the ground.

The Federal Government's Conundrum:

The federal government's condemnation of the attacks as terrorism while refraining from assigning blame within the Hashdi Shaabi circle adds a layer of ambiguity. Labeling U.S. attacks as violations of Iraqi sovereignty further complicates the response, creating a conundrum for the Iraqi government in managing internal and external pressures.

Navigating the Uncertain Future

In this swirling vortex of geopolitical tensions and drone warfare, the Kurdistan Region finds itself at a crossroads. The region's stability is being tested, and the international community must grapple with the complexities of regional conflicts and the evolving nature of warfare.

As the fate of Kurdistan hangs in the balance, urgent and coordinated action is paramount. The international coalition's role in fortifying the region takes on added significance. The need to address the root causes of internal strife, marginalization, and the unchecked influence of armed groups is as crucial as responding to immediate security threats.

As drones cast their foreboding shadow over the Kurdistan Region's skies, the region teeters on the brink of an uncertain future. The international community's response will shape not only the destiny of Kurdistan but also the broader landscape of Middle Eastern geopolitics.

Economic Turbulence: A Recap of Key Events in Kurdistan Region and Iraq in 2023



The economic landscape of the Kurdistan Region and Iraq witnessed significant shifts in 2023, marked by the suspension of oil exports, approval of the federal budget for 2023-2025, dinar volatility against the dollar, and measures taken by the Central Bank of Iraq influenced by U.S. Treasury decisions.

Suspension of Kurdistan's Oil Exports:

The cessation of oil exports from the Kurdistan Region cast a ripple effect on global oil prices, despite its relatively small contribution to the world market. While Kurdistan supplied about 0.5% of

the global demand for crude oil, the impact on oil prices underscored the interconnectedness of regional economies.

In 2023, faced with challenges in the oil and gas sector, Kurdistan grappled with Baghdad's refusal to recognize the constitutional rights of its people. Despite a slight drop in global oil prices compared to the previous year, Kurdistan's oil, if exported, could have fetched an average of approximately \$71 per barrel. The long halt in oil exports resulted in an estimated loss of \$7 to 8 billion, reflecting the economic toll on the region.

Prospects for

Resuming Oil Exports:

Prime Minister Masrour Barzani addressed the prospects of resuming oil exports during a meeting with BBC journalist Maryam Moshiri in November 2023. Barzani emphasized the need to determine the reasonable cost of oil production in Kurdistan before exports can resume. Additionally, a financial dispute with Turkey, obligated to pay \$1.4 billion to Iraq, adds complexity to the situation.

Federal Budget Approval and Its Implications:

Despite the suspension of oil exports in

2023, the Iraqi government, heavily reliant on oil revenues, approved a three-year budget, allocating 12.67% to the Kurdistan Region. However, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) faced delays and challenges in receiving its budget share, leading to loans instead of timely disbursements. The KRG's share for July, August, and September was not delivered as stipulated by the budget law.

Dinar Volatility Against the Dollar:

Throughout 2023, the dinar experienced continued instability against the dollar, despite efforts by the Iraqi government and the Central Bank to

stabilize its value. Various factors, including U.S. Treasury decisions, sanctions on Iraqi banks, and rumors of reduced cash flow from the U.S., contributed to the fluctuations. The black market's influence, especially in importing goods from Iran, further strained the official exchange rate.

Expert Opinions on Dinar's Future:

Economists provided diverse perspectives on the future of the dinar. While some anticipated challenges for the U.S. dollar, others predicted a decline in the dinar's value. An economist highlighted the difficulty of the dollar fall-

ing below 150,000 dinars in the short term due to Iraq's trade with Iran. Conversely, another Iraqi foresaw a continued decline in the value of the dollar in early 2024.

The economic landscape of the Kurdistan Region and Iraq in 2023 showcased the intricate web of global and regional dynamics. The suspension of oil exports, budgetary challenges, currency fluctuations, and geopolitical influences collectively painted a complex picture. As the region navigates these economic challenges, the road ahead remains uncertain, with the resolution of financial disputes and geopolitical factors playing a crucial role in shaping the future.

Price Adjustment to Benefit Citizens: Kurdistan PM Announces Reduction in Bread Cost

Kurdistan's Prime Minister Masrour Barzani earns widespread acclaim for his proactive decision to reduce the prices of bread and Samoon, bringing economic relief to citizens and bolstering support for local bakeries.

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In a move aimed at alleviating economic burdens on citizens, Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) Prime Minister Masrour Barzani has decided to reduce the price of 10 loaves of bread and Samoon, one of the most widespread breads, to 1,000 Iraqi dinars. This decision, set to take effect at the beginning of next week, has been widely welcomed by both bakeries and citizens across the region.

The decision mandates that bakeries provide 10 loaves of bread and Samoon to citizens for 1,000 dinars, with each loaf weighing a minimum of 95 grams. The same pricing adjustment applies to Samoon, ensuring citizens can purchase 10 Samoon for 1,000 dinars.

Previously, the economic challenges stemming from increased electricity, flour, and fuel prices led to a reduction in the quantity offered for the same price. Now, this decision seeks to strike a balance that benefits both citizens and the propri-



etors of bakeries.

Nabaz Abdul Hamid, the Mayor of Erbil, highlighted key factors contributing to this decision. He noted a significant 50% reduction in electricity prices and government assistance to bakeries in obtaining flour and liquid gas. Addressing concerns about the financial impact on business owners, he assured them that various measures had

been taken in their favor. These include a 50% reduction in electricity rent for bakeries, access to cheaper flour from a local brewery in Erbil province, and the provision of liquefied petroleum gas at a more affordable rate.

The Mayor emphasized the importance of compliance with the decision, cautioning that legal action would be taken against any bakery failing

to adhere to the pricing adjustments. The decision, issued by the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, has been communicated to the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Commerce for implementation across all provinces and autonomous administrations in the Kurdistan Region.

Speaking at a press conference, Mayor Nabaz Abdul Hamid stated that

the decision would be officially announced, emphasizing the need for swift implementation beginning the upcoming week. He clarified that the initial price of 10 loaves of bread and Samoon was set at 1,000 dinars, but subsequent increases were necessitated by rising flour and oil prices.

This pricing adjustment aligns with the gov-

ernment's commitment to supporting citizens during challenging economic times and ensuring fair practices within the bakery sectors. As the decision takes effect, it is anticipated to bring relief to both consumers and business owners, fostering economic stability in the Kurdistan Region.

Erbil becomes city of 1 million oak trees

The city of Erbil has embarked on an ambitious plan to plant one million oak trees within the next five years. Hasar Organization has initiated the project with 300,000 trees already planted.

Ghashbin Idris, Head of Hasar Organization, stated that the organization in collaboration with Rwanga Foundation and the Kurdistan Regional Government's (KRG) Ministry of Municipality and Tourism has plan to plant one million oak trees which is dedicated to enhancing the lush greenery lining the 120 Metre Road that encircles the city of Erbil.

In the first phase, 300,000 trees have already been



planted, Idris revealed, stating that the organiza-

tion has introduced a water treatment system that

would make these trees receive nourishment from treated water sourced from the neighboring communities.

Engineer Mohammed Yousif, told the KRG website that "the trees will be irrigated using a system of recycled and treated wastewater, in addition to utilizing solar energy to generate the required electricity."

He added that 'with this advanced system, we can produce 300 to 340 cubic meters of irrigation water daily.'

The organization has gathered oak seeds from the mountains of the Kurdistan Region, particularly, Penjwin, Sidakan and Shaqlawa.

Kurdistan Delegation Represented Iraq at Global Refugee Forum

Kurdistan Region's delegation led by Reber Ahmed, Kurdistan Region Government (KRG)'s Interior Minister, accompanied by Alan Hama Saeed, Minister of Education, represented Federal Iraq at the Global Forum for Refugees held in Geneva, Switzerland in the mid-December 2023. Upon his attendance in the Forum, the Minister posted a statement on his social media account on (X) emphasizing Kurdistan Region's commitment to promoting cooperation with international community, sharing insights, and advancing solutions for the global refugee crisis, especially those in Iraq, including Kurdistan Region.

