The Challenges of Applying the Experience of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq to the Northeast of Syria

Policy Paper

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Executive Summary

This study is a comparison between the Kurdistan Region of Iraq and the area east of the Euphrates in Syria. From a historical perspective, the Kurdish question in Iraq was present from creation of the Iraqi state and remained an area of interest for the Iraqi political elite. Syrian Kurds formed their nationalist being over time, as the Kurdish issue was left unconsidered by Syrian politics, and Arab nationalist trends increasingly saw Kurds as enemies.

When it comes to comparing the geographic and demographic context, the Iraqi Kurdistan Region proved to share a unified stance towards the Iraqi state, while the Kurdish areas in Syria were divided politically, socially and ethnically. Both areas are rich in resources, but in east of the Euphrates has been underinvested.

On international relationships, the paper describes that the relative legitimacy and political and ideological independence of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, enabled it to have external relations, while in Syria the overlap between political movements east of the Euphrates and the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) created a barrier for relations with neighboring countries.

When comparing the political structure, the Kurdistan Region of Iraq has relative agreement among the political forces for the better of the region as a whole, in contrast to the area east of the Euphrates, where political forces rely on their military power and relationships with international powers for gaining legitimacy and do not recognize each other.

Based on its findings, the paper recommends that decision makers in the area east of the Euphrates find agreement amongst each other and increase trust between Arab and Kurdish social factions in the region, in addition to increasing their own social legitimacy. Furthermore, leaders should use the economy to create a sense of belonging in the area.

International decision makers on the other hand, should legally recognize the area, and decisions makers in the United States and European countries must put mechanisms in place to achieve long-term societal, political, and economic stability.

Introduction

The Kurdistan Region of Iraq was established based on a long experience of political conflict within the Iraqi state. The conflict grew and developed alongside the form and transitions of the Iraqi state itself, where the transition in the leader of the state meant a transformation of the identity and the nature of the Iraqi state itself, and the dynamics of its relationship with its foundational issues, particularly the Kurdish issue. That lengthy experience increased the ability of the elite and the political structures to overcome the negative aspects of inherited ideology, especially the bitterness of the civil war. They were thus able to realize the futility of disagreement, whether amongst themselves, with the central government, or with neighboring countries. That historical experience would not have continued were it not for the geographic continuity which allowed it to struggle against the central government. Demographic power positively impacted the geographic makeup. In a later phase, the massive size of subterranean wealth assisted with rapid economic growth and with overcoming the painful impacts left by the various, continuing conflicts of the Iraqi Kurdish struggle.

For these reasons and factors, Iraqi Kurds weaved a network of mature regional and international relationships, which resulted in the countries of the region understanding that the Iraqi Kurds' had numbers and strength that could not be done away with. The Iraqi government cannot be stabilized without some sort of response to the Kurdish question, whether through war or negotiation, unlike other Middle Eastern countries who were able to impose a kind of internal political stability by eliminating and overcoming the Kurdish question. The confrontational nature of Iraq's political regimes with international powers, specifically after the Baathist coup and the subsequent behavior of Saddam Hussein's regime, allowed Iraqi Kurds to expand their foreign relationships to guard and protect their progression and presence in international relations. Building on that, the Iraqi Kurds had a dynamic political elite and political structures, with a clear and close relationship to the society, and was able to transition, to some extent, from a revolutionary elite and political structures to a ruling elite and ruling political powers with professional capabilities in bureaucracy, economic planning, and public administration. The foundational moment for the

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creation of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq was 2005, building on the permanent Iraqi constitution, the crowning of all these inputs which are still effective and influential in public life in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

In contrast, the experience of the area east of the Euphrates has not produced a clear illustrative trajectory, building upon internal and external factors. It is true that there was always a Kurdish question in Syria, but it was oppressed and not effective in influencing the dynamics of governance and administration in the country. Alongside the Kurdish question, the Syrian regime destroyed the political, organizational, and elite infrastructures in the country, especially in the area east of the Euphrates, the 'domestic colony'. In doing so, the area east of the Euphrates failed to transform into a region with a political identity, or to transform into an attractive cause, neither to the elite nor to organizations, nor even to the society in that region itself. At the deepest levels, this failure resulted in the dilution of the geographical and demographic makeup of the area. The area resembles those entities that feature dispersed urban areas, with large distances between them. There is also no long-term planning. There is an active political elite among one indigenous group in the area east of the Euphrates, which is the Kurdish elite. Meanwhile its Arab counterpart is either beholden to ideologies and forces from outside the area east of the Euphrates, or is extremely indigenous. The area east of the Euphrates is going through a state of vitality and exeptionalism regarding the formation of relationships with international and regional forces and entities, but the recalcitrance of its relationship with Turkey hinders its progression in that regard. These factors have contributed to the foundational moment of the area east of the Euphrates becoming complicated, unstable, and not based on a project whose features are clearly or maturely defined.

