

DISTRIBUTED WITH THE SUNDAY TELEGRAPH

# KURDISTAN

## THE CASE FOR INDEPENDENCE

24 September 2017



GETTY

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- Why this vote matters to Britain
- The West's ally in the fight against Isis
- Shared values after Brexit
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Pictures: Richard Wilding, Getty

## A PEOPLE WITHOUT A NATION



# TIME FOR BRITAIN TO DO THE RIGHT THING

KURDISH JOURNALIST **NORELDIN WAISY** SAYS THE UK NEEDS TO SUPPORT THE KURDISH HOMELAND THAT IT HAD ONCE PROMISED

**R**elations between Kurdistan and Britain go back nearly a century. However, it is a tragic and sorrowful history. Kurds hold Great Britain, more than any other party, responsible for their inclusion in the state of Iraq.

During the First World War, Britain and France divided the region into spheres of influence in a secret treaty – the Sykes-Picot agreement – which they concluded without even informing the inhabitants of the areas they planned to rule, let alone seeking their consent.

Britain then created modern Iraq in 1921 out of its sphere. In the process, it partitioned historic Kurdistan and incorporated the Kurdish population into an Arab-majority country. The

previous year, in the Treaty of Sèvres, the victorious Europeans promised the Kurds a state, in keeping with the 14 points for peace of US President Woodrow Wilson, but that pledge was undone by the subsequent Treaty of Lausanne.

The opposition within the British Government to incorporating Kurdish-inhabited territory into the new state of Iraq is scarcely recognised now, but it was significant.

Senior figures, including Lord Curzon, the Foreign Secretary, opposed the notion. So did the India Office, responsible for Iraq until early 1921, when Winston Churchill, the new Colonial Secretary, shifted Iraq to his

jurisdiction. In March 1921, Churchill convened a conference in Cairo to develop a strategic approach towards Britain's post-war position in the Middle East. The dominant view in that conference was similar, expressed most bluntly by TE Lawrence – the celebrated Lawrence of Arabia: "The Kurds should not be placed under an Arab government." Churchill, for his part, warned that an Arab ruler "would ignore Kurdish sentiment and oppress the Kurdish minority".

But British administrators in Iraq, above all Sir Percy Cox and his deputy, Arnold T Wilson, felt otherwise.

They prevailed, because they were determined; they were the men on the ground; communications were slow and unwieldy; and London had many other concerns. The result has been decades of civil strife, going back to Kurdish leader Sheikh Mahmoud Hafid Barzani, who led two uprisings and headed a short-lived Kurdish kingdom in Sulaimania, crushed by British forces in 1924.

Subsequently, Baghdad grew significantly more brutal, especially toward the Kurds, who were subject to repeated occurrences of mass murder, culminating in Saddam Hussein's

genocidal Anfal "spoils" campaign, in which the regime repeatedly used chemical weapons against civilians and killed more than 182,000 people. It is little wonder that the Kurdish people do not feel part of a political entity called Iraq. We have not forgotten the brutal repression of successive Iraqi regimes, which sought to eliminate our identity as a separate and distinct nation.

For the past quarter of a century, the Kurdistan Region has been a self-

## CHURCHILL WARNED THAT AN ARAB RULER WOULD OPPRESS A KURDISH MINORITY

governing entity and has proved it is a threat to no one. Rather, it is a factor for stability. When Isis attacked Iraq in 2014, it was the Kurdish Peshmerga (military forces) who held the line and prevented Isis from overrunning the country. Since then, they have played a major role in pushing back and defeating the terrorist organisation.

The Kurdistan Region has shown its respect for Western values. It is among

the few areas in the troubled Middle East where the rights of all religious minorities are protected and they are free to practise their religion without fear. As Kurdistan President Masoud Barzani has explained, a future state of Kurdistan would not be a centralised entity. Rather it would be a federal system in which each province would enjoy its own local government and parliament. He has also pledged that the government of Kurdistan will reflect all the different components of the region and promote co-existence among the multiplicity of ethnic and religious groups.

We expect that an overwhelming majority of our people will vote Yes in the independence referendum being held in the Kurdistan Region tomorrow. We hope that the UK will support us; that you will correct an old, hoary mistake, when the better judgement of men such as Churchill was circumvented through determined bureaucratic manoeuvre.

And so you will help to end the tragedies of our people, who have suffered great sorrows and woes in the long years since.

\*Noreldin Waisy is the general manager of Kurdistan24 News Network. He is on Twitter as @nwaisy

## EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE INDEPENDENCE REFERENDUM IN IRAQI KURDISTAN

### SARHANG HARS ANSWERS THE BIG QUESTIONS FACING VOTERS IN NORTH-EASTERN IRAQ

**Q What is happening?**

The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) within the Kurdistan Region of Iraq is holding an independence referendum. The vote will determine whether the people of the Kurdistan Region and some areas outside KRG jurisdiction opt for independence from Iraq.

**Q When is the referendum taking place?**

Tomorrow. Masoud Barzani, the President of the Kurdistan Region and leaders from other parties, including the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and the Kurdistan Islamic Union, met and decided the date. The Goran Movement, which has the second largest number of seats in the regional parliament, and the Kurdistan Islamic Group were absent.

**Q What is the question on the ballot?**

The Yes or No question on the ballot asks: "Do you want the Kurdistan Region and the Kurdish regions outside the KRG area to become an independent state?" The question is written in four languages: Kurdish, Arabic, Syriac and Turkmen. The process is supervised by the Independent High Elections and Referendum Commission, established in 2014.

**Q Who is allowed to vote?**  
KRG residents who are 18 years and older can cast their vote. There are nearly three million people qualified to take part in the vote. The Kurdistan Region population is 5.2 million, according to official data from the government, and live in four governorates – Erbil, Slemani, Duhok and Halabja. In addition, Kurdish citizens of Iraq who live abroad and residents of the disputed territories of northern Iraq can also vote. Kurds of other countries such as Syria and Iran are not allowed to vote.