The KRG's Interior Minister Rebar Ahmed said in a speech he delivered at the Forum that Kurdistan Region has proudly succeeded in hosting refugees, highlighting that Kurdistan Region has provided security and support to the refugees in order to stay in the country, and showcasing the achievements accomplished in Kurdistan Region in this regard as a source of pride. Over the past years, a significant influx of refugees from neighboring countries has entered to Iraq, with tens of thousands of seeking refuge



in the Kurdistan Region, where they resided in the urban settings, as well as accommodated in the camps. "We have ensured a very good condition for the refugees in line with the international law" Reber added, noting their proactive measure to address constitutional gaps in Iraq with this regard. He also emphasized that Kurdistan Region has issued specific instructions in coordination with

the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) to work together with the refugees and those who seek asylum, reaffirming Kurdistan Region's commitment to advocate for the refugees hosted in Kurdistan Region.

The Minister also highlighted that the Iraqi Interior Ministry has prepared a legislation to regulate the right to asylum. Also special committee to determine these laws has been

formed in both Kurdistan Region and Federal Iraq, in line with the UNHCR. "Everyone should coordinate together, and we must continue to provide education for refugees in the Kurdistan Region, so that their children and those seeking asylum have a good education alongside the local community in the Kurdistan Region" emphasized Reber. He stressed on the importance of the inclusion of the ref-

ugees, adding that the refugees should benefit from all services such as health, education and all other sectors of life, and should benefit from the local and federal levels as well.

Held every four years, the Global Refugee Forum is the world's largest international gathering on refugees, designed to support the practical implementation of the objectives such as easing pressures on host countries, enhancing refu-

gee self-reliance, increasing access to third-country solutions and improving conditions in countries of origin. The participation of the KRG's delegation in the Forum, representing Federal Iraq marks as a significant achievement given that Kurdistan Region hosts most of the refugee population in Iraq.

According to the official UN statistics, Kurdistan Region hosts 90% of Iraq's refugee population. There are over 260,000 Syrian refugees, predominantly Kurdish, mainly in Kurdistan Region, 60% of whom are living in the urban areas in Duhok, Erbil and Sulaymaniyah governorates, the rest have distributed among refugee camps across Kurdistan Region. Notably, Kurdistan Region government has developed a policy with support from the UN agencies to ensure that refugee children have access to quality education on equal basis as the host community children. This allows refugee children in Kurdistan Region to enroll in school, continue secondary education, enroll technical and vocational education training, as well as higher education programs.

By Shvan Goran

Two Kurdish women reunite with family after 45 years



Two Kurdish sisters from Duhok governorate in the Kurdistan Region have reunited with their immediate family members after 45 years of missing.

The two sisters, Zainab and Hayam, are the daughters of Khalid Kochar, a deceased Kurdish Peshmerga commander who left the Kurdistan Region in 1980s. They fled to Syrian Kurdistan with their mother.

Since then, Kochar lost contact with his two daughters and wife. The veteran Peshmerga commander passed away in 2019.

Zainab Kochar said that her mother provid-

ed them with information about the family and always encouraged to return to Duhok in search for family members.

The sisters grew up and got married in the Syrian Kurdistan. Zainab in 1999 and Hayam in 2011 migrated to Germany where through a special DNA program they managed to find their cousins and other immediate family members.

Omar Saifaddin, one of the family's elderly said that for over 40 years they have tried to find the two sisters whereabouts but we not lucky enough.

Iraqi army attempts to forcible expel 172 Kurdish families from Kirkuk neighborhood



The Iraqi army has raided Kurdish houses of Kirkuk's Newroz neighborhood in an attempt to forcibly replace them with Arabs.

Residents of Kirkuk city's Newroz neighborhood were asked to leave their homes early on Tuesday as a large number of military forces accompanied by armored vehicles

began knocking on doors of the Kurdish houses, claiming that the area is owned by the defense ministry.

According to local officials, the land belongs to Kurdish farmers whose land were confiscated by the former Iraqi regime as part of Arabization process in Kirkuk later given to Arab settlers and

members of Baath party. Kurdish families who were previously displaced from the area, returned to the neighborhood following 2003.

A resident of Newroz neighborhood the army has deployed a large number of forces in the neighborhood to inform the families to leave the area while they could in-

form the families through the police and by the legal means.

Based on a decree from the former Kirkuk Provincial Council, people were granted the right to reside in those houses until the federal government provided them with compensation.

In a decree issued during the US-led Coalition Pro-

visional Authority which ruled Iraq after the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime, these houses were registered as properties of the finance ministry, whereas the army claims that the properties belong to the Ministry of Defense.

A total of 172 families, mostly Kurds, reside in Newroz neighborhood's 122 houses.

Shakhawan Abdullah, the Iraqi Parliament's second deputy speaker in a statement stated that following discussions with the Iraqi Prime Minister, he directed the defense ministry to order the withdrawal of the military forces in the Kurdish neighborhood.

NGOs: Shia militias' drone attacks are acts of aggression

A number of local NGOs in the Kurdistan Region in a statement condemned the recent drone attacks on the Peshmerga bases and other institutions by the Shia militias calling it as an act of aggression.

In a press conference, the representative of NGOs, stated that the purpose of these drone attacks is to destabilize the Kurdistan Region, saying that these attacks endanger civilian lives and must be condemned.

He added that the Iraqi federal government is not only silent about these attacks but also provides financial support for the militia groups committing such acts of aggression, while it does not send Kurdistan Region's financial dues.

The NGOs asked for not involving Kurdistan with the regional and in-



ternationals tensions and conflicts, urging the diplomatic missions based in the Region to have a stance against these types of attacks.

Ziba Taha, Secretary of the Kurdistan Wom-

en Union, in a statement urged the Iraqi federal government to take immediate and effective measures to stop such attacks, stating that these attacks pose real danger on the civilian lives.

In another statement, Head of Kurdistan Jurists Union, Hakim Tofiq, stated that a number of out-law groups have recently launch drone attacks on the Kurdistan Region in areas controlled by Iraqi

federal security forces.

He added that such attacks by out-law groups are used as pressure cards against the Kurdistan Region but will never achieve any political gains.

Head of Kurdistan Jurists Union urged the Iraqi federal government to take measures against these groups that threaten the political system and people's lives.

Kurdistan's Mushroom Renaissance: A Growing Industry Boosting Local Economy

Mushroom Boom: Kurdistan Regional Government Reveals Robust Annual Production



The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) proudly announced that the city of Kalar contributes significantly to the region's agricultural prowess by annually producing a bountiful 1500 tons of mushrooms. This agricultural success story emanates from a thriving mushroom factory nestled in Kalar, Garmiyan administration.

According to a statement from the KRG, the mushroom factory, led by entrepreneur Hersh Mohammed, not only caters to local markets in Sulaimani and Kalar but also plays a pivotal role in mushroom exports to

central and southern Iraq. This thriving enterprise has become an economic engine, providing direct employment to 50 citizens, and indirectly benefiting 150 others.

The mushroom industry, a testament to the burgeoning agricultural sector in the region, has experienced significant growth during the ninth cabinet's tenure. The increase in domestic production and the export of a substantial portion of these products are tangible indicators of Kurdistan's commitment to achieving agricultural self-sufficiency and expanding its economic footprint on the interna-

tional stage.

Mushroom Factories Flourish to Meet Domestic Demand

In the province of Erbil, the mushroom industry is experiencing a renaissance with four large factories collectively producing over 20 tons of mushrooms daily. These factories have become vital in meeting the domestic demand for mushrooms in the Kurdistan Region, and a surplus is exported to various cities across Iraq.

Samir Mahmood, the Director of Agricultural Services at Erbil's General Directorate of Agricul-

ture, shared insights into the mushroom production landscape. Two of the factories, located in the Qushtapa district, boast a robust daily production of 12 tons, while another factory in the same area contributes an additional two and a half tons daily. A fourth factory, currently closed, is slated for reopening, reflecting the resilience and optimism within the industry.

Mahmood highlighted the unique market dynamics of mushrooms, emphasizing that their popularity transcends typical dietary patterns, making them a staple across various meals. He envisioned

future opportunities for mushroom exports as production capacity grows, further solidifying the region's position as a key player in the agricultural market.

Shirin Najib, the Director General of Horticulture and Forestry in the Kurdistan Region, shed light on the broader industry landscape. With a mushroom factory in Duhok generating an annual output of approximately 100 tons, coupled with three factories in Sulaimani and four in Erbil, the Kurdistan Region boasts a total of nine mushroom factories.

These factories contribute to the mushroom

boom, with part of their products making their way to markets beyond the Kurdistan Region, enhancing economic ties and showcasing the region's agricultural prowess on a national scale.

Kurdistan's mushroom industry stands tall as a beacon of success, fostering economic growth, providing employment opportunities, and contributing to the region's self-sufficiency in agriculture. As mushroom factories flourish and exports expand, Kurdistan's agricultural landscape promises a sustainable and prosperous future.