The Five Levels of Comparison

History of the Two Experiences

Kurdistan Region of Iraq

The Kurdistan Region of Iraq was founded as an organic political entity within the state of Iraq according to the constitution that was enacted in 2005, after a long experience for the Kurdish question in the country, and whose roots go back to the first months of the creation of the modern Iraqi state in 1919. Therefore, the modern Iraqi state has not lived any period without the Kurdish question being the most vital formational part of the domestic political dynamics.

Throughout the foundational years that separated the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the creation of the modern Iraqi state from 1917 to 1925, there was a continuous "Kurdish rebellion". It is not true in any case that those rebellions were targeted at the British occupation of Iraq, but rather they were, in more than just appearance, a rebellion against the form and type of the Iraqi state.[1]

- ♦ The relationship between the rebellious Kurdish forces and the central authority in the country vacillated between two understandings of "legitimacy".[2]
- ♦ The Kurds considered the Treaty of Sevres, which gave the Kurds the right to self-determination and which ended World War I, to be legitimate.

The central Iraqi authority, both the executive and legislative, continued to consider the foundation of the Kingdom of Iraq from the three historical Ottoman states (wilayat) to be the legitimate foundations of the modern Iraqi state.

Alongside this there were the armed Kurdish rebellions opposed to the form that the modern Iraqi state had taken. The Anglo-Iraqi Treaty that was ratified in 1924, which was the first

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[1] For more information see: Rostom Mahmoud, "The Kurdish Question and the Tradition of Decentralization in Syria and Iraq," *al-Jumhuriya* (in Arabic). https://www.aljumhuriya.net/ar/38482
[2] For more details: *The Complete Effects*, Ahmad Othman Abu Bakr, Part 2, Zein al-Salmaniyah Foundation Publishers, pp. 73-81 (in Arabic).

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official recognition by the modern Iraqi state of the Kurds of Iraq, dictated the rights of the Kurds in developing and teaching the Kurdish language in their areas, and that appointments to government positions in the Kurdish areas are the right of those living in those areas.

During the monarchical rule in Iraq, although there was not a complete Kurdish integration into the Iraqi state's institutions and public identity, the dynamics of the "democratic" Iraqi state in the monarchical period were able to attract the Iraqi Kurdish bourgeoisie and give some form of autonomous authority to local leaders (*za'ims*).

It can be concluded, then, that Kurdish efforts for more political decentralization and more independence for regions and identities increased and coincided with changes that occurred in the institutions of the Iraqi state after the famous coup by Abdul Karim Qasem against the monarchy in 1958.[3] But the first real political negotiations over the form of the Iraqi state, and the role and position of the Kurds in that state, occurred after the second Baathist coup in 1968. Two years of exhausting negotiations between the Kurdish national movement and the central government led to the famous statement of 11 March 1970, which led to a crack in the institutions and identity of the central Iraqi state for the first time.

It is true that the Baathist and Iraqi regime did not implement the aspects of the agreement, and replaced it with the implementation of formal autonomous rule, creating a Kurdish political elite as a replacement of the populist Kurdish parties who were independent of the forces of the central government, prompting a renewal of local Kurdish negotiations. Despite all of that, however, the central government continued to recognize autonomous rule, at least in appearance, for the Kurds of Iraq.

In 1991 Iraqi Kurds lost the formal recognition of their autonomous governance by the central Iraqi state, but they came to possess actual, direct governing authority over the vast Kurdish areas of Iraq, albeit without recognition. This position continued until the American occupation of Iraq, when the Iraqi Kurds gained the federal entity within the Iraqi state, with

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[3] For further reading, see "Caught between Abdul Karim Qasem and the Kurdistan Democratic Party," Ghassan Mutab al-Hayti and Ali Ghazi al-Radam, the Anbar University Magazine for the Humanities, First Edition, March 2013 (in Arabic).

established constitutional ratification and not subject to replacement except with Kurdish approval, according to the fourth clause of Article 142 of the Iraqi constitution.[4]

East of the Euphrates

The modern Syrian entity was founded, geopolitically, on a central area which is the series of the four historical Syrian cities: Aleppo, Hama, Homs, and Damascus. On their outskirts are the three rural regions that have varying political identities: the coastal mountains, Jabal al-Druze, and the Syria Jazira region.[5]

French political and administrative arrangements with which France arranged its governing authority in Syria, did not indicate in any way the presence of a Kurdish nation. Rather, sectarian decentralization was between the urban, Sunni majority in Syria, and its minority Druze and Alawite equivalent.

