

The Iraqi Kurds: a Valuable Ally in the US Invasion of Iraq (2003)

أكراد العراق: حليف ثمين في الغزو الأمريكي للعراق (2003)

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Abstract: It has been stated that the Kurds have no friends but the mountains. However, this statement proved incorrect during the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, as the US-Kurdish relations improved and became stronger than any time before. The present work tends to investigate the crucial role that the Kurds played in the US war on Iraq. And the major issue of the paper is centered on how the Iraqi Kurds, who had been betrayed by the Americans in the past times, became a reliable US ally and an effective player in the war.

Keywords: The United States; Iraqi Kurds; Peshmerga; Saddam Hussein; Operation Iraqi Freedom.

ملخص: كثيرا ما كان يذكر أن الأكراد لا صديق لهم سوى الجبال، إلا أن هذه المقولة قد ثبت عكسها خلال الغزو الأمريكي للعراق سنة 2003، حيث توطدت العلاقات الأمريكية الكردية وأصبحت أقوى من أي وقت سابق. وقد جاءت فكرة هذا المقال لتسلط الضوء على الدور الهام الذي لعبه الأكراد في الحرب الأمريكية على العراق، وكيف أن أولئك الأكراد الذين شهد التاريخ على خيانة الأمريكان لهم في العديد من الأحداث، هم ذاتهم الذين أصبحوا حلفاء لأمريكا وقاتلوا بشراسة في صفوف القوات الأمريكية خلال الحرب.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الولايات المتحدة؛ أكراد العراق؛ بيشمرکه؛ صدام حسين؛ عملية تحرير العراق.

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1. Introduction:

Following the attacks of September 11, 2001, the United States began contingency operations against some countries that were considered rogue states, including Iraq. On March 20, 2003, US-led coalition forces launched a war on Iraq, aiming at removing Saddam Hussein and his Ba'athist government from power. The invasion; indeed, was based on political and humanitarian justifications, claiming that President Hussein sponsored al-Qaida terrorist group and manufactured Weapons of Mass Destruction within his country. Additionally, Hussein was accused of committing crimes against his Iraqi people; thus, overthrowing his regime became a necessity for America.

Factually, the Kurds of Iraq, who had experienced a long history of repression at the hands of the Iraqi government, were the best example to justify the US humanitarian reason for intervention. Meanwhile, the United States attempted to benefit from the long lasting Iraqi-Kurdish conflict to fragment Iraq's unity and win the Kurds, both army and civilians, to the American side. And though the Kurds had been abandoned by the United States in several occasions throughout history, and paid dearly for trusting foreign powers, they accepted to risk again and cooperate with the Americans to oust Saddam Hussein's regime. Through this study, the researcher attempts to answer the following questions: did the Iraqi Kurds constitute a valuable asset in the American war on Iraq? And how did the United States exploit the Kurdish people to fight against Saddam Hussein? The objective of this work; therefore, is to shed light on the role that the Iraqi Kurds played during the invasion of Iraq, and to show how the US exploited the struggle between the Kurds and the Ba'athist government to reach its aim in toppling the Iraqi regime.

2. Historical Overview of the Kurds:

The term 'Kurd' refers to the Kurdish people who consider themselves the indigenous people of Kurdistan region, which includes adjacent parts of Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran. In fact, historians believe that the origins of the Kurds date back to the dawn of history, when inhabitants of the Zagros Mountains existed, including the people of 'Lullu, Koti, Kurti, Guti, Kassites, Mitanni...'.¹ And later in the 10th century B.C., people from Indo-European origins

¹ Thomas Bois, **The Kurds**, Khayat Book and Publishing Company S.A.L., Beirut, 1966, p. 10

(Medes and the Kardakians) immigrated to Kurdistan and settled there, making with the indigenous inhabitants what became known as the Kurdish nation.¹ Additionally, Kurdistan as a geographical term was used first in the 12th century A.D., during the Seljuks Era, when the Seljuk Sultan Sinjar established a state in the western part of the mountain region and called it Kurdistan, to be ruled by Suleiman Shah. However, following the victory of the Ottomans over the Safavid Empire in the battle of Chaldrin in 1514, most of the Kurds joined the Ottoman Empire, which treated them not in terms of their ethnic origins, but as Muslim elements and allowed them to enjoy certain autonomy and authority within their Kurdish areas.²