According to Article 140 of the Iraqi constitution, established after the fall of Saddam, the fate of those territories must be resolved and those affected compensated. No steps had been taken to resolve the fate of those territories by the deadline of its implementation, which was set for 2007. When Islamic State (also known as Isil and Daesh) took over large swathes of Iraq, some of those territories were also occupied, but later liberated by Kurdish forces (the Peshmerga) and remain under their control.

**Q What about the disputed territories?**

Other regions with Kurdish-majority populations that fall outside KRG jurisdiction but are under Kurdish control can also take part. The disputed territories of northern Iraq include Kirkuk and other towns and villages in the Dilay, Nineveh and Erbil governorates, such as

Prime Minister, Haider al-Abadi, has called the move "unconstitutional".

On 12 September the Iraqi parliament voted against the holding of the referendum and authorised the Baghdad Government to "take all measures" to preserve Iraq's unity. Kurdish lawmakers walked out of the session in protest; Mr Barzani criticised the vote and insisted the referendum would go ahead.

**Q What has been said by international powers?**

Global players such as the US and the European Union have been sceptical about the vote. Washington has called for the referendum to be postponed as it believes the vote will lead to more instability in Iraq and the region. The EU and the United Kingdom have also expressed concerns as they think it will ultimately interfere with the efforts to defeat Isil, rebuild Iraq and secure stability in the region. Iran and Turkey have also warned against the vote. Israel has shown its support in the past for an independent Kurdistan as it believes it will lead to the creation of more moderate states in the Middle East.

**THE 25 SEPTEMBER QUESTION**

"DO YOU WANT THE KURDISTAN REGION AND THE KURDISH REGIONS OUTSIDE THE KRG AREA TO BECOME AN INDEPENDENT STATE?"

There is a group of business people, politicians and activists have come out under the banner of No for Now. It has called for the vote to be postponed and has urged people to vote No. The group believes that the vote is just another tactic to expand the authority of the ruling parties and that it is not a step towards independence.

**Q Is there a group in favour of a No vote?**

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**Q Will the UN observe the process?**

The United Nations stated officially it will not observe the vote. But MPs from countries such as the UK and some EU members, and other organisations, have shown willingness to send observers.

## STRATEGIC ALLIANCE

A VIEW FROM  
WESTMINSTER

LET THE KURDS TELL THE WORLD  
ABOUT THEIR PAST AND FUTURE

TRACY BRABIN  
LABOUR MP FOR BATLEY & SPEN

On arriving in Erbil, I was shocked by its progressive and sophisticated surroundings. I was expecting a war zone, but the city could be mistaken for Dubai in its high-rise ambition and elegance. Sadly, war was not far away and its physical and psychological consequences will take years to overcome. One way to heal wounds is through culture, which can be a force for rebellion and resistance as well as rebuilding empathy and tolerance. The Kurds' love of poetry and music attest to that. Iranian-Kurdish folk singer Mazhar Khalighi's Kurdish Heritage Institute in Sulaimania unites ethnomusicologists, anthropologists and historians to preserve



Kurdish identity. I met film-makers who want to use the beautiful location to boost creative links with the world. A local producer showed me around a disused cigarette factory that could become a film studio to rival Shepperton or Pinewood. The British Government and the UK film industry could back Kurdistan's ambition for inward investment, domestic production and private-sector employment in an efficient film industry. Kurdistan could be a major film-making centre, bringing economic, social and cultural benefits, and letting Kurds tell the world about their past, present and future.

\* Tracy Brabin donated the fee for this article to the Kirkwood Hospice

# A SAFER KURDISTAN IS GOOD FOR THE WORLD

**GARY KENT,**  
DIRECTOR OF  
THE ALL-PARTY  
PARLIAMENTARY  
GROUP ON  
KURDISTAN,  
BELIEVES A  
VOTE FOR  
INDEPENDENCE  
WILL BENEFIT  
US ALL

With similar stereotypes but found a country – well, one in the making – that surprised and intrigued them. They worried about security and the feel of the place. It is safer than many countries because good internal security measures command popular support, and terror attacks have been rare; the worst one was back in 2004.

I also tell audiences they should go there as tourists, and mention a family holiday in the capital, Erbil, which has won the Arab Tourism Capital of the Year award. Visitors expect deserts but are amazed by snow-capped mountains that provide the irrigation for vast, verdant and fertile plains.

You can see the biggest canyon and waterfall in the Middle East, the world's longest-inhabited city and many archaeological sites. You can even ski. Income from tourism and agriculture could also slash dependence on oil revenues and help small businesses.

Some like it hot but temperatures of 50C (122F) in the summer are not for all – although the dry heat is gentler, and at other times of the year more temperate than much of the Middle East. Increasingly Kurdistan's cities



have cosmopolitan hotels, restaurants and bars, and there is a lively scene in the capital's Christian quarter.

The biggest surprise is the Kurds' massive affinity for the British. English is the second language in which three universities teach entirely. When the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) established a foreign scholarship programme, most participants opted to study in Britain.

This affection is despite and because of history. Take tea with Kurds and they will soon chide us for the secret Sykes-Picot agreement of 1916 to carve up the Middle East. This set the scene for scuppering a single nation for Kurds in Turkey, Syria, Iran and Iraq. On the other



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



## STRATEGIC ALLIANCE

KURDISTAN  
DIPLOMACY

KURDISH AND ARAB  
NATIONS CAN LIVE  
SEPARATELY

KARWAN JAMAL TAHIR  
HIGH REPRESENTATIVE



**THE HAMILTON ROAD,  
RAWANDIZ GORGE**

In 1928, the engineer A.M. Hamilton was commissioned to build a road from Erbil, up through the mountains and gorges of Kurdistan to the Persian frontier. **Richard Wilding**



hand, Britain helped prevent Iraq's brutal dictator, Saddam Hussein, continuing what the Commons officially recognises as a genocide that systematically exterminated 200,000 Kurds, many with chemical weapons, and razed thousands of villages in the 1980s.