The strategy relied on two dualities in their attempt to control the domestic situation in Syria. The first dealt with gaining the satisfaction of the urban bourgeoisie leaders (*za'ims*) in the primary central cities, while also getting agreement from the rural notables, including those from the Kurdish and Arab communities in the area east of the Euphrates.

The first Kurdish political body in Syria emerged during the events of 1936, during the beginning of negotiations between the French government and a delegation of Syrian political forces regarding the future of Syria. At that time, the Syrian Jazira was divided vertically between the leadership of the Kurd Hajo Agha al-Haverke and the Arab Daham al-Asi al-Jerba. The former had a political and popular alliance with a faction of the local forces in the Jazira, and demanded that in the Jazira there be a special entity for the Kurds with the Syrian state. Al-Hadi was, at the same time, leading the 'Unionist Movement' which opposed Hajo Agha.

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[4] The text of the Iraqi constitution: https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Iraq_2005.pdf?lang=en
[5] For more detail: "Lebanon and Syria, Partnership of Independence, from the Ottoman Era until the French Mandate," Hilal al-Solh, Limited Print (in Arabic).

From the middle of the 1950s, with the formation of the first Kurdish national party in 1957 and with decline of the era of the national democratic bourgeoisie, the Syrian Jazira divided politically between two factions[6]:

♦ The majority of Kurds were divided between the Kurdish nationalist movement led by Kurdish nationalist parties on one hand, and the Syrian Communist Party on the other hand, which was widespread in Syrian Kurdish circles.

♦ The majority of Arabs were divided between the Nasserist and Baathist Arab nationalist movements on one hand, and between populist tribal currents on the other hand.

During the long Assadist rule, the Syrian Jazira lived as if it were a domestic Syrian colony, with intense centralization of the apparatuses, compacts, and administrations in the capital Damascus. The political regime attempted to practice four kinds of relationships with this area:

♦ Promoting and working towards a fundamental political division between Arabs and Kurds in the region, and removing and destroying any attempts to create a movement demanding the rights of all residents in the governing political regime.

♦ Absorbing the Kurdish nationalist movement by turning a blind eye to their activities and their domestic party-political rhetoric directed towards Kurdish society while maintaining all forms of oppression of Kurds – political, cultural, economic, and identity.

♦ Relative permission for the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) to work within Syrian Kurdish circles.

♦ Neglecting the area east of the Euphrates, in politics and development, as if it is outside all Syrian balances and considerations.

After 2003 the Syrian regime saw the Kurds as complete functional enemies, and saw them as the sole Syrian populist block organized, with durable internal solidarity, and with political organizations that had bearing in the community. Likewise, it saw opposing them as an

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[6] For more details: Nikolaos van Dam, *The Struggle for Power in Syria*, pp. 120-128, electronic copy.

effective tool to create ties with the Arab communities in the Jazira, who opposed the American occupation of Iraq.

The Qamishli uprising in spring 2004 was the peak of Arab/Kurdish animosity in the area east of the Euphrates.[7] The Kurdish nationalist movement integrated after that into the expressions of the Syrian opposition, as through the Damascus Declaration, and the National Syrian Council later on, up until the Syrian revolution, where the Kurdish political forces were split against each other on the position towards the regime and the revolution, despite the fact that the vast majority of Syrian Kurds stood with the revolution. Arabs in the Syrian Jazira did not have political forces to express their political positions regarding the revolution and the regime, but their elites were divided between the regime and the revolution.

Comparing the Two Historical Experiences

Five forms of comparison can be used between the experiences:

- ♦ There was a Kurdish question with a nationalist sense in the foundational roots of the Iraqi entity, which quickly turned into a national question with a geographical, region, and structural understanding. In the Syrian entity, however, there were the seeds of a foundational, territorial question, with many factional differences, which developed into a Kurdish national question as Arab nationalist trends established hegemony over power.