The Kurds lived as Ottoman subjects for many centuries ; however, things started to alter in the aftermath of World War One and the collapse of the Ottoman empire, which was split into newly created nation-states. Consequently, the Kurds found themselves divided into four states called Iraq (or Mesopotamia as called by the British), Iran, Turkey and Syria. Population estimated in the late1990's recorded nearly 30 million Kurds divided among Turkey (51%), Iran (24%), Iraq (16%), and Syria (5%).³

In Iraq, the Kurds constitute the largest ethnic minority, estimated between 4 to 4.5 million, roughly 15% and 20% of the country's total population⁴. Most of the Iraqi Kurds are Sunni Muslims, but there are also Shi'is, Yazidis, Alawis, and Christian minorities. They speak a Kurdish language which is akin to Persian, and several other dialects includingKurmanji in North Iraq and Sorani in North West Iraq. They inhabit areas rich of oil and natural resources. The following map shows the Iraqi Kurdish regions.

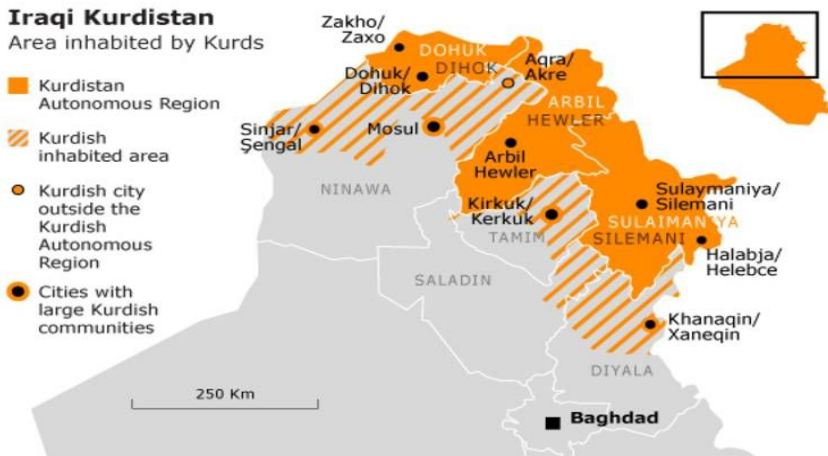
¹David McDowall, **A Modern History of the Kurds**, I. B. Tauris, London, 1996, p. 8

²Christopher Houston, **Kurdistan: Crafting of National Selves**, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 2008, pp. 19-20

³ Lokman I. Meho& Kelly Maglaughlin, **Kurdish Culture and Society: an Annotated Bibliography**, Greenwwod Press, Westport CT., 2001, p. 4

⁴KerimYildiz, **The Kurds in Iraq: the Past, Present and Future**, Pluto Press, London, 2004, p. 9

Map N°1: Iraqi Kurdistan



Source: Map of Iraqi Kurdistan.

http://www.oilandgas360.com/wpcontent/uploads/2014/11/iraq_kurdish_regions_map5_600px_02_2f6f597f72.jpg accessed on 19/02/2021

3. The Evolution of the Kurdish Ethnic Problem in Iraq:

Following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in 1918, the Kurdish dream of independence increased, especially after the declaration of Wilson's Fourteen Points¹ on January 8, 1918, which stipulated the right of minorities to self-determination, and the Treaty of Sèvres² in 1922 that called for autonomy for Kurdish areas. However, the Treaty of Lausanne (1923)

¹Wilson's twelfth point stated that 'the Turkish portions of the present Ottoman Empire should be assured a secure sovereignty, but the other nationalities which are now under Turkish rule should be assured an undoubted security of life and an absolutely unmolested opportunity of autonomous development.'