Saddam's unexpected occupation of Kuwait changed Western policy to the benefit of the Kurds. His forces were routed and retreated to Iraq in 1991 and the Kurds rose up in response to Western appeals. Saddam's murderous wrath forced millions to flee to the freezing mountains, which Kurds mournfully describe as their only friends.

Public outrage at the miserable scenes on our TV screens encouraged John Major, the Prime Minister, to establish a no-fly zone that protected Kurdistan after Saddam was evicted. The Kurds saluted the liberation of Iraq in 2003 and revere both Sir John and his successor Tony Blair.

Despite those decades of discrimination and genocide, Kurds then agreed to stabilise the new Iraq, and in 2005 won a federal constitution in a referendum that promised equality in a binational country.

Kurds initially enjoyed a golden decade thanks to high oil prices that boosted living standards, jobs, housing and education. Kurds

presented themselves as "The Other Iraq" and won much foreign investment while independence was put on the back-burner. Iraq worked after a fashion, although violations of federalism were steadily accumulating.

Such hopes crashed in a series of catastrophic shocks within a few months in 2014. Baghdad unilaterally cut obligatory budget payments to the Kurds, who began supposedly illegal independent oil exports – but then world prices slumped.

Isis suddenly took Mosul, Iraq's second city, as Iraqi troops fled – leaving behind sophisticated American military kit worth billions of dollars. It is said they even left the keys in hundreds of Humvees.

The capture of a third of Iraq propelled hundreds of thousands of Iraqi Arabs into the sanctuary of Kurdistan. The influx increased Kurdistan's population by a third and swamped water, power and other public services.

Kurdistan suddenly acquired a 650-mile border with Isis, which attacked Kurdistan that August, raped, murdered or enslaved thousands of women, and came within an ace of Erbil but was beaten back by swift American airstrikes. Iraq had ceased to exist in reality.

The official Kurdish army, the Peshmerga – universally admired for

resisting Isis – lost 2,000 soldiers with 10,000 wounded. The Peshmerga and the Iraqi army, which had been foes for decades, overcame their differences and have largely beaten Isis.

Maybe this experience could reunite Iraq or create new co-operation between independent entities.

A Yes vote in the 25 September referendum would provide Kurdish leaders with a mandate for negotiating an amicable divorce and building better relations between new neighbours instead of trying to make a square peg fit a round hole.

We believe our independence can resolve many crises and create stability in Kurdistan, Iraq and more widely. We have had enough of violence, conquest and coercion and we want our independence to avoid all that. We have waited long enough and will be asking our friends to help facilitate fruitful talks and dialogue.

We believe that independence provides the incentive to advance our reforms. We ask the international community not to bail us out but to provide development and capacity-building assistance to help us to help ourselves, aid which is normally available to any important strategic ally, as we would be to the West. The Kurds also seek close links with Iraq and other neighbours. However the vote goes and their leaders then negotiate, the Kurds are essential in fighting extremism – and a stronger and safer Kurdistan benefits the world. Their success is ours, too.

Britain has deep connections across Kurdish history, positively and negatively. Relations between the United Kingdom and the Kurdistan Region have deepened considerably on many levels in recent decades.

We thank the British people for the military co-operation against the Daesh threat to us, the UK's support for our Peshmerga and a huge contribution in humanitarian aid to those fleeing Daesh. Our relations are based on mutual benefit, the UK is our "partner of choice" and we welcome UK commitment to better bilateral ties with us.

Some say that we should keep Iraqi unity, but in fact it has never been united. Relations between its component parts were like a roller coaster: more down than up. We only enjoyed cordial relations from 2003 to 2014 when the promise of a new democratic, federal and pluralistic Iraq sadly succumbed to sectarianism from Baghdad.

Baghdad has violated 55 of the 144 articles of Iraq's constitution and caused political and security instability for the Kurdistan Region, which is left with no alternative but to decide its future through the referendum.

This has been decades in the making and if my fellow Kurds say Yes it will take a few more years to negotiate better relations with a neighbour-to-be, Iraq. New realities require Kurdish and Arab nations to live together separately but peacefully, with more coordination and co-operation to obtain increased prosperity, stability, security and a better future for all.

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A FRESH START

# LET'S USE BREXIT AS A NEW BEGINNING

SUPPORT FOR INDEPENDENCE WOULD GIVE A POST-BREXIT BOOST TO THE UK'S MIDDLE EAST POLICY, SAYS RANJ ALAALDIN

**T**he historic vote tomorrow on independence in Iraqi Kurdistan could accelerate the Kurds' path towards sovereignty and finally give them a state of their own after a century of suffering mass atrocities and genocide.

Britain may soon be faced with a choice: embrace and harness the opportunities a Kurdish state could bring for the Middle East and the international community or resist an independent Kurdistan and risk losing the West's most reliable ally (and the region) to its adversaries.

The arguments in favour of Kurdish independence should be familiar for the British as they grapple with Brexit negotiations and prepare for the UK's own new chapter in its relations with Europe and the rest of the world. With sovereignty comes the capacity to shape your country and its future.

Before the 2003 invasion of Iraq, the country's Kurds were shackled by their lack of sovereignty. They faced the prospect of suffering further atrocities at the hands of the Baathist regime of Saddam Hussein, which was bruised but not defeated after the Gulf War in 1991.

Yet the sanctions that were imposed on Iraq did not make exceptions for the Kurds, who were attempting to recover and rebuild after suffering genocide, the destruction of their towns and villages, and a series of mass atrocities just a few years earlier in the infamous 1980s Baath onslaught known as the Anfal (spoils of war) campaign.

When the international community imposed its sanctions, it did not discriminate between Baghdad and the Kurdistan Region lest it encouraged secession or weakened the territorial integrity of the Iraqi state, even though Kurdistan enjoyed autonomy from the rest of Iraq under the Western-imposed no-fly zone. This contradictory, somewhat counter-intuitive foreign policy was reflective of the international system and the regional order in the Middle East, where resource-rich (Western-aligned) governments had little appetite for encouraging secession and changing the boundaries of the Iraqi state.