- ♦ The changes that overtook the Iraqi authorities contributed to a continued increase in breaking down the centralization of the Iraqi state, politically and geographically, whereas the transformations to the authority in Syria increased the centralization of Syrian authority and geography.

- ♦ There was an Iraqi Kurdish nationalist entity from the time of the foundation of the Iraqi state, built on the Ottoman Kurdish notables in the cities, along with the tribal leaders and religious movements. This was not available for Syrian Kurds, who

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[7] For more on the situation of Syrian Kurds, see the Human Rights Watch report entitled "Group Denial: Repression of Kurdish Political and Cultural Rights in Syria", published 26 November 2009.

formed their nationalist being over time and in phases, especially since their geographical areas were separated politically, culturally, and socially.

♦ The Kurdish question has always been an area of interest for the ruling and political elite of Iraq, both those in power and in opposition equally, and both positively and negatively. In Syria, however, the Kurdish issue, or even the issue of the area east of the Euphrates, was always left unconsidered by the cultural and political Syrian elite consciousness, both those in power and in opposition equally.

♦ There was no political allegiance or connection between the Iraqi Kurdish political forces with their counterparts outside of Iraq, and therefore their willingness to enter into the political struggle in Iraq was high, unlike Syrian Kurds, who for decades continued to consider the Kurdish question in both Iraq and Turkey as part of the essential cause, in contrast to their relationships with Syrian forces, including the Arab forces in the Jazira/east of the Euphrates.

Geographical, Demographic, and Economic Foundations

The Kurdistan Region of Iraq

There are two areas that make up the geography of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq:

♦ The four northern provinces, Erbil, Dohuk, Halabja, and Suleimani, whose area is more than 40,000 km^2.

♦ Disputed territories in the provinces of Kirkuk, Nineveh, and Diyala, whose area is almost the total area of the three provinces.

Defining the Kurdistan Region in either of the two areas was the center of the intense conflict between the Kurdish nationalist movement and the central authority. The Kurdistan Region, according to the first definition, makes up about one fourth of the area of "useful" Iraq, if the

vast desert areas were removed from consideration, whereas considering the two areas together forms between a third and a half of this "useful" Iraq.[8]

The geographical area extends along the boundaries of the three neighboring countries, and is more fertile and receives more rainfall than other areas of Iraq. It is completely contiguous aside from the gap between areas of Dohuk province and the Yezidi areas of Sinjar.

The latest parliamentary elections in Iraq revealed that Iraqi Kurds make up about a fifth of the total Iraqi population, as the Kurdish nationalist movements gained about 60 parliamentary seats out of about 300. The residents of the four provinces that form the Kurdistan Region of Iraq currently are about three fourths of this Kurdish population bloc, which is almost 15% of the population of Iraq.

Kurds suffer from a decline in fertility rates compared to Iraqis generally, for complex reasons related to the development of public life and lifestyles in the Kurdistan Region with faster dynamics than in other areas of Iraq, and for a number of political and economic factors, which have increased the phenomenon of emigration from Kurdish areas over recent years.[9]

The Ministry of Natural Resources in the Kurdistan Region estimates the oil reserves in the region to be about 45 billion barrels of oil and 177 trillion cubic meters of gas.[10] This is more than one fourth of the total reserves in Iraq of subterranean and oil resources. The Kurdistan Regional Government was previously receiving 17% of the central Iraqi budget, until Nuri al-Maliki's government cut if off in 2014 after the escalation of conflicts regarding the Kurdistan Region's rights to invest in its oil resources, and the Kurdistan Region's portion did not return to what it had been previously, but rather the budgets of 2018 and 2019 set the Kurdistan Region's portion of the Iraqi public budget at 12.67%. The latest political and

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[8] For more details about the portfolios caught up between the Kurdistan Region and the Central Government see report number 103 by the International Crisis Group, released 2011 under the title: "Iraq and the Kurds, Confronting Withdrawal Fears."

[9] For details on the population of Iraq and the Kurdistan Region, visit the following links:
http://www.rudaw.net/arabic/middleeast/iraq/011020189
https://www.iraqakhbar.com/1400402

[10] To read the detailed numbers of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq's oil reserves, see the following link:
http://www.bayancenter.org/2018/08/4740/

financial agreement between the regional and central governments stipulated that the central government would sent the salaries of employees in the Kurdistan Region and of Peshmerga members to the Kurdistan Regional Government regardless of any political disagreement, as long as the Kurdistan Regional Government promises to turn over 250,000 barrels of oil daily to the National Iraqi Oil Company (SOMO).