<https://www.britannica.com/event/Fourteen-Points>. Retrieved on 22/01/2021 at 07:20

²Articles 62 to 65 of the Treaty of Sèvres called for local autonomy for the predominantly Kurdish areas lying east of the Euphrates, south of the southern boundary of Armenia as it may be hereafter determined, and north of the frontier of Turkey with Syria and Mesopotamia. <http://www.hri.org/docs/sevres/part3.html>. Retrieved on 22/01/2021 at 17:01

came to kill all Kurdish hopes since it did not even consider the Kurds a distinct ethnic minority but people who belonged to the states they inhabited. Accordingly, Kurdistan was divided to be parts of new nation-states. As a result of those changes, the Kurds in Iraq, which became under the British mandate, rebelled asking for autonomy. Several revolts took place in the early years of the 1920's, including those of Sheikh Mahmud Barzinji, but were brutally crushed by the British.

In fact, under the British rule, the Kurds enjoyed some limited linguistic and political rights. In 1926, they were allowed to teach Kurdish in primary schools in the Kurdish areas, and also to publish books in their own language. A Kurdish newspaper, TegayshtniRasti (literally means Understanding the Truth), was created in Sulaimaniyah. Moreover, there was Kurdish representation in the government. Nevertheless, in the aftermath of World War Two and the spread of the ethnic awareness, the Kurdish political movement in Iraq increased. The Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) was founded in 1946 by Mustafa Barzani¹ and succeeded to garner large popularity and support among the Kurds there.

Factually, the overthrow of the Iraqi Royal government by General Abdul Karim Qasim in 1958 marked a significant point in the Kurdish history. For the first time, the Kurds were mentioned in the Iraqi constitution as part of the new republican state, and their rights were protected too. Additionally, Mustafa Barzani was allowed to return to Iraq after being in exile for 11 years in the Soviet Union. However, that situation did not last long. Things began to worsen as the Iraqi government launched an extended campaign of Arabization, aiming at creating a homogenous society to ensure national unity in Iraq. However, The Kurds refused to abandon their own identity and to adopt the Arabic one, leading to them being exposed to harsh kinds of discrimination and oppression at the hands of the Iraqi government, including armed attacks, forced deportation, and destruction of Kurdish villages.

4. The Kurds Under Saddam Hussein's Regime:

After taking power from the Qasim government in 1968, the Ba'ath Party adopted a radical Arabist ideology which sought to eradicate all that was linguistically and culturally distinct, including the Kurdish identity. However, going in war with the Kurds was not in favor of the

¹ Mustafa Barzani was the leader of Iraqi Kurdistan during the period 1946-1979. He is considered as the father of the modern Kurdish national movement in Iraq.

infant Ba'athist government; thus, Saddam Hussein, who was still Vice President, decided to pursue a settlement with the Kurdish people, at least until the party would secure its position in power. He signed a peace accord with the KDP on March 1970, in which Hussein promised to recognize the Kurds' rights to self governance. The accord was, indeed, made to gain much time to guarantee the dominance of the Ba'ath forces over the Kurdish people and their region as well. In 1974, the Iraqi government issued the Autonomy Law¹; however, rival Kurdish leaders disagreed on that law, leading to a Kurdish-Iraqi war that was crushed by the Iraqi army as Iran withdrew its military support to the Kurds following the Algiers Accord of 1975.² The KDP's defeat resulted in more aggressive policy against the Kurds, who were dispossessed and deported. Jaji Muhammad Ya'aqub Hussein, a Kurdish witness, stated,

There were 188 villages in Shaikhan. The government cancelled all of the property certificates of the Kurds and the other nationalities in the villages... the Law of 1975 Arabized the whole area, and brought the Arabs to all of the Kurdish villages.³

Then came the 1980's and brought more sufferance to the Iraqi Kurds. The late years of the decade; in fact, witnessed the mostdisastrous and devastating campaigns against the Kurdish population in the country. On the winding up of the Iraq-Iran war (1980-88),President Saddam Hussein appointed his cousin, Ali Hassan al-Majid, who was known for his brutality, to be the overlord in the north of Iraq. Broad powers were put at his disposal to

¹ Law N° 33 was issued by the Iraqi government and provided for limited governing institutions in some Kurdish areas, but it did not garner Kurdish support.

² Under the accord, Iraq made concessions to Iran in Satt al-Arab in exchange of Iran's commitment to stop assisting the Kurds of Iraq in their fight against the Iraqi forces.