Local company produces firefighting trucks



A local company in Erbil has started producing firefighting trucks with the potential buyers from Europe and the United Arab Emirates.

Mariwan Faiq Kareem, the owner of Dusara company, recently announced the establishment of company for producing firefighting products and vehicles, stating that this year they managed to produce the latest type of firefighting vehicle named DFP 77.

Kareem also mentioned that the company has

produced 11 more types of firefighting vehicles.

According to the company owner, a UAE-based company has requested purchase of 10 vehicles, another company in Greece has requested 30 firefighting vehicles.

Dusara company is based in Erbil and has the capacity of producing 35 firefighting vehicle annually, providing nearly 50 job opportunities for local engineers and workers.

The vehicles are pro-

duced based on Austrian standards which has the capacity of 10,000 liters of water and 500 litres of foam and are equipped with all the required equipment.

The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) through the Ministry of Interior's Civil Defense Institution is monitoring the quality of the vehicles and has requested to buy a number of vehicles from the company.

10th Duhok International Film Festival Launched



Featuring 116 films from 34 countries worldwide, including 50 Kurdish films, the tenth Duhok International Film Festival was launched. During the opening ceremony Ali Tatar, Governor of Duhok emphasized the Kurdistan Regional Government's continuous support to the festival despite "the ongoing financial crisis".

The event's president Amir Ali Mohammed Tahir underscored in a press conference the obstacles they have been facing to achieve the agenda of the festival, which was only "accomplished through the dedication of the staff who tirelessly navigated these challenges over an extended period of time" he added.

The festival's official theme for this year was 'mother tongue'; "since the language is one of the powerful tools for cultural exchange and communication, and cinema itself delivers its humanitarian message through language," the website of the Duhok Film Festival reads. In press conference, the General Director of the Media in the International Film Festival Hasan Arif reiterated their commitment to encouraging directors to produce films in Kurdish language. "We have many Kurdish directors who produce [films] in foreign languages, thus, we aim to deliver a message to them to produce more films in Kurdish in order to preserve the language", highlighting the

extensive and rich nature of Kurdish language, which encompasses numerous dialects and accents.

The festival opened with the film 'Baghdad Messi' directed by Belgian Kurdish filmmaker Sahim Omar Khalifa, which was filmed in the Kurdistan Region and Mosul. The film festival this time welcomed France as the "guest country" this year, which actively attended the event with prominent films, short films and documentaries. "We have selected France as the guest country of this year's Duhok Film Festival, with screenings of feature-length films, shorts and documentaries. France is one of the birthplaces of cinema, and at the moment, the international film festival of Cannes stands as one of the most prestigious cinematic events worldwide," said Hassan Arif.

The festival responded to the producers' requests from previous year by incorporating a dedicated section for children and youth cinema, marking a notable addition to the event. A total of 10 films were screened as part of this special section throughout the event. Moreover, the festival also curated a selection of films under the 'classic cinema' category, which included several world's prominent films.

The closing ceremony of the 10th round of Duhok Film Festival was held on

Saturday, 16 December 2023 at Duhok University's Conference Hall, in the city of Duhok, attended by Duhok governor Dr. Ali Tatar, Duhok Film Festival president Amir Ali Mohammed Tahir, the festival's artistic director Shawkat Amin Korki, the jury members of the competition categories World Cinema and Kurdish Cinema, a number of filmmakers as well as cinema lovers. The winners in each section were announced and the Golden Leaf and Silver Leaf statues, plaques of appreciation, and the cash prizes were distributed among them.

The start of the ceremony featured a musical act by "Nizamettin Aric", the famous Kurdish composer and singer, along with Duhok music band, performing several pieces of Kurdish music, and was followed by the distribution of awards.

The closing ceremony continued with members of the jury in the World Cinema competition category including Emin Alper, filmmaker and screenwriter from Turkey as the jury president, Mahsa Mohebali, novelist and screenwriter from Iran, Nirmal Dhal, actor from India, Artur Zaborski, journalist from Poland and Chabname Zariab, Afghan screenwriter and filmmaker residing in France, announcing the winners as follows:

Yilmaz Guney Award: "Between Revolutions" by

Vlad Petri (Romania) New Talent Award: Milena Aboyan for "Elaha" (Germany)

Jury's Special Mention: "No End" by Nader Saeivar, a collaborative production from Iran, Turkey, and Germany.

In the Kurdish Cinema competition category, Camille Laemel from France presided over the jury, joined by Maryam Bou-bani from Iran, Mahmoud Abu Abbas from Iraq, Nizamettin Aric, a Kurdish composer and singer, and Elsa Rassbach from the US, announcing:

Best Film: "Allihopa: The Dalkurd Story" by Kordo Doski, a collaborative production involving the US, Canada, Sweden, and Kurdistan Region.

Best Director: Semir Aslanyurek and Kazim Öz for "Elif Ana" (Turkey).

Best Screenplay: Ayşe Polat for "In The Blind Spot" (Germany).

Best Actor: Ahmed Mohammed for "Baghdad Messi," a collaborative production from Belgium, the Netherlands, and Kurdistan Region.

Best Actress: Parwin Rajabi for "Transient Happiness" (Iran).

Jury's Special Mention: Shima Mollai for "BEY-AN" (Kurdistan Iran).

The Short Films Competition, overseen by Carmen Gray from New Zealand, Kamiran Betasi from Kurdistan Region, and Süheyla Schwenk from Germany, recognized:

Best International Short: "Fairplay" by Zoel

Aeschbacher, a joint production of Switzerland and France.

Best Kurdish Short: "Things Unheard of" by Ramazan Kılıç from Turkey.

Jury's Special Mention: Zhino Hadi Hassan for "TRIANGLE" (Kurdistan Region).

In the documentaries category, chaired by Rodney Charles from England, Anaïs Boelicke from Germany, and Rekish Shahbaz from Kurdistan Region, the winners were:

Best International Documentary: "The Sky is Mine" by Ayoub Naseri from Italy.

Best Kurdish Documentary: "Iraq's Invisible Beauty" co-directed by Sahim Omar Khalifa and Jurgen Buedts, a collaborative production from Belgium, France, and Kurdistan Region.

Jury's Special Mention: Maria Binder for "Eren" (Turkey).

The International Federation of Film Critics (FIPRESCI) panel, including Katharina Dockhorn from Germany, Aina Randrianatoandro from Madagascar, and Sait Tarakcioglu from Kurdistan Turkey, awarded:

FIPRESCI Award: "In The Blind Spot" by Ayşe Polat from Germany.

The film festival has served as a vital link connecting the Kurdish directors with the filmmakers around the world. Duhok International Film Festival was founded by Amir Ali Muhammad Tahir in

memory of the Kurdish filmmaker Yilmaz Guney (the winner of the Palme d'Or in Cannes Film Festival in 1982). The film festival serves as a bridge between the Kurdish directors and the filmmakers worldwide and provides an opportunity to cultural exchange among the nations of the world. Tahir emphasized that the Duhok festival aims not only to promote Kurdish culture and foster connections with other countries but also to inspire and cultivate a new wave of local filmmakers. Additionally, Tahir elaborated on the festival's broader ambition to attract international studios to choose the Kurdistan region as a filming location. "Each year we try to engage the most excellent works of cinema and elevate the event's standards. It is of utmost significance to us that the people travelling to Duhok get to observe the region's exquisite cinematic culture" Tahir said.

The festival is designed to showcase Iraqi Kurdistan and boost tourism and economy, while the main goal is to invite a number of prominent global movie companies to this event so choose the Kurdistan region as a principal setting of their works. "I hope that in the near future we get to see the beautiful and intact culture and nature of Kurdistan region, especially Duhok through the lens of global filmmakers" added Tahir.

By Shvan Goran

Demographic shifts and lifestyle changes in an evolving cosmopolitan Kurdistan Region



By *Jawad Qadir* *

The once homogenous Kurdish society has now become a melting pot of various ethnicities, religions, and ideologies, fostering a more cosmopolitan and multicultural environment.

The Kurdistan Region has witnessed significant demographic changes and urbanization since 2003. One of the key aspects of these changes is the population growth that has occurred in the region. The population has experienced a substantial increase, with more people migrating to urban areas in search of better opportunities and improved living conditions. In 2000, the population in the Kurdistan Region was estimated to be around 3.9 million, while currently, it is estimated to be well over 6.5 million. This indicates a substantial growth rate over the past two decades. (KRG Statistical Board)

To illustrate this, one can look at the city of Erbil, which has transformed from a relatively small city into a bustling metropolis. The population of Erbil has grown exponentially, with new residential areas, commercial centers, and infrastructure developments being established to accommodate the influx of people. This rapid urbanization has not only led to an increase in the population but has also brought about changes in the social fabric of the region.