East of the Euphrates

The area east of the Euphrates exceeds 50,000 km^2, approximately one third of Syria's land area. It forms one geographical unit. The residents of this area are estimated to number about five million; Arabs form the clear majority within this geography, about two thirds of residents, whereas Kurds represent about one third. There is also a presence of Assyrians/Syriacs in the area.

There are four issues dealing with the geography and demographics of the area:

♦ Within the political forces, elites, and structures, there is a division in this area into two entirely different spheres: there is a series of border cities and towns in the north, and their rural areas to the south, where the Kurds form the absolute majority of residents. There is then the sphere of Arab areas stretching south from the rural areas of those cities and towns, in which Arabs form the absolute majority. And of course, there are the mixed cities, like Qamishli and Hassakah.

♦ There are no magnet cities within this entire area, so the demographic presence of residents is distributed along two separate axes: the series of border cities and towns stretching from the city of Derik/al-Malikiyah to Kobani/Ain al-Arab, and the other stretching all along the Euphrates River.

♦ The dynamic of Kurdish political thought was and is that the geographical unit possible for them is the three regions where Kurds form the majority of residents: the upper Jazira, and the two regions of Kobani and Afrin. The political effort that the Kurdish political, cultural, and youth elite put forth throughout the past decades must not be in vain.

♦ There are tools, cultural, political, and even economic, to form a region east of the Euphrates as a political entity, aside from the desire of the Autonomous Administration. Without working these dynamics in the public sphere this desire, which the Kurdish Autonomous Administration is doing alone, cannot be transformed into a creation on the ground. It will be met with refusal even by the social bases that most imagine their interests to be in the creation of such a region.

Economically this region is the primary breadbasket of the Syrian economy, with its riches in oil, agriculture, and water, and its electricity production. It yields more than half of the needs of the national treasury.

However, the area east of the Euphrates remained extremely underdeveloped economically. The report "Internal Migration in Syria Between 1994 and 2004," published by the National Statistics Service, shows the numbers regarding change in residency, which do not show the full scale of the internal migration from these areas, but nonetheless form a standard to measure the demographic bleeding from these areas in favor of other regions of Syria resulting from the alarming economic situation and underinvestment and underdevelopment in the area. The numbers in the report show that there are approximately 20,000 families from the three provinces trying to transfer their residency each year to other provinces.

Comparison between the Geographic and Demographic Situations

There are four forms that can be taken for comparison:

♦ The Kurdistan Region of Iraq did not need massive cultural, economic, and political efforts to unify the desire of its local residents towards the federal political option with the state of Iraq, as the political elite – especially in the two main Kurdish parties – had the trust of the social bases, who tasked them with entering into the larger conversation with the central government. This was not available to the area east of the Euphrates, because alongside the deep political fissure, there were societal fissures

resulting from complicated factors – linguistic, regional, ideological, and even military – in the area east of the Euphrates.

♦ It is true that there is vast subterranean wealth in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, and that is more than what is in the region east of the Euphrates, but the area east of the Euphrates has many capabilities that have not been invested in effectively, especially with regards to agriculture and the oil industry. Additionally, the population makeup of the area east of the Euphrates is more active and more in tune with the culture of work, and the levels of education there are better in some sectors than in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

♦ The area east of the Euphrates has an issue of geography compared to other areas, either regarding the Kurds of the region in Afrin, or with regards to Arabs and their relationship with residents on the areas west and south of the Euphrates (al-Shamiyyah) in the provinces of Raqqa and Deir al-Zour, exactly like the Kurdistan Region of Iraq's issue in disputed areas with the central government.

♦ There are forms of 'demographic hegemony' that the majority of residents in the area east of the Euphrates are conscious of given the lack of any central magnet city. There is a feeling of hegemony that those in the Jazira have towards other Kurdish areas, which the political and bureaucratic elites played against the rural areas of Hassakah and Raqqa provinces.

Regional and International Relationships

Kurdistan Region of Iraq

The political agreement that led to the formation of modern Iraq after 2003, and which produced as a by-product the Iraqi constitution of 2005, was not simply a dividing-up of positions or interests between the central government and outlying areas, but was in a sense a dividing-up of sovereignty. The foundational articles of the Iraqi constitution state that Iraq is made up of the Kurdish and Arab peoples, and that the Kurdish language is an official language in the country by constitutional writ. But before all that, there is a sort of balance of power between the Kurdistan Region and the central government.