That picture has dramatically changed since the Arab uprisings in 2011 and the regionalised, proxy civil war in Syria. The UK must adapt to the new realities in the Middle East. Traditional allies, and state actors more generally, have been severely compromised. State institutions have weakened or collapsed, creating vacuums that have been exploited by jihadi terrorist organisations and regional powers such as Iran. While the West may engage with the region

**A CHANCE TO LEARN TOGETHER**  
The Mamilian internally displaced persons camp, near Akre in Iraqi Kurdistan, houses thousands of Yazidis from Shingal and Muslims from Mosul. It has separate sections for Yazidi, Sunni and Shia families, but children are taught together in mixed classes.  
Richard Wilding



as though it is business as usual, others use violence and disorder to shape it to their own advantage.

The UK, along with its allies, needs a long-term sustainable strategy as part of which the alliance with the Kurds is harnessed rather than constrained and that would also ensure the future of the Middle East is not left to others.

The UK, therefore, has a vested interest in helping Kurdistan maintain its stability and security, both before and after independence, given that Iraqi Kurdistan has for long been at the forefront of the battle against radical Islam and newly emerged Islamist groups that threaten the interests of the region and the broader international community.

Kurdistan has hosted Christians, Yazidis and other minorities over the past decades, who would have

otherwise fallen victim to the sectarian bloodshed in the rest of Iraq and the tyranny of Islamic State. Kurdistan has also provided support for more than 1.5 million refugees and internally displaced people, making it a pivotal partner in the effort to remedy the refugee crisis at source and ensure they are not exploited by people smugglers.

This strategy should be driven by an acceptance that events on the ground do not necessarily take into account the preferences of Whitehall, Washington or other major Western capitals, at least not like they have in the past. The Syrian conflict and the geopolitics of the region over the past five years show that talk in the West is becoming increasingly cheap.

The political and security environment is being shaped by anti-Western militias and their foreign

patrons, who have exploited US disengagement from the Middle East and the disarray and populism in European countries that has pushed foreign policy, with far less interventionism, to the margins.

The post-Brexit UK will still have a vested interest in ensuring the territorial integrity of Iraq but supporting a Kurdish state does not necessarily conflict with this, and it does not prevent Whitehall from adopting a dual-track policy towards Baghdad and Erbil.

Contrary to the simplistic, often sensationalist analysis that Kurdish independence would somehow precipitate the end of Iraq and other states – despite the lack of empirical evidence that would support such a scenario – there is simply too much resistance regionally and internationally to changes to the state system in the Middle East.

Britain's traditional allies have already shifted their alignments. Turkey, which has for long resisted Kurdish independence, has slowly moved towards accepting a Kurdish state over the past three decades, even if it is not actively pushing for it.

Ankara has transformed its economic relationship with the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) into a security arrangement of which Iraqi Kurdistan is a key buffer against Iranian expansionism and instability in the rest of Iraq. In addition to Turkey, the Gulf has also positioned itself in a way that allows it to capitalise on Iraqi Kurdistan's hydrocarbons, which with sovereignty the Kurds could export without political and economic measures from Baghdad.

While the UK does not have to actively support the Kurdish referendum, failure on London's part to play a stabilising role if and when independence is declared would bring more costs to the fragile Iraqi state

and exacerbate instability. It would miss an opportunity to use Iraqi Kurdistan as a conduit through which to stabilise Syria, while also undermining the generational battle against terrorism.

If the post-Brexit UK is serious about becoming the global power it has the potential to become, and if indeed economics and trade become the defining feature of post-Brexit Britain, it requires a rethink of the UK's traditional foreign policy approaches to the Middle East.

Supporting a Kurdish state provides an opportunity to bring some much-needed revitalisation to British foreign policy in the Middle East – one that is based on the mutual interests that the UK shares with the KRG but also a set of values and convictions that make it a moral imperative to support the Kurds.

COMMON CAUSE

# THE KURDS SHARE VALUES THAT UNITE US

JACK LOPRESTI IS THE CONSERVATIVE MP FOR FILTON & BRADLEY STOKE AND THE CHAIRMAN OF THE APPG ON THE KURDISTAN

**B**ritish MPs have visited the Kurdistan Region regularly over the past decade and often meet leaders and others here. I have come to admire a place that has survived massive traumas but is resilient and has made great strides in adversity. Furthermore, the Kurds are also clearly pro-Western and firmly back common values such as religious tolerance and pluralism.

Their contribution to defeating Isis was brave and vital for everyone. Their government gets things right more often than not and I see Kurdistan as a glass half-full rather than half-empty.

Federalism was the great hope for the Kurds who voluntarily rejoined Iraq in 2003 on the promise that the country would be pluralistic and democratic. This exercise of their right to self-determination did not expire on its first use and if things degenerated, Friends of Kurdistan also supported the decision of the Iraqi people in the 2005 referendum to embrace federalism instead of a sectarian dictatorship.

The international community must work out why Isis emerged and how to undermine the ideological and political appeal of such "vile fascism", as Karwan Jamal Tahir, the Kurdistan Regional Government's High

minority rights. The Kurds cannot be forced into subordination by leaders in Baghdad. Iraq has severed itself from Kurdistan: it pays no budget contributions and does not even help scores of thousands of Iraqi Arabs sheltering there.

Yet the Kurds are not going for a unilateral declaration of independence but wisely and voluntarily seek a reset of relations with Iraq. A Yes vote in the referendum tomorrow will lead to negotiations to form two countries that could be much stronger without constant internal disputes.

The story of how the Kurdistan Peshmerga and the Iraqi armies united against Isis is instructive. When I visited the Kirkuk front line in November 2015, there was no coordination or communication between them. A year on, the two forces agreed to work together to defeat Isis, as I saw on the road to Mosul and in the city.