³ (**Claims in Conflict: Reversing Ethnic Cleansing in Northern Iraq**), Human Rights Watch, Vol. 16, N° 4, August 2004, p. 29

purify the region fromthe saboteurs, and Ali lost no time to start his mission. He immediately

started the Anfal¹ campaign, in which mass executions and disappearances took place. For the first time in the history of Iraq, the Ba'ath forces used a different type of shelling, chemical weapons, which were dropped on both Kurdish civilians and combatants' targets indiscriminately.² Additionally, homes were fired and orders were issued, stating that 'all persons captured in those villages shall be detained and interrogated by the security services, and those between the ages of 15 and 70 shall be executed after any useful information has been obtained from them.'³ On March 16, 1988, the Iraqi army also launched attacks on Halabja, a Kurdish town in the Iraqi borders with Iran, arguing that Iranian Revolutionary Guards and Kurdish fighters were hiding in the city. Poison gas was used, and innocent civilians were killed, including children, women, and elder people who fell and died in the streets. In fact, Halabja attacks, which resulted in an estimated 5.000 deaths⁴, were often referred to as 'a war crime and a crime against humanity.'⁵ Although statistics remained inaccurate, the Anfal genocide resulted in the destruction of thousands of Kurdish villages between February and August 1988. Approximately 200.000 Kurds were killed and nearly 1.5 million others were deported in the process⁶. Actually, the campaigns were considered as the Iraqi regime's revenge to punish the Kurds for their treason and assistance to Iran in its eight years' war with Iraq. And most of all, Saddam's Ba'athist government saw it an opportunity to put an end definitively to Kurdish aspirations towards

¹ Anfal is an Arabic word means 'the spoils of war'. It is the name of the eighth chapter of the Quran which tells a story in which followers of prophet Mohammed took the lands of non-believers.

² Dave Johns, (**The Crimes of Saddam Hussein: 1988, the Anfal Campaign**), Frontline World, January 26, 2006

³ Ibid

⁴ Dave Johns, (**The Crimes of Saddam Hussein 1988, Halabja**), Frontline World, January 26, 2006

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Barbara Robson, (**Iraqi Kurds: their History and Culture**), CAL RefugeeFact Sheet, Series N° 13, Washington DC, 1996, p. 19
autonomy and independence.

However, the 1990's marked a turning point in the path of the Kurdish issue in Iraq. During the liberation of Kuwait, which was occupied by Saddam Hussein in the second Gulf War, US-led coalition forces succeeded in expelling the Iraqi army from the neighboring invaded country. On March, 1991, a popular uprising broke out in the Shiites in southern Iraq and the Kurds in the north. Again, the Iraqi authorities responded violently and put down those revolts in a complete silence of the international community. Still living in the ghost of the Anfal crime, nearly 1.5 million Kurds fled to Turkey and Iran for fear of Iraqi attacks¹; however, Turkey refused to host those refugees, who found no choice but to stay in the mountains and face diseases and death under very hard living conditions. That situation forced the coalition forces, under US leadership, to intervene and declare Operation Provide Comfort, in which the North of Iraq was made as a safe haven for the Iraqi Kurds. And the UN Security Council, in Resolution 688², allowed international aid agencies to provide massive aid to help the fleeing Kurds. Meanwhile, Kurdish leaders, Massoud Barzani and Jalal Talabani, also took advantage to negotiate with the Baghdad government on autonomy for Iraqi Kurdistan.

Once being secured from Saddam Hussein's attacks, the Kurds started re-building their lives on the ruins of the towns and villages destroyed during the Anfal operations. In 1992, the first Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and National Assembly were elected; and the Regional Parliament in Erbil voted for federalism instead of autonomy. However, rivalries between KDP and PUK prevented the formation of a unified Kurdish government in the region, leading to a Kurdish civil war that broke out in 1994 and lasted four years, resulting

¹ BBC News, (**Iraqi Kurdistan Profile**).

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-15467672>. Retrieved on 13/01/2021 at 20:15

² A copy of the resolution is available online at the United Nations Digital Library. <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/110659?ln=en>. Retrieved on 10/02/2021 at 18:12 in at least 3000 deaths and tens of thousands displaced Kurds.¹ On September 17, 1998, the KDP and PUK, with US mediation, signed the Washington Peace Agreement, and put an end to the Kurdish civil conflict.