Additionally, the experience of lengthy domestic tranquility since that time until the present, unlike the tattered and worrying domestic situation in the rest of Iraq, transformed the Kurdistan Region into the successful example for the experiment of the United States and the West in Iraq and the region. In addition to these two issues, the Kurds of Iraq were with the Western and international policies regarding the position on terrorism, extremism, the Arab spring, Iran, and the rise of political Islam. The Kurdistan Region's international relations are a tool to protect the form of its presence within the Iraqi state, and the form of its relationships with neighboring countries. The experience of the referendum and the clash that followed with the central government, which was in accord with neighboring countries, were the largest expression of that balance that the Kurdistan Region lives in.

East of the Euphrates

From the entire network of regional relationships, the area east of the Euphrates only has coverage and military protection from the international coalition to fight terrorism. That relationship is almost exclusively the air coverage that the coalition provides for the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), and the coalition considers the SDF to be their military partner fighting for it on-the-ground, and which it should protect from the Syrian regime and neighboring countries.

Within this definition, the network of regional and international relationships for the area east of the Euphrates suffers from the following:

♦ There is no central political force that can weave, or attempt to weave, relationships between this region and international and regional forces.

♦ The area east of the Euphrates does not enjoy any legitimacy from the Syrian state through which it can try to secure an overlapping network of regional and international relationships.

♦ The high level of sensitivity that Turkey has towards this experiment, which is Kurdish and led by a political movement that is closely linked to the Kurdistan

Workers Party (PKK), is a primary barrier to the development of this structure of international and regional relationships.

♦ There is no legitimacy, even outside of official institutions of the Syrian state, like the legitimacy taken from decisions by the Security Council and international agreements. There is no authority that acts as an umbrella to form regional and international relationships for the area east of the Euphrates.

A Comparison between the State of International Relationships

Four frameworks for comparison can be made to balance between the two sides:

♦ The difference in legitimacy creates a fundamental distinction between the two experiences regarding international and regional relationships for the Kurdistan Region of Iraq and the area east of the Euphrates.

♦ The political and ideological independence of the political forces in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq allowed them to overcome the sensitivities of neighboring countries towards their experiment, even if only very relatively. On the other hand, the nature of the overlap between the dominant political movement east of the Euphrates and the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) creates a barrier for the area east of the Euphrates to overcome the sensitivities of neighboring countries.

♦ There is overlap between the very relative 'success' of the two experiences within their respective countries, which could give a boost to the area east of the Euphrates in their relationships in the future, if any agreement is reached in Syria that they are a part of.

♦ There are no historical binding relationships between the political factions in the areas east of the Euphrates and between any international forces like the relationship between the Kurdistan National Union and international socialism, which was used later on to the benefit of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq's international relationships.

Political Elite and Structures

The Kurdistan Region of Iraq

The political elite and political forces in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq have a massive political inheritance, stretching to the beginning of the last century, when the urban political and elite forces were Ottoman, especially in the cities of Sulaimani and Erbil, and even in Mosul and Baghdad. These elites brought about three forms of effective political bases:

- Political organizations capable of mobilizing and building up a system of public work in Iraqi Kurdish society.
- A political "theory" compatible with the conditions and political balances within Iraq and in its regional context.
- A network of domestic relationships with Iraqi cultural and political forces which serve to create general understanding of the Kurdish question and its righteousness and legitimacy.
- Facing these objective bases, the experience of the political structures and elite in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq fell into the four "traditional" stumbling blocks in the experiences of the region.
  - These political elite and structures were for attracted by the interests of one or more regional power, especially in the periods before economic independence and the recognition of legitimacy by the central authority in Baghdad.
  - The political elite and structures were divided against themselves despite a common goal. Because of that they entered a number of bloody wars where their brother became their enemy in various phases of its political activities.
  - The political elite and structures drowned in the dynamics of corruption, nepotism, and accumulation of wealth, and there was no room given to developing the internal structure of a political system that most closely resembles a dynastic emirate so as to take a modern, urban form of governance.

♦ It failed to create an objective central structure for "national security" within the Iraqi state that most political movements agree with despite their internal differences on other issues.