The international community must work out why Isis emerged and how to undermine the ideological and political appeal of such "vile fascism", as Karwan Jamal Tahir, the Kurdistan Regional Government's High

REGULAR VISITOR JACK LOPRESTI MP HAS BEEN TO THE KURDISTAN REGION MANY TIMES IN THE PAST DECADE



time. But Kurdistan needs reform to reduce reliance on oil and state employment, and grow a private sector.

Nechirvan Barzani, Prime Minister of the Kurdistan Region, and Qubad Talabani, the Deputy Prime Minister, have made a good start in aligning revenues and state spending, and tackling double jobbing and ghost workers. Statehood could allow greater access to development funds that are conditional on continuing reform.

The Kurds tell visitors they live in a tough neighbourhood and can only pick their friends. They cannot go on being treated as half-time, second-class citizens. I told the Commons in July how Arab Iraqis adore Kurdistan as Shimal Habib ("the beloved north") thanks to holidays in its cooler climate.

Baghdad's centralisation is crushing the Kurds and is restricting their development. I have tabled a cross-party motion accepting their right to determine their own destiny and I believe it is strongly in our interests that they prosper. I am pleased that Alistair Burt, minister of state at the Foreign Office, recently visited

Kurdistan to advance co-operation despite disagreements on the vote. If the Kurds believe it is possible to re-establish a reliable federalism in Iraq with substantial autonomy, they will vote tomorrow to stay with a No. If they believe that is not feasible, they will vote Yes – for independence and self-determination. Either way, there is a strong moral, political and practical case for our solidarity and support.

\*Mr Lopresti donated his fee for this article to CLIC Sargent, the UK's leading cancer charity for children, young people and their families

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# DRESS SENSE: MIDDLE EAST MEETS WEST

DESIGNER DELLA MURAD EXPLAINS HOW MODERN HISTORY HAS SHAPED KURDISH FASHION

**T**he Kurds, the world's largest ethnic minority without a recognised state, occupy a strategic area of the Zagros mountains in the Middle East yet separated by the borders created by the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923.

The agreement ensured that the Kurds would be left without a state and instead would be divided among the nations of Iraq, Iran, Turkey and Syria. Despite numerous historical attempts to establish a recognised and legitimate state for the Kurds, none has proved to be successful in the long term.

The dismantling of the greater Kurdish state over hundreds of years has created differences in language, music and even traditional Kurdish garments. The Kurds would use phrases such as *jili kurdî Iran* to describe the distinctive material, three metres long, that would be tied around a woman's hips like a belt to accentuate her curves, or *kaway kurdî Irag* to describe the long colourful coat that is worn over a dress.

During the 1990s and early 2000s there was a mass migration of Kurds to Europe after decades of persecution and repression. In Turkey many were jailed for demanding equal rights for the Kurdish language, while the atrocities of Saddam Hussein against the Kurds in Iraq were well documented. Syrian Kurds still face similar treatment, as they are not recognised as citizens and as a result do not have Syrian passports.

This mass migration and the diaspora of Kurds has had a great impact on Kurdish culture. In the UK the Kurds began to form communities and cultural centres where they could help to enlighten their new neighbours about the plight of the Kurdish people. As a way of staying in touch with their ethnic roots and exploring different aspects of their culture, Kurds from the Iraqi state would experiment with styles from Kurdistan in Iran, Syria and Turkey and vice versa. This led to an organic evolution of trends and characteristics that merged the cultural nuances of designs.

Another huge factor that affected the evolution of Kurdish clothes was the exposure of young Kurds to Western fashion and culture. The Kurds, predominantly from traditional Muslim backgrounds, were now living in Western communities that do not hold the same strict beliefs about clothing; ideals that ensured beautiful clothes still covered the woman's bare skin and form adequately.

Over time, this heightened exposure led to innovation in the design of the

clothing – including thinner materials being used around the arms and the body of the primary dresses, as well as shorter undergarments to highlight the figure of the Kurdish woman.

These differences of style led to the many fashion shows that I hosted, showcasing my individual designs of contemporary Kurdish clothes alongside traditional Kurdish attire. I had many orders for my Kurdish clothes from all corners of the Middle East, each wanting items that expressed a new Kurdish identity, one that was unapologetically traditional but that simultaneously celebrated a modern Kurdishness.

Personally, I can only speak about the effect this has had on the Kurds in the Iraqi region. That is where I am from and it is the location of most of my work.

The Kurdistan Region in Iraq has been semi-autonomous since 1991, when the no-fly zone was established in response to a humanitarian justification to protect the Kurds against Saddam's regime. Since then the region has grown in strength, and is not only protected by the constitution of Iraq, but has its own parliament, local elections and representatives in Baghdad. This has resulted in a large influx of Kurds returning to their homeland, bringing with them new cultural ideals and ideas to propel Kurdish fashion into a vibrant new era.

Many of the women no longer feel bound by the strict restrictions of a difficult past, and feel free to adapt and experiment with their styles, mixing Western influences with Kurdish authenticity.

In the referendum tomorrow, the Kurdish people in the Iraqi region will be voting on whether they wish to become a country independent from the Iraqi state. What is left to be seen is how the Kurdish vote will affect the neighbouring states as well as their large Kurdish minorities. One thing is for sure: the Kurds will no longer go back to obscurity. They have a voice and it will be heard as many go to the ballots adorned in bright colourful Kurdish clothes.