As a matter of fact, the Kurdish civil war was not in favor of the United States that feared the fall of northern Iraq into the hands of regional powers, especially Iran, which was providing military assistance to the PUK. Moreover, the US mediation to help ending the conflict was not really for pure humanitarian reasons. Instead, it was a plan to weaken Saddam Hussein as part of US' containment policy. Actually, the Americans saw Kurdistan as the sole port to Iraq, and considered the Kurds a useful weapon to fight Saddam's regime. Thus, they worked to strengthen US-Kurdish relations to prevent any outside influence in the region. QubadTalabani, KRG representative in the United States, mentioned that 'from 1998 to 2003, there was a sharp increase in cooperation, assistance and support from the U.S.'²

5. Peshmerga's Role in Operation Iraqi Freedom:

September 11, 2001 attacks had a great impact on the American foreign policy and US foreign relations. On the one side, the Kurdish leaders, who realized that a US war on Iraq was eminent, worked to maintain good relations with the Bush administration. On the other side, the US also attempted to use the Kurdish card to serve its interests. Since the American people were still resentful of the US involvements in foreign wars during the previous decades, President G. W. Bush feared that they would reject the war in Iraq; thus, he used the Kurdish cause to enlist the American public opinion, saying that 'Saddam Hussein gassed his own people – the Kurds.'³ This statement; indeed, was efficient to remind the Americans of the Holocaust and to psychologically influence their attitude towards the war. Carole O'Leary, Iraq expert at the American University, asserts that the Kurds were 'an excellent

¹Inga Rogg& Hans Rimscha, (**The Kurds as Parties to and Victims of Conflicts in Iraq**), International Review of the Red Cross, Vol. 89, N°. 868, 2007, p. 829

²Mohammed M. J. Shareef, (**President George W. Bush's Policy Towards Iraq: Change or Continuity ?**),John Dumbrell&AnoushiravanEhteshami,School of Government and International Affairs, University of Durham, 2010, p. 197

³Ibid

example of Saddam's brutality.¹ Thus, if the threat of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) would not be enough to convince them to go to war, then freeing the Iraqis from Saddam's aggressiveness would be a compelling reason. Daniel Pipes argues that the Kurdish case provided 'both a humanitarian and a political justification.'² Hence, the United States attempted to show the image of liberator rather than invader, and also to prove its intention to help the Iraqis to get rid of Saddam's autocracy, and the Kurds; indeed, were the best tool available for such role.

The initial phases of overthrowing the Iraqi regime began early in February 2002, when President Bush signed an Executive Finding that permitted the CIA and military Special Operations (SO) Forces to start their plans secretly to destabilize Iraq. On February 16, orders were given to the CIA to support opposition groups in the country and to make sabotage operations there. Initially, the CIA activists passed through Turkey to northern Iraq, which means that the invasion was initially with Turkish cooperation. Moreover, The United States relied on the Kurdish cooperation in its mission to liberate Iraq. However, the Kurds, who had been betrayed many times by the Americans³, learnt from the past lessons. Therefore, they refused to make any commitment unless they received guarantees from the US regarding their safety and their future in post-Saddam era. Politicians and experts, including Qubad Talabani, believed that the Americans could not have launched the invasion 'without the buy-in of the Kurds.'⁴ In April 2002, CIA director George Tenet met the Kurdish leaders Masoud Barzani and Jalal Talabani in Washington. The meeting resulted in the US acceptance to give the Kurds the assurances they had asked; and also to alter the American policy from responding in time and place of US choosing to immediate intervention if Saddam would decide to attack the Kurds. According to Qubad Talabani, that 'was enough

¹ Ibid

² Ibid

³ For further details, see Bryan R. Gibson, *Sold out? US Foreign Policy, Iraq, the Kurds, and the Cold War*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2015