East of the Euphrates

There are four forms of political elites and structures in the area east of the Euphrates, unaligned with each other structurally, and in the web of their differences they define the nature of the dynamics that form the effective elite and their role:

♦ The "traditional" Syrian Kurdish political elite and structures. These are the Syrian Kurdish parties that succeeded or broke off from each other since the founding of the first Kurdish part in Syria in 1957 till today.[11]

♦ The Arab political elite with its various poles: there is the elite that supports the ruling regime because it is an Arab nationalist regime that offers hegemony to the Arab element at the expense of other peoples, and another which was a part of the Syrian political opposition like the Communist Labor League and the opposition People's Party, and to some extent with the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood.

♦ The Kurdish/Syrian elite and structures tied to the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK). This elite was allowed to move easily in the 1980s and 1990s, with the Syrian regime turning a blind eye, until the two sides were cut off from each other after 1998. With the outbreak of the Syrian revolution, according to the well-known political agreement between the Syrian regime and this political movement, this elite and its structures have returned to the public sphere with exceptional vitality.[12]

♦ The unorganized cultural and economic elite in any political structure are the most important political and social capital. In the area east of the Euphrates this elite possess a network of interests and political positions with the hegemonic powers generally, and also has a network and type of relationships like that of "local Masons"

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[11] You can read the history of Syrian Kurdish parties and their nature in a study by Rostom Mahmoud entitled "The Social Bases of the Syrian Kurdish Parties," published on the website Al Jumhuriya: https://www.aljumhuriya.net/ar/33686

[12] You can follow the trajectory of the role of the PKK in Syrian/Turkish relations in the book *Syrian-Turkish Relations: Definitions and Issues*, Dr. Arkan Adwan, p. 171 and onward.

between themselves, especially in the cities where the economic and cultural elite have gathered.

Comparison

There are three levels of comparison between the two experiences regarding the elite and political forces in each case:

♦ The "single cause" helped forced the different elite and political forces in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq to come to agreement among themselves, even if to a minor extent. This situation was not the case in the area east of the Euphrates.

♦ The current political and military hegemonies do not rely on creating political consensus and satisfying social bases, as they feel that their legitimacy comes from their military power and their relationships with international powers.

♦ The political forces east of the Euphrates do not recognize each other, rather there is a sort of mutual nihilistic cut off, from both sides, whether by parties or the hegemonic elite or its counterpart who has been pushed aside. Nothing of this sort occurred in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq at any point, even during the local civil war.

Moment of Emergence

The Kurdistan Region of Iraq

The Kurdistan Region of Iraq was founded in its current form at the moment the new Iraqi constitution was ratified in 2005, which specified for Iraq and the Kurdistan Region and Iraqi Kurds a number of particularities:

♦ The legitimacy of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq was ratified with quasi-consensus within the constitution itself, which was done by agreement between Shiite and Kurdish Iraqi political powers, and despite its absolute rejection by the Iraqi Sunni powers..

♦ That ratification came after two years of the American plan for Iraq, which was opposed to all regional powers. In other words, the Kurdistan Region was done by

foreign effort and despite the rejection of all of the regional and international powers who opposed it.

- ♦ The Kurdistan Region of Iraq was founded at a time when it had possessed *de facto* independence from the central government for 12 years, even if it was not recognized. In this sense, it had deep acceptance to distinguish its trajectory from other areas of Iraq, and for there to be within it particularities and dynamics upon which its domestic political and economic effectiveness could be based.

- ♦ The general environment that the American occupation created in modern Iraq pushed the country generally, and the Kurdistan Region especially, to adopt and develop democratic and civil values and dynamics, and respect for human rights internally.

- ♦ The Kurdistan Region of Iraq was founded after an entire decade in which its elite and its political parties possessed memories and experiences of the worst of what modern entities can pass through: civil war.

East of the Euphrates

The area east of the Euphrates was founded as a result of four compounded factors:

- ♦ The Syrian revolution, which was an uprising of the vast majority of Syrians in the face of an extremely violent, stable regime that was engrained in society. This majority included Arabs, Kurds, and Syriacs in the area east of the Euphrates.

- ♦ In order to reduce the burden on itself, the Syrian regime entered an agreement with the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), and turned over to it vast areas with a Kurdish majority, which turned the Syrian Kurdish ally of the PKK into a partner in governing those areas.

- ♦ The accumulation of the Syrian regime losing its capabilities, and losing its acceptance and ability for a quick return to governing those areas like it was planning, and therefore this Syrian Kurdish movement was able to increase its ability to govern these areas and expand them, even outside areas with a Kurdish majority.