\*Della Murad is an internationally acclaimed fashion designer. Her Kurdish clothes are based on traditional designs. She is creative director of Gulan, a charity that promotes Kurdish culture. With Gulan, she is building an online archive of traditional Kurdish clothes and jewellery at [gulan.org.uk/kurdish-costumes/](http://gulan.org.uk/kurdish-costumes/)



## KURDS RETURNING TO THEIR HOMELAND HAVE BROUGHT NEW CULTURAL IDEALS



## ANCIENT AND MODERN

This traditional outfit, left, is from the 1940s. Baggy trousers (*awal-kraß*) are worn under the dress (*krass*) and coat (*kawa*). A hat (*fessa*) is decorated with coins and fringing (called *gulang* or *qazzaz*). At the front of the hat is a *parwana*, gold jewellery designed by Kurdish Jews. Richard Wilding



## THE DAF DRUM IS PART OF THE NATION, LIKE THE HARP IS TO IRISH PEOPLE

**INNOVATIVE TEXTURE**

"Kurdish music can be very fast, dynamic, rhythmic, but at the same time extremely melancholic, and very mellow. Kurdish musicians in the diaspora are exposed to a lot of ideas from different genres, so Kurdish music is evolving. What we hear now is slightly different to what we heard 20 or 30 years ago. Musicians are becoming more innovative, more complex in terms of

harmony, in terms of arrangements, in terms of rhythm and texture."

## RITUALISTIC SONGS

"For Kurds, music is very personal and woven into every aspect of life. You get music in live performances, concerts, weddings – that's another fascinating place to experience music – and funerals, where specific songs are sung. At harvest you hear harvest songs, call and response, for harvesting wheat. At Newroz [new year] the festive season, you would hear music not only in concert halls but at specific rituals. The Ahl-e Haqq community perform on a Kurdish instrument called the tambour; they have a particular ritual called *jam*. You get 50 to 60 tambour players performing in unison, with singing and the daf. The songs are very ritualistic, very heavy. In every leaf of society, music is there, and it is a very strong personal identity for every Kurdish person."

# RHYTHMS THAT CROSS BRIDGES AND MOUNTAINS

PERCUSSIONIST HUSSEIN ZAHAWY TALKS ABOUT LIFE IN KURDISTAN AND LONDON TO DAVID BENNUN

**F**ew artists can have done more to bring Kurdish music to the international stage than percussionist Hussein Zahawy. His family's home town is

Khanqa, in north-eastern Iraq; by 1980, when he was born, they had fled from the regime of Saddam Hussein across the border to Iran. Ten years later, the family moved to London, and it was here he developed the passion for music that has made him a regular at arts and culture festivals globally, and a key member of the celebrated Kurdish ensemble Nishitiman. Here he speaks about the role of music in Kurdish life, and in his own.

**THE POWER OF CULTURE**

"Culture always crosses bridges, it crosses mountains, it does not recognise any political borders. Music has always been the pivot that has affected humanity. My heroes are those who stand together, to connect through music together. This is why I wanted to always collaborate, to promote Kurdish music. I play in festivals around the world and people come to you and say they never knew that Kurdish music has all these different colours, all these variations."

## RICH TRADITION

"With Kurds as in any other nation you have popular, upbeat modern music that young people connect to. At the same time you have this rich tradition which is very deep.

Especially with a lot of religions. If you compare Kurds to some of the other nations of the Middle East, we have Christians, Muslims, Jews, even some religions that are pre-Islamic, like the communities of Ahl-e Haqq, Kaka'i and Yazidis. In Turkey, and in Iran, most of the great classical or traditional musicians are of Kurdish origin. They play an important role."

## THE DAF

### DRUM IS PART OF THE NATION, LIKE THE HARP IS TO IRISH PEOPLE

## IDENTITY

"I come from a family who are music lovers, not musicians. Kurds are a nation who are very music-loving. OK, every nation loves music, but with Kurds music has had an important role socially as well as from a nationalistic point of view. When you do not yet have a state or a country, you try to hang on to something, to keep that identity going. The Kurds have their songs, their instruments. The daf is part of the Kurdish nation's identity, like the harp is to Irish people. It is a unique symbol, the sound of Kurdistan."

## COMMON CHAIN

"In the different areas of Kurdistan, they speak different Kurdish dialects. With every dialect you get a different style of music. When we look at Kurdistan, we are looking at a vast geography. Kurds are displaced in four different countries – Iran, Iraq, Syria, Turkey. There are a lot of similarities with Arabs, Persians, Turks. But there's also that uniqueness that makes Kurds stand out. Every region has developed its own colour, its own genre, its own flavour. But there is this common chain. When you play a song, everybody knows it! For example, a song called *Kavoke*, when you play or even whistle it, a Kurd, in Iran, Iraq, Syria, or Turkey, would know it.

SUPPORT FOR INDEPENDENCE

# WE OWE A DEBT TO THE KURDISH PEOPLE

LONDON MEP CHARLES TANNOCK SAYS HISTORY TELLS US IT IS TIME FOR THE UK TO SUPPORT AN INDEPENDENT KURDISTAN

**W**hen much of the international community chose to recognise Kosovo as an independent state, one of the most compelling arguments was a moral sense of duty owed to the Kosovars after they had been the victims of war crimes perpetrated against them by Slobodan Milosevic.

that Britain in particular has owed a debt to the Kurdish people, especially when considering its role in shaping the borders of the modern Middle East as part of the Sykes-Picot agreement.

The Kurds represent a minority people of Iraq, with a language, culture and identity distinct and separate from the Arab majority.



I BELIEVE  
THE KURDS  
HAVE A  
STRONG  
CASE FOR  
STATEHOOD  
IN IRAQ

principles. I believe that each case should be assessed on its merit and in its historical context. We should not therefore allow examples such as South Sudan and Eritrea to deter us from welcoming emerging states by allowing negative connotations to cloud judgements.

The secession of Kurdistan from Iraq would not mark a dramatic revolutionary event but rather the final point of an evolutionary process that was set in motion in 1991.

Operation Provide Comfort, led by the US and the UK, enforced a no-fly zone over much of the area corresponding to the Kurdistan Region in Iraq today. Since then the development of a proto-state has emerged with the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) running a wide range of functions, including securing and policing its borders with full visa issuing facilities, commanding its armed forces and overseeing a foreign affairs department with missions across the globe.

The region has a constitution, a parliament, a judiciary and other necessary state institutions. I certainly recall from my own visit the feeling of being in a separate country, and one that was very different from Iraq. Memories of civil war in the 1990s between the two main parties are of course a worry to some, and recent tensions regarding the operation of the

parliament and disagreement over proposed electoral changes have given rise to concerns that the achievements of the past three decades are being lost.