⁴ Shareef M. J. Mohammed, *op. cit.*, p. 197

for the Kurds buy-in.¹ Since then, cooperation between the US and the Kurds started effectively to topple Sadaam's regime. On 15 August 2002, Jalal Talabani made an official invitation for the US to invade the country from the PUK controlled areas. He said in an interview with CNN, 'I explained to the United States' officials here that the Iraqi opposition, Kurds included... have tens of thousands of armed people. These forces can liberate Iraq with the support of the US., with cooperation and coordination with American forces.'² US Special Operations Forces members reached northern Iraq in November 2002 to study the situation and also to train their Kurdish allies. Later, American Special Operations brigades arrived dramatically in January and February 2003.³ As a matter of fact, President Bush's speech on March 6, 2003 contributed to a large extent to restore the Kurd's confidence in the US intentions, as he stated, 'Iraq will provide a place where people can see that the Shiite and the Sunni and the Kurds can get along in a federation. Iraq will serve as a catalyst for change, a positive change.'⁴

Actually, Turkey's refusal of a US northern front along the Turkish-Iraqi borders helped to strengthen US-Kurdish relations, and increased the US dependency on the Kurdish allies, who became a major contributing part to Operation Iraqi Freedom. Qubad Talabani pointed out that Turkey, the strategic NATO ally, rejected to help the Americans, whereas 'here are the Kurds with their Kalashnikovs and unsophisticated machinery that are really so passionate about fighting alongside Americans.'⁵ Additionally, having a well-organized army, peshmerga⁶, which numbered almost 100,000 fighters, made the Kurds of high value for the United States.⁷

Before starting the war to liberate Iraq from Saddam Hussein and his government, the Americans had to eliminate another threat, Ansar al-Islam, which could hamper their

¹ Ibid

² (Truck, Missile Movement Reported in Iraq), CNN World, August 16, 2002

³ Shareef M. J. Majeed, op. cit., p. 202

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Ibid, p. 206

⁶ Peshmerga are Kurdish military forces whose name means 'those who face death'.

⁷ Kerim Yildiz, op. cit., p. 130

mission. Thus, the first task for the Kurds was to cooperate with the US to defeat that Islamist radical group which existed in northern Iraq. And since the group was linked to al-Qaida, which was classified by America as a terrorist organization, the US saw that fighting it would also be part of its War on Terror. On March 21, US Special Operations Forces, joined by the Kurdish Peshmerga, launched Operation Viking Hammer, in which air strikes and cruise missiles were used against Ansar al-Islam targets in the Sargat Valley; followed by a ground attack on March 28, resulting in the defeat of the group. Factually, the elimination of Ansar al-Islam reduced the possibility of any obstacles during the coming assaults on Iraq.

Then, Peshmerga-US Special Forces moved to attack the Iraqi Green Line units; and the second mission also ended successfully as the Iraqi army was defeated in the cities of Kirkuk, Mosul and Erbil. In fact, the attacks from 21 March to 12 April 2003 led to the withdrawal of the Iraqi forces, which became unable to protect Baghdad, resulting in the latter's occupation by the United States on April 9, 2003. The fall of Baghdad; indeed, demoralized the Iraqi soldiers who were still trying to resist in the north; consequently, they left Kirkuk and Mosul unresistingly. Scenes of celebrations took place in those cities; however, things altered as soon as looting began. Since the US did not expect such a quick surrender by the Ba'ath army, there was a lack of coalition forces on the ground to maintain order there. Thus, the US relied on the Kurdish leaders to end looting and maintain local security. Factually, the Kurdish people did such actions not for sabotage but for retaliation. They reversed the policy of Arabization implemented on them; they believed that those lands inhabited by the Arabs had originally been theirs and that it was their right to restore them. Alum Wali, a Kurdish witness, said 'we are not looting... Saddam took everything from us. Now, we are taking back what is ours.'¹ However, the Kurdish officials condemned the looting, Massoud Barzani stated, 'no Kurd is allowed to attack the property, life or integrity of any Arab citizen in any village, district, or in the center of main cities.'² After a few days, things were calmed down in Kirkuk, which became under the PUK control, while some parts in Mosul remained under

¹ Damien McElroy, (**Grateful Iraqis Surrender to Kurds**), The SCOTSMAN, April 11, 2003

² Michael Howard, (**Arabs Face Evictions as Kurds Take Revenge**), The Guardian, April 18, 2003