- ♦ The entry of the SDF in a military partnership with the international coalition forces starting in 2014, therefore withdrawing from the condition of their agreement with the

Syrian regime, and the development of the areas under its hegemony, and benefiting from its partnership with the international coalition forces to protect itself from international powers.

These foundational factors gave the area east of the Euphrates a number of particularities, stemming from the nature of these factors which contributed to its foundation:

♦ The area east of the Euphrates was established on an unsteady foundation, resulting from exceptional circumstances, and therefore not relying on local will or even regional or international will. On top of that, the principal hegemonic political force does not appear to be attempting to seeking that will, benefiting from this unique circumstance.

♦ The current factors do not show that the entity/area east of the Euphrates is stable in this form for the long term, because all of the factors that brought it into being are changing and overlapping, particularly the future of the Syrian regime and the transformation of the American presence in Syria.

♦ The area east of the Euphrates is not founded as part of a large, stable project, but rather relies solely on fighting terrorism, which may not transform into a method to gain political legitimacy to firmly establishment any particular entity.

♦ There is one side attempting to control the process of establishing this area, and building on its ideology and a particular political process. Therefore, the foundational particularities for this entity do not lean towards consensus and respecting the systems of democracy and human rights.

Comparison

There are three frameworks that specify the difference between the experiences of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq and its counterpart east of the Euphrates.

♦ There was an "international" project that resulted in the experience of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq in its foundational moment, whereas the experience of the area east of the Euphrates stemmed from a number of coincidental, contradicting factors, which

has brought about in this moment an unstable hegemony for a particular political movement over the area east of the Euphrates. In some sense, the condition for a moment of emergence was the most important factor in the experience of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, while the condition for a moment of emergence is most important east of the Euphrates because of the instability there.

♦ All of the factors and transformations that came alongside the rising of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq forced upon it a number of primary particularities, such as public freedoms and respect for human rights. In complete contrast, the areas east of the Euphrates came to be during a long-term war, which had many features of a civil war.

♦ The condition of consensus between the political forces in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq was available at the time of the region's founding more than is the case east of the Euphrates, and the situations cannot be compared. As such, it can be expected that the area East of the Euphrates will pass through a difficult experience of altercations between its political forces until consensus emerges between these forces.

Recommendations

♦ It is incumbent upon the decision makers in the area east of the Euphrates to understand the importance of the historical accumulation of the experience in any entity, and that the lack of that experience must be overcome by increasing the levels of exchange, communication, and acceptance of agreement amongst them.

♦ Public leaders in the area east of the Euphrates must understand historical experiences equivalent to their own, in which all went through a civil war following the foundation of entities not based on consensus, or those that were founded like the one east of the Euphrates as a result only of military effort.

♦ It is incumbent upon decision makers in the countries involved in the international coalition to understand the importance of creating an umbrella of statutory legal recognition for this area, so that it can be a tool in creating stability, and imposing more responsibility on the actors in the governing authority of the area.

- Local leaders must understand that the poor relationship and lack of trust between Arab and Kurdish social factions in the area east of the Euphrates is the result of historical factors regarding public life in the area, and that this will be overcome by creating dynamics for public work that overcomes the current situation, and not just through lofty rhetoric.

- Decisions makers in the United States and European countries must put mechanisms in place regarding long-term societal, political, and economic stability for this area, as this alone is what can be called "holding ground" in the face of extremist organizations.

- Leaders in public affairs must understand that the economic factor, specifically dealing with the investment in natural resources, is the most capable of creating a collective being and collective belonging to the different residents of the area within this structure and entity, and this factor has been lacking so far.

- Political forces in the area east of the Euphrates must understand that they do not have sufficient trust from social bases, and that these bases are tired of the effects of civil war, and believe deeply that the political forces do not have the popular support to change the terrible situation of these elements.

- The political and cultural elite in the area east of the Euphrates must understand that any entity in the area east of the Euphrates is not incapable of become totalitarian, and that there is no deterrent to the ruling authorities to do so.

- Politicians in the area east of the Euphrates must understand that the true protector of the area is the social forces themselves, and that in order for them to become a true protector they must have a reasonable element of representation, and must participate in authority in the area.

- Decision makers in the European Union must understand that stability in the area east of the Euphrates will be a tool to allow thousands of refugees and asylums-seekers to return to the area, especially the least effective and vital to European society, like the elderly and those not integrated into the environment of European countries.