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KURDS IN THE UK



THE 12TH-CENTURY  
YEZIDI SHRINES, LALISH

The Yazidis claim to follow the world's oldest monotheistic religion, citing the antiquity of their calendar, which they trace back 6,767 years.

The beautiful wooded valley at Lalish is punctuated by white conical shrines, one of which sits over the tomb of the 12th-century Yazidi saint

Sheikh Adi. Lalish, to the north-east of Mosul, is the Yazidis' spiritual centre, and a place of refuge in times of persecution. **Richard Wilding**

## NEWCOMERS WITH A ZEST FOR HARD WORK

SMALL BUSINESSES HAVE MADE THE KURDISH COMMUNITY ONE OF BRITAIN'S SECRET SUCCESS STORIES, SAYS **IBRAHIM DOGAS**

For much of the Kurdish community, spread across countless countries, Britain is the closest they have felt to a homeland of their own. The Kurdish people's links to Britain go back centuries and, when they faced a renewed round of violent repression in the 1980s, it was to here that many chose to come and build new lives.

There are now believed to be more than 250,000 people of Kurdish heritage in the UK, although a lack of an option for "Kurdish" on the census makes it difficult to know the exact numbers, with many Kurds choosing to select British as their ethnicity rather than be associated with the authoritarian regimes of where they originated.

Many of the Kurds arriving in the 1980s found their first jobs in the most British of industries: textile manufacturing. But with

the final decline of the industry by the mid-1990s, they began to start their own businesses, more often than not relying on each other's savings to provide the start-up capital.

Adam Smith called Britain a "nation of shopkeepers" and, 240 years later, British Kurds are working hard to maintain that reputation by setting up and running thousands of small businesses. These often family-owned enterprises make a vital contribution to local economies across the country, employing many thousands of people.

In doing so, Kurds have become an integral part of British society. From London and Birmingham to Manchester, Glasgow and beyond, small businesses have become the basis for the connection and pride that Kurds feel as part of the communities in which they live.

During the 2011 London riots, it was Kurdish shopkeepers who protected local businesses from being burnt

down and then set about organising the community to come together to clean up the streets. And in every major British town and city you will find Kurdish community centres, usually funded by local businesses, dedicated to improving their local area through volunteering.

These experiences, ingrained with the British values of openness, trade and local responsibility, have shaped British Kurds, and in turn helped to mould the wider Kurdish community. London in particular has become a thriving Kurdish economic hub with a growing cultural influence among the Kurdish diaspora, pioneering one of the first Kurdish language newspapers and the first Kurdish Film Festival.

The success of Kurds in London and elsewhere in the UK has set an example for the ways in which a self-confident Kurdish community can work closely with people from all backgrounds, particularly Turkish and Arabic-speakers, to the success of all. Likewise, many of the current generation of Kurdish leaders were educated in the UK and maintain close links to the country. Their experience of a pluralistic, modern Britain has helped Kurds maintain



PROTECTING THE COMMUNITY DURING THE 2011 LONDON RIOTS IT WAS THE KURDISH SHOPKEEPERS WHO PROTECTED LOCAL BUSINESSES FROM BEING BURNED DOWN

their strong commitment to building a democracy in one of the world's most volatile regions. In the space of less than one generation, Kurds have used the opportunities they found in this country to quietly become one of its most successful communities, contributing to all aspects of British life. The humble kebab has become as quintessentially British as tikka masala, with almost 70 per cent of kebab restaurants in the UK run by Kurds, and public recognition in the British Kebab Awards. In 2010, Nadhim Zahawi became Britain's first MP of Kurdish heritage, and he has become a prominent backbencher, frequently on TV and radio. Kurds are now head teachers, doctors, nurses and barbers; all making their contribution to British society. In return, Britain continues to shape the Kurdish community within its own borders and beyond. Regardless of what lies ahead, Britain has become a powerful example of what Kurds can achieve in a country with a strong commitment to human rights, the rule of law, and free and fair enterprise. It is a lesson that is now more important than ever.

# REFERENDUM OFFERS A WIN-WIN FOR BRITAIN AND THE KURDS

BORN IN IRAQ TO KURDISH PARENTS, NADHIM ZAHAWI FLED TO THE UK WITH HIS FAMILY FROM SADDAM HUSSEIN'S REGIME IN 1976

**A** bastion of liberalism. An island of democracy. A stronghold of tolerance. These are just some of the figures of speech used by the commentariat to juxtapose Iraqi Kurdistan with the backdrop of political volatility that is endemic to the region in which it is located.

The commentariat is not wrong. The democratic freedoms enjoyed in Kurdistan diverge prodigiously from the human rights abuses seen in Iran, Syria and, of course, the receding territory of Daesh. And even within Iraq, Kurdistan stands out. Its significant oil reserves make it economically viable and allow it to sustain itself, albeit with some difficulty since being almost totally cut from central government funding in 2014.

Militarily, there are few who would dispute the Peshmerga, Kurdistan's armed forces, as the region's most capable operators. From Sinjar in 2015 to Mosul this summer, the Peshmerga have played an indispensable role in recapturing from Daesh these symbolic conquests, depriving it of strategic supply corridors, and pushing it ever closer to annihilation. They have provided lasting stability and defended good governance post-liberation, and have protected more internally displaced persons (IDPs) of all races and creeds within the region. It is estimated that IDPs constitute around 35 per cent of the Kurdish population.

I believe the reason for Kurdistan's impressive performance in all this stems in part from its autonomy from Baghdad. Its status as a proto-state within Iraq gives the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) the ability to control its economic affairs, manage its public services, hold its own elections, raise its own army and offer sanctuary to those fleeing danger.