With urbanization, there has been a shift in social norms and values. Traditional customs and practices are gradually being challenged by more modern and cosmopolitan lifestyles. The younger generation in urban areas is embracing new ideas and adopting different cultural practices, which are often influenced by global trends. This changing social landscape is evident in the way people dress, interact,

and engage in various social activities.

One of the most evident changes resulting from the demographic shift is the alteration in individuals' lifestyles. With an influx of people from different backgrounds and cultures, the social fabric of the region has become more diverse and dynamic. This has led to the emergence of new social norms, values, and practices, as well as the adoption of different languages and traditions.

Furthermore, the educational framework in the Kurdistan Region has also undergone substantial transformations. The increase in population has necessitated the expansion and improvement of educational institutions to accommodate the growing number of students. As a result, new private schools, colleges, and universities have been established, offering a wider range of educational opportunities.

In addition to changes in lifestyle and education, the demographic shift has also influenced the architectural development of housing within the Kurdistan Region. The increased demand for housing has led to the construction of new residential areas and the expansion of existing ones. This has resulted in the emergence of modern and innovative architectural designs, as well as the incorporation of sustainable and environmentally friendly practices.

The demographic changes and urbanization in the Kurdistan Region over the past two decades have not only resulted in population growth but have also had a significant impact on the social fabric and economy of the region. While there are great challenges associated with urbanization, the overall transformation has so far brought about positive changes and opportunities for the people of the Kurdistan Region.

The Majestic Gali Ali Bag Waterfall: A Natural Wonder in Kurdistan



The picturesque view of the site attracts hundreds of thousands of tourists every year

Renowned for its geological significance, the Gali Ali Bag waterfall in the Soran district of the

Kurdistan Region routinely draws many visitors from both within the region and Iraq. The waterfall, which stands as the highest in both the Kurdistan Region and Iraq, is approximately 12

meters high and is located adjacent to the magnificent Korek Mountain that towers 2,076 meters

above sea level. It also serves as the confluence of three unique rivers - the Rwanz, Sidakan,

and Khalifan. About 95 km northeast of Erbil, the capital city of the Kurdistan Region, the waterfall is nestled

amidst the hilly landscape of the region, tucked in the acclaimed gorges of Soran, known for

their rapid streams and smaller falls. The waterfall and the surrounding region have a rich historical background and are of great geological importance. Tales from the locals weave an intriguing history of this popular waterfall.

Professor Sardar Balaky, an eminent geologist from Soran University, estimates that the rock

formation of Gali Ali Bag is probably 25 million years old, pegging its inception in the Miocene epoch. Also, the creation of

the waterfall is attributed to the intersection of the Arabic and

Iranian plates along the Zagros Mountain bend.

The rock composition of the waterfall and the surrounding gorge is diverse, including dolomite,

marlstone, and limestone. According to Balaky, the formation of Korek Mountain took place

during the Jurassic period, around 165 million years ago, making it about 140 million years older

than the waterfall. The provenance of the name Gali Ali Bag is a subject of two conflicting interpretations. One

theory proposes it was named after a prince from the Great Soran Emirate, a former ruler of a

significant part of what is now under the jurisdiction of Erbil governorate. However, another

belief, shrouded in dispute, attributes the name to the assassination of a Kurdish Yezidi Prince

named Ali Bag. The Soran Emirate, originating in the 15th Century CE, was allied with the Ottoman Empire

during the conflict between the Ottoman and Safavid Empires. The emirate maintained its existence as a smaller kingdom,

subsequently moving its capital from Soran to Harir and

finally to Rwanz, the most impregnable location, until its overthrow by the Ottomans in 1836.

The waterfall attracts thousands of local, regional, and international tourists on a daily basis.

Annually, the Soran District welcomes approximately 900,000 to 1 million visitors, with most

tourists capturing a picture with the Gali Ali Bag waterfall.

According to Soran's Directorate of Tourism, the Gali Ali Bag waterfall lures about half a million

tourists every year. Tourist visits to the resorts in Soran hit over a million in 2023.

The Gali Ali Bag waterfall is well-known among Kurdish and Iraqi tourists, many of whom are

motivated to visit by its depiction on Iraqi banknotes.

The majestic waterfall has been immortalized on Iraqi banknotes, making it a familiar landmark

to many. From the late 1970s to 1990, it graced the 5 IQD note, embedding Gali Ali Bag into

everyday life at a time when travel was fraught with difficulties and risks. In the era following

the Baathist regime, it has been featured on the 5,000 IQD note.

United States and Iraq are looking to restructure their relationship



By *Saadula Aqrabi*

It is necessary for the United States to move beyond its previous focus on ISIS, and the challenge posed by the armed militias at the present time, which has characterized the American-Iraqi relationship over the past few years. The parties should also seize the opportunity for serious dialogue and instead consider how the United States and Iraq can shape a sustainable strategic relationship, one that serves their strategic interests and helps bring peace and stability to the region.

Before addressing what the United States might ask of Iraq in the strategic dialogue, it is important to examine why Iraq is important to America, as some see the need for the United States to simply limit its losses in Iraq and withdraw from it. The answer to this proposal is simple: Iraq is of great strategic importance to the United States in order to ensure stability in the Gulf, supply oil to the global economy, and reduce the risk of a violent war with Iran.

The American withdrawal from Iraq would enable the hardline Iranian regime and regional terrorism and extremism to cause great harm to American national security. Just as the US withdrawal from Iraq in 2011 proved to be a costly, even disastrous, mistake, future US troop withdrawals and support for the Iraqi government, particularly support for the Iraqi security forces, would have major repercussions for US interests in the Middle East.

American strategic interests in Iraq can be divided into four main categories: threats posed by Iran; The threat of ISIS or another similar group; Divided Iraq and

its repercussions on the region; and competition between great powers. Therefore, the United States must continue to focus on these four interests, otherwise Iraq will become a source of great concern for it in the future, Iraq is considered essential to the US strategy of containing the expansion and influence of the current Iranian regime. No country in the Gulf region is currently more important than Iraq to the United States as it seeks to contain the plans of the Supreme Leader, hard-line revolutionaries, and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps.

If the United States is able to help Iraqi leaders build a stable and strong Iraq, this will be an important addition to deterring Iranian ambitions and the military pressure exerted by the Islamic Republic in the Gulf region. Iraq is currently facing a period of dysfunctional governance, deep internal divisions, and serious economic problems. However, it has enormous oil resources in addition to a large, educated population. If Iran is able to exploit Iraq's problems to control it, this will greatly multiply its power. But any Iranian effort aimed at dividing Iraqi politics or dominating it outright would face notable opposition from many Shiite and Sunni Arabs and Iraqi Kurds. It will also inflame sectarian, ethnic and regional tension and is highly likely to lead to another civil war in Iraq.

A similar civil conflict would lead to serious problems in the region and encourage terrorism and extremism. The presence of an unstable Iraq will also strengthen Sunni and Shiite extremism in Iraq and the rest of the countries of the region as a whole, and will help the return of ISIS and extend beyond the Iraqi borders. Moreover,

Sunni Arabs may view ISIS as the lesser of two evils if they clash with a largely sectarian Shiite government that Iran is pressuring to exclude them and deprive them of any political voice in Iraq. This is what happened after the American withdrawal in 2011, and there are many reasons to believe that this trend will not be repeated. It is a scenario that is difficult for the United States to ignore and will require American military commitment to contain. The United States should indeed refocus its concerns on ISIS in the short term as well, as making a political statement that the group has been destroyed after losing its strongholds is tantamount to ignoring the facts on the ground. The organization is still present and active in Iraq, and in fact it is participating in an active guerrilla campaign in areas with a Sunni majority in Iraq, a campaign that has intensified recently. ISIS is now much stronger than Al-Qaeda was in Iraq when US forces left in 2011. Since ancient times, Iraq has been the eastern gateway to the Arab world and the transportation node between the peninsula, semi-Asia, central Asia, and via Iran and Turkey. It is the starting point in the eastern Middle East, and it owns the second highest quality oil company in the world after the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Therefore, Iraq succeeds in this. Strategic importance and strategy for American national security and the Pentagon is called a valve and control of the Arab and honest economic leadership, and controlling it means controlling oil, its quantity, prices, transportation lines, entity security, and the starting point for the American organization in the Middle East.