Saddam's loyalists control, resulting in some unrest there. In fact, the significant role the Kurds played, especially in the north of Iraq, could not be ignored. Denise Natali, an Iraq expert at the National Defense University in Washington, indicated that 'the Kurds were very reliable allies... there was complicity between the US forces and Peshmerga, and they were extremely helpful.'¹

6. The Kurdish Civilians' Stance on the US Invasion of Iraq:

Indeed, not only the Peshmerga that supported the United States and cooperated with the American forces to oust Saddam's regime, but also the Kurdish civilians welcomed strongly the US presence in the country, and considered it a lifebuoy that would salvage them from the black decades of segregation and massacres. The Kurds were very optimistic about the war. There were sounds of bullets and shelling, but this time the assaults were against their enemy and not against them. Ali Kurdistani, a political activist from Sulaymaniya, mentioned that when the war broke out, there were aircrafts flying over the Kurdish people, but they were not scared because they were convinced that the war was to liberate them from their tragedies.² He said that 'some people even put the US flag and photos of President Bush'.³ During the war, northern Iraq became a safe shelter where the American soldiers went to relax. They were welcomed by the Kurdish families and treated as liberators. In this context, Ali Kurdistani stated, 'people would cheer them when they came to Suli... They would practice their English by talking to the military... They wanted them to take pictures with their children.'⁴

As soon as the Iraqi Ba'athist regime was overthrown, the Kurds, among other Iraqis, went to the streets cheering, dancing, holding both Kurdish and American flags, and celebrating the end of injustice. In addition, Saddam's statues were demolished in the Iraqi cities. The AP archives channel published a video in which the Kurds tore down the president's statue in

¹Jenna Krajeski, (**The Iraq War was a Good Idea, if you Ask the Kurds**), The Atlantic, March 20, 2013

²Ibid

³Ibid

⁴Ibid

Kirkuk, hitting it with hands and shoes.¹ Years later, the Kurds also celebrated the verdict of Saddam's sentencing to hang. Serdar Hirki, a member of the Kurdish Parliament, expressed his feelings of happiness for the court's decision, saying,

This is the happiest day in the history of justice all over Iraq. Today, we have achieved justice and this is not only for the Kurdish people but also for the Shiite and Sunni. This man oppressed the Iraqi people and ruled the country badly and, thank God, today he got what he deserves.²

Actually, the toppling of Saddam Hussein and his Ba'ath government by the US, with significant Kurdish assistance, marked a turning point and a new chapter in the history of the Kurdish issue in Iraq.

7. Conclusion:

The Iraqi Kurds had lived for a long time under the ruthless policies of the Ba'athist regime, facing all kinds of oppression, ethnic cleansings, torture, and genocide. Hence, they saw the US war on Iraq a lifeline. On its part, the United States realized the importance of the Kurds as a main internal factor that would help in fighting Saddam Hussein, so it attempted to take advantage of them. And though the Kurds had no friends but the mountains, the United States succeeded in garnering their confidence and support. As a matter of fact, the Iraqi Kurds played a key role in the invasion, mainly following Turkey's rejection to permit America to use of its territories to invade the neighboring country. Consequently, the US found the Kurds as alternative allies in the north of Iraq. Moreover, big numbers of Kurdish soldiers, Peshmerga, were also placed at the disposal of US officials; those soldiers facilitated

¹ (GTW: Celebrating Kurds tear down Saddam Statue), AP Archive.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_BrluouL_YM. Retrieved on 27/02/2021 at 11:28

² (Kurds in Irbil React to Saddam Verdict), AP Archive.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UW5Ab5GGO38>. Retrieved on 27/02/2021 at 11:54

the mission for the US mainly in the Kurdish areas due to their knowledge of the geographical positions of the region.

In spite of the fact that the interests differed, the enemy was still common for both the Americans and the Kurds; and this was the sole reason that led to cooperation between the two parts. On the one hand, The United States did not intervene primarily to help the Kurds but it used them as a weapon to topple Saddam's government; and on the other hand, all that mattered for the Kurds was to get rid of the Iraqi regime; thus, they were ready to cooperate with any power that would help them to reach their goal, even if the cost would be a foreign invasion of the whole country.

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