The Iraqi army is still relatively weak after re-

ceiving a triple blow to its capabilities when politics in Iraq prompted the United States to withdraw in 2011, and Nouri al-Maliki stripped the Iraqi forces of competent officers and replaced them with political followers who responded to him. This facilitated mass desertions of soldiers and the destruction of units in the war against ISIS. US training and support to the Iraqi military is now essential to keeping Iraqi security forces on a path to renewal. It is still weaker than the Popular Mobilization Forces, as many Shiite units are aligned with Iran, and allowing the Shiite militias to dominate the Iraqi security sector will help ISIS regain its power and will not help defeat it.

Finally, the United States has a strategic interest in Iraq in order to counter the efforts of Russia and China to extend their economic and political influence in the country. The Russian and Chinese governments are essentially making unremitting efforts to strengthen their influence in Iraq at the expense of the United States. American financial investments in Iraq could fail if American companies are replaced by Chinese or Russian companies. Also, the image of the United States abandoning Iraq in favor of the Russians and Chinese will have repercussions that go beyond Iraqi borders. This will be a signal to other countries in the region that the United States is an unreliable friend.

The bottom line with regard to American interests in Iraq is that America has a great and obligatory interest in a stable, prosperous, and politically balanced Iraq, especially given the negatives of the alternative. If the United States withdraws from Iraq before achieving these goals, it will be forced to deal

with an Iraqi catastrophe that could cost the United States much more than is necessary. At the same time, remaining in Iraq requires major changes to Iraqi politics, governance, and development. It cannot be said that Iraq's problems began with the American invasion in 2003. Some of them date back to the establishment of the state, others to its development since the fall of the monarchy, and many of them are the result of the actions of Saddam Hussein. Today's problems are mostly the product of Iraq's current leaders. The United States can only help an Iraq that helps itself.

Iran is considered the main external player in American calculations regarding Iraq, which makes it very important for Iran to ensure that Iraq does not once again pose a security threat to its eastern neighbor. It is worth noting that Iran seeks to exploit Iraq to strengthen Tehran's strategic authority in the region and to preserve and develop Iraq as a market for Iranian goods and services. The current security elite in Iran, whether reformists, extremists, or others, will not abandon Iraq as long as it is weak and divided. Iran's rulers realize that they do not have the luxury of even considering this as an option. After a years-long war in the 1980s against Saddam Hussein, Iran decided that the best way to neutralize the serious threat to its national security of the current Iranian regime was for "their cronies" to take control in Baghdad. Iran's leaders assume that external powers, especially the United States, will seek to weaken the pro-Iranian Shiite blocs in Iraq. Also, there are many Iraqis, especially Sunni Arabs, Kurds, and even nationalist Shiite Arabs, who do not want to see pro-Iranian parties dom-

inate Iraqi politics

Controlling Iraq also serves a broader regional purpose, which is to establish a land bridge between Iran and Lebanon, and Iraq is considered an essential part of that strategy, in light of its actual control by Hezbollah. Therefore, controlling Iraq is considered a way to expand Iran's influence in the Middle East, while working to secure its positions against potential regional competitors. Finally, Iraq is essential to Iran as it is an important market for Iranian goods and services. This is the case now more than ever, as Iran reels under the weight of sanctions imposed on its economy. Iraq is a market for Iranian non-exchange goods, in other words, for Iranian goods that do not find other markets. Pro-Iranian Shiite politicians made this possible for the Islamic Republic, despite the negative repercussions for Iraq's producers and consumers. Iranian imports to Iraqi markets resulted in unemployment and inflation in Iraq and deeply angered the Iraqi street.

The most difficult issue in organizing a meaningful strategic dialogue between the United States and Iraq and establishing a lasting strategic relationship between them is what the Iraqis want for their country. Iraq is now a highly divided country experiencing instability in terms of politics, governance, and economics. Not to mention the clear divisions in Iraq between Shiites, Sunnis, and Kurds, these people themselves are experiencing internal divisions. The Iraqi political institutions created in the wake of the US invasion in 2003 have exacerbated these divisions and are considered a major factor in the political paralysis that Iraq is witnessing.

Oil investment systems and harmonious with the current economic and political situation



To clarify and analyze oil investment systems and highlight the systems that are most compatible and harmonious with the current economic and political situation and that serve Iraqi interests.

By *Roger Corregon*

It seeks to clarify the stages and methods of transition between the investment systems that governed the oil economy of the Iraqi state over time, since the first appearance of oil and how it was exploited and foreign colonial competition. The purpose of studying the historical stages ultimately guides us to identifying the best systems used in harmony with the current circumstances and the requirements that He seeks to achieve them, and seeks to clarify the importance of oil as a tool to advance the economy and direct it towards the development of various sectors and to improve the economic reality away from the unfair contracts that have been used against it for many years.

Oil investment has great and great importance in serving the state and its reconstruction on the one hand, and enriching the investor on the other hand. The oil state needs huge resources of money and modern technical expertise in order to complete its projects, increase its growth, and increase the level of well-being. Therefore, the process of investing in the oil sector is one of the important processes. In changing the roots of the economy from a rentier economy to making oil a bridge for the development of all sectors. Oil investment aims to rehabilitate all oil sectors and develop the sectors interconnected with them as well, by exploiting optimal investments and employing them in the optimal way and with the participation of foreign oil companies based on balanced agreements that contribute to building companies on the horizontal and vertical levels and developing oil investment projects, and this complementarity between benefiting from oil wealth and cadres. Iraq and attracting investments form an integrated link that contributes to the stability of Iraq and the development of its

economy.

Iraq's undiscovered resources amount to about 215 billion barrels, but the International Energy Agency confirmed that reserves throughout Iraq, including the Kurdistan region, amount to about 246 billion barrels (of crude oil and natural gas liquids). In 2013, Iraq launched the National Integrated Energy Strategy, which set a production target of 13 million barrels per day by 2017, before the number was reduced to ten million barrels per day, then reduced to 9 million barrels per day in 2020. Some view the committee's plan to increase production to 5 million barrels per day as a precursor to reaching those numbers. Iraqi Oil Minister Hayan Abdul-Ghani stated that the oil production capacity in Iraq currently amounts to 5.4 million barrels per day, although it still produces between 4.3 and 4.5 million barrels per day in general. The ambitions of the authorities in Iraq collide with many obstacles, including those related to corruption and internal and regional political influences. Transparency International believes that massive embezzlement and fraud in the field of procurement, money laundering, oil smuggling, bribery and widespread bureaucracy... are all elements that led to Iraq being classified among the most corrupt countries in the world.

The massive scale of corruption does not encourage major Western companies to engage in extracting Iraqi oil. In June 2021, the British oil giant BP said that it was working on preparing a plan to transform its operations in the giant Rumaila oil field in Iraq into a self-established company. The research included four chapters, as follows: The first chapter of the research dealt with a conceptual and historical framework in investment contracts and licenses in the oil sector. The chapter focused



on studying the general concepts of investment and contracting systems and their importance at the political and economic levels of the state, while studying the historical roots of investments in the Iraqi oil sector. The second chapter dealt with the issue of rehabilitation and development of the methodological - technical and economic capabilities of Iraqi oil companies, showing the nature and importance of national development capabilities, how to manage the methodology of national companies, and finding the optimal ways to develop and develop the capabilities of national companies operating in the oil sector. The third chapter studied investment combination patterns in managing oil project contracts. The chapter is concerned with studying advisory and technical patterns for managing oil investment contracts, investment patterns in activating the management of oil project contracts, and studying the executive paths in managing oil project contracts. The fourth chapter was devoted to future study, which is the future of investment projects in the Iraqi oil sector, demonstrating the economic importance of

the oil sector and its impact on the life of Iraqi society, and studying the future of Iraqi oil management in light of the contemporary investment combination. As a result, this study led to the fact that Iraq possesses a strategic material of utmost importance in the present and future of Iraq. Oil also constitutes one of the basic foundations of Iraq's contemporary renaissance, as it is the main pulsating artery that feeds all of its vital joints. The Iraqi people have struggled for many years to regain their freedom and their looted wealth and extract them from them, the hands of foreign monopolistic companies.

Iraqi oil had and still has a prominent impact in making political history and an important role in changing the strategic, political and economic agreements towards the Iraqi government, in addition to its effective role in the economy, as oil revenues from foreign currencies formed a primary source for financing the state budget and development projects and filling the shortage. In payments, as well as its direct and indirect contribution to improving living standards and developing the

productive and service sectors. Oil is a national wealth that should be used to develop the country's economy, and foreign oil investment opens tremendous horizons for economic development, as it provides a real opportunity for development in the comprehensive civilizational sense. Iraqi oil, by virtue of its huge reserves, future production, and expected volume of exports to countries around the world, will play an important role in Iraq's foreseeable future and on the global oil stage.

These huge investment projects are what will qualify it to lead the oil-exporting countries over the next two decades, and this can only be achieved with the active participation of international oil companies, as the required capital, expertise and technology are pumped into balanced agreements that do not increase the burden on Iraq, but must The companies should aim to achieve a balanced policy between profits and the construction process to complete horizontal and vertical projects simultaneously for the oil industry, provided that they conduct careful studies and exercise all care and caution when making their decisions to

increase the rate of their oil production, so that this increased production does not lead to rapid, unjustified depletion. Due to the precious oil resources that are depleted and non-renewable, our national interest and the interest of future generations must be taken into consideration, and the bottom line is that Iraq must follow a wise policy in contracting and production to comply with various advanced considerations and take into account in the first place its legitimate national interests and reliance on foreign companies in horizontal construction. For the oil industry and its development, especially oil refining projects and the use of oil derivatives and their development to meet internal demand and for export, and focus at the same time on gas investment. This complementarity between benefiting from oil wealth and Iraqi cadres and attracting foreign investment constitutes an integrated link that contributes to the stability of Iraq and its economy and building a strong position in The international energy market and curbing oil market fluctuations.



Transforming Iraq's Business Model to a Global Scale by Executing Strategic Plans

By *Dr. Mwafaq Ramzi* *

The possibility of taking Iraqi corporations globally in this age of globalization offers both opportunities and challenges. This article considers the strategic planning required to turn Iraqi enterprises into major participants on the international stage. Through an examination of Iraq's current business model and the identification of critical strategic components, this article seeks to shed light on the measures needed to improve global competitiveness. Using strategic plans becomes essential while negotiating the complexity of the international market. Iraq has a long way to go before it can emerge from its precarious situation and diversify its economy beyond the oil sector. It suggests that Iraq should reorient its political settlement toward growth, enhance clarity in the administration and distribution of its oil earnings and public funds, and make investments in infrastructure, human capital, and social protection. This article explores the strategic initiatives that can help Iraqi firms succeed and expand sustainably by putting them on the global stage. Iraq has several excellent opportunities to develop and implement a strategic business plan that will help it endure the current economic slowdown in the region and around the world. The strategic business model needs to take into account the following opportunities: crisis response; resilient livelihoods; building capacity of national institutions and communities; food systems; enhancing regional integration; producing jobs; decreasing poverty; encouraging innovation and digital transformation; cutting down on bureaucracy and corruption; assisting micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises by giving them access to capital; and enhancing regional integration by increasing trade, investment, and cooperation with neighboring

countries. Iraq can achieve the prosperity and stability it needs by shifting its economy away from the oil sector and toward other sectors. The private sector could be redesigned and developed in order to promote economic diversification. Iraq's political settlement will be able to concentrate again on development if there is clarity in the management and reporting of the oil and other public resources. Enhancing Iraq's educational system and raising the country's labor force participation rate will be very beneficial to this business model change process. We will begin by discussing the current business model landscape of the nation: Iraq presents tremendous opportunities for global market engagement due to its wealth of resources and rich historical background. But in order to realize this potential, businesses need to adjust to the needs of the world market. Many Iraqi enterprises currently function in a localized framework, thus making the transition to a global scale will require a thorough strategic plan. Effective strategic planning is essential for any international business expansion to be successful. It entails a thorough examination of both internal and external influences, the determination of strengths and weaknesses, and the formulation of a distinct future vision. Strategic planning becomes not only advantageous but also necessary for Iraqi enterprises to compete on a global basis. The key to this shift is strategic planning, which provides companies with a road map for navigating the intricacies of the global marketplace. Now let's explore the essential elements of strategic planning, to expand globally, an Iraqi tech firm should conduct thorough market research to identify demand, competitive landscapes, and customer preferences. This data can be



used to tailor offerings to meet global needs effectively. Iraqi businesses can also explore global partnerships and alliances, such as establishing alliances with international distributors to access broader markets. Technological integration is crucial for manufacturing companies in Iraq, as it can automate production processes, enhance product quality, and meet international standards. Local educational institutions can collaborate with global counterparts to develop specialized programs, equipping the local workforce with the skills required for international business environments. Risk management is essential for export-oriented businesses, including geopolitical considerations, currency fluctuations, and supply chain disruptions. Contingency plans based on these assessments can mitigate potential risks and uncertainties. Finally, cultural competence is crucial for hospitality businesses planning global expansion, as adjusting marketing strategies, menus, and service styles to align with the cultural preferences of each target market ensures a positive reception. By addressing opportunities for their firms, employers must play a vital role in shifting Iraq's business model to a global scale. To assist workers in settling into

new employment and creating a feeling of community, employers provide a range of advantages. These consist of internal training sessions and seminars that acquaint new employees with the ethos, regulations, and practices of the company. Employers may also send staff members to outside training or instruction programs in order to improve specialized skills and keep abreast of market developments. Employee benefits such as tuition reimbursement promote lifelong learning and provide financial assistance for staff members seeking certifications or more education. Businesses collaborate with academic institutions to gain access to specialized expertise, research, and people. Employee knowledge and credibility are increased through training for industry-recognized certifications, which promotes both individual and organizational success. Programs for coaching and mentoring help people gain new skills, advance professionally, and transmit knowledge. Executive coaching offers individualized direction on strategic planning, leadership, and decision-making through senior leaders or outside coaches. Giving employees early work experience and leadership opportunities broadens their skill set and helps them compre-

hend how decisions affect the tactical and strategic levels of the organization. Employees can experiment with multiple jobs and departments within a company through internal job mobility, which fosters skill diversification and adaptability. Employees are exposed to a variety of cultures, markets, and business methods through overseas assignments, which broadens their horizons, improves their cross-cultural communication abilities, and advances their understanding of global business. These are a few instances of how an employer could support its staff members' personal and professional development and assist them to succeed in their duties and responsibilities. An organization can give staff members a variety of opportunities to advance their knowledge and technical skills, soft skills, and abilities. These consist of onboarding seminars and classes held internally, sending employees for outside instruction or training, paying for MBA students' tuition, working with outside academic institutions, providing industry certification training, internal mentoring, and coaching, and hiring outside executive coaching. One technology company, for instance, hosts onboarding workshops for new hires that cover sub-

jects like team collaboration tools, cybersecurity protocols, and company values. In order to stay current on trends and connect with industry experts, an advertising agency dispatches a team of marketers to a digital marketing conference. Financial services companies support professional growth and career success by paying for workers' MBA degrees that are relevant to their roles. Partnerships with non-academic organizations, such as pharmaceutical corporations, can also be advantageous. An IT consulting company invests in preparing its employees for cybersecurity certifications to improve cybersecurity expertise and provide clients with certified personnel. It can also be helpful to have early work experience, the ability to manage others, and the ability to make both tactical and strategic decisions. Employees may find that their overseas assignments provide great opportunities to research markets and modify their marketing plans to suit regional tastes and cultural quirks. In conclusion, a strategic paradigm change is necessary for Iraqi enterprises to expand to a global level. Businesses can position themselves for long-term success on the global scene by implementing strategic plans that include talent development, risk management, technological integration, market research, global collaborations, and cultural competency. It's time for Iraqi businesses and entrepreneurs to take advantage of the opportunities presented by globalization and support the nation's economic expansion internationally.

**Dr. Mwafaq Ramzi, Ed.D. American Higher Education Leadership*



Sustainable development goals by 2030

By *Dr. Nojdar Akreyi*

Health system goals are goals set by the health care system to improve population health and health system performance. These goals can be set at different levels, from global to national to local

Global health outcomes goals set by the United Nations include, for example. Reducing maternal mortality, Reducing preventable deaths of children under 5 years of age, Reducing the risk of infectious diseases, Reducing deaths and injuries resulting from road traffic accidents. However, there is no international consensus on how best to measure health system performance. The country context is important, and the current state of population health and health system maturity has a significant impact on what goals can be set and what can be achieved in practice. At the national level, the goals of the health care system will vary depending on the specific needs of the country. However, some common goals that can be identified at this level include improving access to health care, increasing quality of care, and reducing health care costs. The goals of the local health system will also vary depending on the needs of a particular community or population group. However, some common goals that can be identified at this level include increasing the number of people receiving preventive care, reducing health disparities, and improving care coordination. This article explores the different types of health systems goals and how to measure them.

What are the 13 global health goals? In 2015, the United Nations set 17 sustainable development goals by 2030, many of which affect health and well-being. Goal 3 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 3) is Ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for everyone at all ages. There are 13 goals, Reduce the global maternal mortality rate to less than 70 per 100,000 live births, by 2030. By 2030, end preventable deaths of newborns and under-5s, with all countries aiming to reduce neonatal deaths to at least 12 per 1,000 live births and under-5 deaths to at least 25 per 1000 live births. By 2030, end the epidemics of AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria and neglected tropical diseases, and combat hepatitis, waterborne diseases and other infectious diseases. Reduce premature deaths from non-communicable diseases by one third through prevention,

treatment and promotion of mental health and well-being by 2030. Strengthen the prevention and treatment of drug abuse, including harmful drug use and alcohol use, by 2030. Halve the number of deaths and injuries resulting from road traffic accidents in the world by 2030. By 2030, ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health-care services, including family planning services and information and education, and integrate reproductive health into national strategies and programs.

Achieve universal health coverage, including protection from financial risks, access to quality essential health care services, and universal access to safe, effective, quality and affordable essential medicines and vaccines. By 2030, significantly reduce the number of deaths and diseases caused by hazardous chemicals and air, water and soil pollution. By 2030, significantly reduce the number of deaths and diseases caused by hazardous chemicals and air, water and soil pollution and contamination. Strengthen implementation of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control in all countries as appropriate. Support research and development in vaccines and medicines for infectious and non-communicable diseases that primarily affect developing countries, and provide access to essential medicines and vaccines at affordable prices, in accordance with the Doha Declaration on the TRIPS Agreement and Public Health, which affirms the right of developing countries to fully use the provisions contained in Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights regarding flexibilities to protect the public. Health, and in particular, providing access to medicines for all. Strengthen the capacity of all countries, especially developing countries, for early warning, risk reduction and management of national and global health risks.

There are many health-related goals in the SDGs such as improving diet and food security, access to education, access to safe water etc. SDG 3 ranks sixth out of 17 goals in terms of investing in ESG ETFs in 2021 globally. The Global Action Plan for Healthy Lives and Well-Being for All (SGD3 GAP) includes 13 global partners and agencies and was established to support governments in achieving the health-related Sustainable Development Goals. What are some common goals of the National Health System? There are a variety of different types of goals that health systems may set at different levels. Some ex-



amples of health care system goals include. Improving access to health care, this may involve increasing the number of primary care providers in the community or ensuring that all residents have health insurance. Improving quality of care, this may involve increasing patient safety or ensuring that all patients receive evidence-based care.

Reducing health care costs: This may involve reducing unnecessary tests and procedures or improving the efficiency of the health care system. Reducing health disparities: This may involve increasing the number of minority populations receiving preventive care or providing culturally competent care to all patients. Improving care coordination: This may involve increasing the number of patients seeing their primary care provider on a regular basis or ensuring that all patients have a medical home. Health systems are increasingly using value-based healthcare frameworks such as the Triple Aim or Quadruple Aim to frame national health system goals. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines health outcomes as “the health status of a person or population at a specific point in time, or over a period of time, which can be measured using various indicators.” In other words, health outcomes are the final outcome of the health status of a person or population. There are many different types of health outcomes, but they can be broadly classified into two main categories: mortality outcomes and morbidity outcomes. These indicate the number of deaths that occur within a population during a specific period. These outcomes can be classified into all-cause mortality (the total number of deaths from all causes) and cause-specific mortality (the number of deaths from a particular cause). These refer to the number of people within a population who suffer from a particular health condition or disease during a specific period.

Morbidity can be measured in terms of prevalence (the number of people with a condition at a given point in time) or incidence (the number of new cases of a condition during a given time period).

Health outcomes are important because they provide a measure of whether a population's health is improving, worsening, or remaining stable over time. They also allow comparisons between different populations (for example, between different countries or regions) and can help identify areas that need intervention in order to improve population health. Many different factors can affect health outcomes. These include but are not limited to Quality of health care: This includes factors such as the availability of preventive care and treatment, the effectiveness of care, and patient safety. Socioeconomic status: This refers to factors such as income, education, and employment. It is well established that people of lower socioeconomic status are more likely to experience poorer health outcomes. Social determinants of health: These are the conditions in which people live, work and play. They include factors such as housing, transportation, and access to healthy food. Social determinants of health have a significant impact on health outcomes. Health risk factors: These are behaviors and conditions that increase the likelihood of developing a disease or experiencing an adverse health event. Common examples of health risk factors include smoking, obesity, and high blood pressure. The above list is by no means exhaustive but provides an overview of some of the key factors that can influence health outcomes.

What are some of the challenges associated with setting health care system goals? There are many challenges associated with setting goals for a health care system. These challenges include, but are not limited to cost.

Many health care interventions can be expensive, and it may be difficult to find the resources to implement them on a large scale.

Some healthcare interventions may not be feasible to implement in a particular setting. For example, an intervention that requires a high level of resources may not be possible to implement in a resource-poor environment. Health care interventions can be difficult to maintain over the long term. This is often due to factors such as changes in funding or staffing levels. It can be difficult to evaluate the impact of health care interventions, especially when multiple factors influence health outcomes. There must be sufficient levels of political will to implement healthcare interventions on a large scale. This can be difficult to achieve, especially in the face of competing priorities. Despite these challenges, it is important to define the goals of the health care system in order to improve the health of the population. Setting goals can help focus attention and resources on priority health issues, and can provide a framework for evaluating the impact of health care interventions.

What are some tips for setting health care system goals? There are a number of things to consider when setting goals for a health care system. These tips can help ensure goals are realistic and achievable. It is important to consult with key stakeholders when setting health care system goals. This will help ensure that objectives are aligned with the needs of the population. It is important to set realistic goals that can be achieved within a reasonable time frame. Setting unrealistic goals can lead to frustration and disappointment. Goals must be specific in order to be measurable. For example, instead of setting the goal of “improving access to health care,” a more specific goal might be “increasing the number of primary care providers in the community.”

Securing the 2023 Moorhead Human Rights Award

Each year, the Human Right Commission of Moorhead, located in Minnesota, acknowledges the activists who have significantly contributed to the advocacy of human rights within the region. It is both an honor and a privilege for me (Zak Amin) to receive this highly regarded Human Rights award this year, in recognition of my commitment in elevating the communities of Moorhead. This honor isn't a singular accomplishment but an acknowledgment to the collective undertakings aimed at fostering positive alterations in multiple lives.

My pilgrimage as an activist has been navigated by a fundamental yet potent belief – the belief that everyone should be entitled to live a worthy life. This belief has fueled my efforts in helping people to secure fruitful employment, thus enabling them to take control of their own destinies. I am of the strong conviction that when individuals have the capability to sustain themselves and their families, it instigates a domino effect that amplifies the strength of the entire society.

I have always positioned education as a pivotal point in my advocacy, and it is with overwhelming pride that I declare the inception of the Heritage Kurdish class at Moorhead High School. This initiative extends beyond merely language and

culture; it acknowledges the depth of diversity in our community. By facilitating a medium for Kurdish students to reconnect with their lineage, we strive to manifest an all-embracing environment that celebrates our distinctive identities while promoting unity.

The course of assimilating into a new society can be daunting for immigrants, and it's been an honor to help smoothen this transition for the newcomers in Moorhead. With cooperative endeavors and communal support, we've managed to supply aid and resources, assuring that immigrants find a welcoming embrace in their fresh surroundings.

Being bestowed with the Human Rights award is an opportune moment for retrospection. It reaffirms the significance of our united efforts in developing a society where everyone can flourish, forsaking their diverse backgrounds and situations. This acknowledgement is not merely for me; it's a dedication to the multitude of individuals who have partaken in this journey, investing their time, energy and fervor to effect a change.

As we revel in this accomplishment, I am mindful that our task is far from culmination. There's much more to achieve in our quest to create a society where human rights are uniformly respected. I extend my heartfelt



gratitude to everyone who has supported and accompanied me on this journey. Together, we'll persist in constructing a society filled with empathy, comprehension, and opportunities, rendering Moorhead a sterling testament to inclusivity and empowerment.

I came to the United States of America in 2015 and was sta-

tioned in Moorhead city in the state of Minnesota. Upon my arrival I went to college and earned an Associate Degree in Business and two diplomas in Accounting Clerk and Payroll Specialist at the Minnesota Community and Technical College. I started working at Moorhead Community Education and also got enrolled in graduate studies. After

earning my Master's Degree in Teaching English as a Second Language, I was appointed as a teacher at Moorhead High School. Alongside teaching I have been working as program manager at the Kurdish American Development Organization and as reporter for the Kurdish Globe newspaper.

Erbil Soccer Team Suffer

Fans believe new players and coach would not solve the team issues

Erbil soccer club has been suffering from many issues since the beginning of the Iraq Stars League. The issues have affected the performance level and the results of the club at the Iraq Stars League negatively. It is hard for the fans of the club to see their favorite team are not even close to the top but to the bottom instead.

Many attempts have been made to improve the club's condition including appointing Abbas Obed as the head coach and bringing other cadres to assist him in his career. The appointment of Obed did not improve anything, but the club suffered even more.

Fans have been accusing the club administration for not having long term projects like working on youth academy and getting benefit from youngsters. On the other hand, the club players have complained recently about their payment and some of them obviously address the financial issues they are experiencing.

"We are not paid regularly like others. I am just ashamed of asking for my payment and I am not going to," said a player in an interview.

Earlier this month, Erbil played a game with Quwa Al Jawihya and was defeated in the match se-



verely. The result of the game was too big for the club administration to digest. After a meeting of the club board and the coach, eventually Obed decided to resign from his position.

As an interim coach, the board decided to appoint Abdul Qadir Hussein to manage the team until another coach is contracted.

Erbil played its first game under Hussein's supervision against Naft Basra but the game ended tied (1:1). Hussein, believed that the loss of concentration in the first half of his team's match against Naft Basra was the reason behind wasting two points and settling for a positive draw (1-1) in the matches of round 10 of the

Iraq Stars League.

He continued: "Our team went through difficult circumstances in previous matches, and today's point is important and through it we can restore confidence and focus to the players."

He concluded: "Our next match against Al-Zawraa, we must focus on it from now on in order to achieve a positive result to continue the journey of improving the image and advancing in the rankings."

Fans are furious about how the club administration are running the club. Some of them gathered in front of the stadium a few days ago asking the administration to be serious in solving the clubs is-

suess.

"I don't think signing two players or bringing a new coach would solve the problem. Look at the club! Look at the results! Look at the players' morale. This is not Erbil at all. I am so disappointed with the administration who don't want positive change in the club," said Dyar Hamid, an Erbil club fan

Hamid, who has been attending the club games since 15 years ago, thinks all the administration should resign and other people who know the issues and who love the club should be appointed to run the club.

Hemn Hawar, another club fan, also said that there are many peo-

ple who have been marginalized from the club and those people are known to be the loyal supporters of the club; they should be given a chance to work and serve the club.

Erbil has played nine games and placed 15th in the Iraq Stars league with only 12 points winning only three, drawing three, and losing six matches. The financial and administrative issues have been negatively impacting the team to stay where they are now.

One of the league's most successful football clubs, Erbil withdrew from Iraq's Premier League during the 2016/17 season due to financial issues.

They have been crowned Iraqi Premier League champions four times, most recently in the 2011/12 season, when they only lost one match. Erbil is also the first club from the Iraqi league to qualify for continental club tournaments. In 2008, they qualified for the Asian Champions League but failed to progress from the group stage.

However, in Asia's second-tier continental tournament, the AFC Cup, Erbil has finished runners-up on two occasions, in 2012 and 2014.



Dr. Tyler Fisher

The Land of Five New Year's Days



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Kurdistan is a country of new beginnings. It looks to the past, to its ancient roots deep in the substrata of pre-history, while also looking forward to the dawning of greater peace and prosperity for the region. The dawn seems to be ever on the horizon.

It is very fitting, then, that Kurdistan celebrates the beginning of the New Year on several days throughout the annual calendar. In fact, it could rightly lay claim to being the country that officially observes more New Year's Days than any other country in the world. The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) formally recognizes no fewer than five as national holidays: January 1 (New Year's Day in the Gregorian or Western calendar), the Kurdish Newroz on the vernal equinox, the Yezidi New Year or Red Wednesday, the Assyrian New Year, and the first day of the month of Muharram (Islamic New Year).

This is significant for several reasons. For one, these five national holidays are yet another striking reminder of the varied, vibrant mosaic of cultures that Kurdistan embraces. In Kurdistan today, unity need not imply or impose uniformity. What's more, the beginning of a new year in any calendar is a time for retrospection, introspection, and anticipation. These holiday junctures

along our planet's orbit offer annual before-and-after moments. The month of January itself derives its name from the Roman god Janus, the god of beginnings, transitions, and doorways, who had two faces, one of which looked behind while the other looked forward. This January, as 2023 gives way to 2024 in the international civil calendar, Kurdistan contemplates the recent past with a view to imminent challenges and opportunities.

A half dozen years have now passed since the KRG held a non-binding Referendum on whether the Kurdistan Region should become an independent state. In September 2017, in what has come to be called the "Kurdish Referendum" for short, the result could scarcely have been more overwhelmingly in favor of independence: with a robust turnout of nearly three quarters of the voting population, more than 93% voted "yes." The very act of holding the Referendum (and participating in it) was a daring, courageous, visionary move. Even in the face of international rebukes in the days leading up to the Referendum, and despite the likelihood of retaliation from neighboring adversaries, the peoples of Kurdistan exercised direct democracy to achieve a decisive, extraordinarily vivid expres-

sion of popular sovereignty. The Referendum harnessed a process of direct self-government and established an unequivocal claim for genuine self-government. The dream of an independent Kurdistan seemed more within reach, more clearly proclaimed, than ever in living memory.

As is well known, the threats of retaliation materialized in the aftermath of the Referendum. Instead of serving as an incontrovertible mandate for Kurdistan's independence in negotiations with Baghdad, the Referendum provoked blockades, sanctions, and military incursions. Federal Iraqi forces, allied with Iranian-backed Shia militias, seized control of oil-rich Kirkuk. Kurdistan lost roughly twenty percent of its territory, and President Masoud Barzani resigned. Words like "miscalculation," "mismanagement," "mistiming," "crisis," and "backfire" peppered the international media coverage of the Referendum. In effect, the Referendum did backfire in terms of the political and socioeconomic crises it unleashed. Even in the most benign terms, the Referendum disappointed popular expectations, and those disappointments still cloud our view of its enduring value.

But we would do well to recall that the word "crisis"

originally referred to a decisive turning point, a pivotal juncture, a watershed moment, like New Year's Day. What abiding worth or meaning does the Referendum and its aftermath hold in Kurdistan's history and prospects?

As the Referendum amplified the peoples' voice, it also underscored that, in the cause of independence, the peoples of Kurdistan can be nonpartisan or "pluri-partisan," like-hearted without necessarily being like-minded. Participation in the Referendum, casting a vote in its sweeping consensus in favor of independence, transcended party lines and ethnic factions. Remarkably, in a land where there is no one-size-fits-all agreement on which day the calendar begins, there is, nevertheless, univocal reaffirmation of independence as a sustained, collective ambition. Again, maintaining this ethos of unity without uniformity will advance Kurdistan's interests in the long term.

In the broader geopolitical puzzle, the Referendum asserted Kurdistan's collaborative agency and right to self-determination, in defiance of international opposition to its timing and terms. For decades to come, the resounding statement the Referendum made will be impossible to ignore in the international arena.

The Kurdistan Region's

Independence Referendum of 2017 is only a beginning, after all. We would do well to bear in mind, by analogy, that the Declaration of Independence did not instantly create the United States of America. The USA celebrates the Fourth of July 1776 as the nation's birthday, but the treaty that legally, internationally recognized the United States as an independent country was not fully ratified until 1884, and it would still take another five years before the Constitution of the United States would become operative and George Washington would later be elected the new nation's first President.

Like the United States with its multiple points of genesis, in Kurdistan, in generations to come, I think we will recognize the Referendum of 2017 as a national New Year's Day in its own right. We will look back to the Referendum as a foundational moment, a watershed, the birthday of a vision. The Referendum did not initiate the aspirations to independence, but it reified them. It gave the peoples of Kurdistan a voice, a point of reference, a historic moment in a history that is currently unfolding. On New Year's Day, on five New Year's Days across the annual calendar, we can reflect on the profound potential the Referendum embodies and the new era it heralds.