Kurds go to the polls tomorrow to decide whether Kurdistan should remain part of a federal Iraq or become an independent state. It is a welcome and long-overdue step in respecting the inalienable right of the Kurdish people to self-determination. In the case of a Yes vote, we would undoubtedly see a pronounced political movement towards a fully independent Kurdish state with full autonomy from Iraq. Even if that new state does not come to be, Baghdad would be likely to devolve further powers to Erbil in response to the KRG's mandate for Kurdish independence. With a No vote, similar concessions would still be likely to come from Baghdad to placate the unsuccessful side. Both outcomes, therefore, would give Kurdistan more of what has allowed it to perform well and be a force for regional stability.

The UK Government believes that a referendum at this time would distract from the more urgent priority of defeating Daesh, bringing continued security to liberated areas and promoting a stable Iraq. I also want to see a stable Iraq but, owing to the positive role that Kurdistan has



WHILE WE MAY HAVE WON THE WAR IN IRAQ, WE DID NOT WIN THE PEACE

performed up to now in promoting regional stability, I think that a more autonomous Iraqi Kurdistan need not undermine Iraq's cohesion. A more autonomous Kurdistan should not be seen as a cause of division in Iraq but as an opportunity for more stability and prosperity in both Iraq and Kurdistan.

Take the example of Turkey, the principal country through which Iraqi Kurdistan's vast oil reserves are already distributed to the global market. Gas will follow, as the KRG recently struck a \$1bn deal and a debt restructuring package with the Dana Gas consortium, which is investing in increasing gas production by 150 per cent from the Chamchamal and Khor Mor fields. Both have lucrative untapped potential.

The energy security and economic benefits that Turkey can reap from this deal are significant given the likely intensification in the flow of gas and oil through the country. An autonomous Kurdistan can only be in a better position to strike similar deals, diversifying energy sources and enhancing economic security. And more control by Kurds over their own reserves would allow the oil and gas in the rest of Iraq to be distributed more plentifully to its non-Kurdish regions.

Greater Kurdish autonomy can help with wider foreign policy too. Iran is systematically supporting insurgent groups across the Middle East to destabilise regimes unwelcome to government ideologues in Tehran or to subvert them under Iranian-backed militias. Examples include backing for the Houthis in Yemen and Hezbollah in Lebanon. But the influence of Tehran in Iraq is also a cause for concern. Across Iraq, Shia militias have long been establishing corridors to transport weaponry to Iran's satellite militias. Iran's clerics have considerable sway over Iraq's Shia majority, many of whom have long felt a disconnect with Baghdad. Iran can therefore count on the sympathies of a range of figures in Iraqi society, from civil servants to border guards. And Iraq's economy depends disproportionately on Iranian imports. An emboldened Kurdistan would increase the number of players in the region and would serve as a bulwark against Iranian attempts to undermine regional stability.

It cannot be denied it is mainly the fault of the coalition that toppled Saddam Hussein that there is a power vacuum in Iraq to be exploited. While we may have won the war in Iraq, we did not win the peace, and we did not adequately plan to ensure a smooth transition to democracy after the withdrawal of international troops. We have a duty to rectify our mistakes. There are also opportunities to improve energy security and economic growth in the region. So let's be more open-minded about the benefits a more autonomous Kurdistan could bring.

\*Nadhim Zahawi is Conservative MP for Stratford-on-Avon and sits on the Commons foreign affairs committee

**A BATTLE ON MANY FRONTS**  
Peshmerga fighters celebrate driving Isis forces from villages below Bashik mountain last year. The fighters moved through tunnels they had built to avoid Isis snipers. Getty



## BRAVE SOLDIERS

**THE PESHMERGA MILITARY FORCES OF KURDISTAN ARE THE BEST HOPE FOR BRINGING STABILITY TO THE REGION, SAYS CHEMICAL WEAPONS EXPERT HAMISH DE BRETTON-GORDEN**

**T**he opportunity to have a stable country in the Middle East will be the greatest benefit to the international community if the Kurds decide to vote for independence tomorrow. I have been directly involved with the Kurds since the Gulf War and the liberation of Kuwait in 1991, as a young tank commander, which culminated in Sir John Major setting up the no-fly zone over Kurdistan, which undoubtedly saved millions of lives.

It is a great shame that current world leaders have not felt able to do the same in Syria, just to the north. In 2011 I started a project with the Minister for Martyrs and Anfal Affairs in the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) to plan to decontaminate Halabja, the city that Saddam Hussein gassed on 16 March 1988 – killing up to 12,000 people. Deaths from this atrocity, to which global leaders turned a Nelsonian eye at the time, continue to this day. We also planned to exhume and identify more than 5,000 people

# BAGHDAD MUST SUPPORT KURDS AFTER A YES VOTE

SIR SIMON MAYALL SAYS THE LONG-SUFFERING REGION WILL HEAD FOR THE EXIT IF IRAQ DOES NOT PLAY FAIR

**T**he international community owes a substantial debt to the Iraqi Kurds. As the Iraqi security forces crumbled in the face of Isis, hollowed out by the sectarianism and corruption of the national government in Baghdad, only the Kurds stood between the murderous Islamic State zealots and the possible fall of the capital.

The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and its Peshmerga military forces blunted the Isis advance, dented the narrative of caliphate success, and provided a humanitarian safe haven for hundreds and thousands of Yazidis, and Sunnis and Shia Arabs. The Iraqi Government shared that debt, but did little to demonstrate its gratitude.

The Kurds, having been denied the dream of self-determination at the end of the First World War, awkwardly straddle the fault line of Arabs, Turks and Iranians, chafing at the treatment they received from all three over the decades. Tomorrow, albeit against the advice of many friends of the Kurds, the KRG president Masoud Barzani is holding a referendum asking its people if they want to move towards independence. The result is a given, and it is difficult not to sympathise with the sentiments that will drive a resounding Yes vote, given the history of violence and mistrust between the KRG and Baghdad.

However, to use this vote as a mandate to drive forward on a path

to independence would be a mistake. The Middle East already has enough complications and complexity, and the international community has no appetite for supporting further disruption or challenges to borders. The experience of South Sudan makes people wary of backing self-determination for landlocked territories with antagonistic neighbours, however righteous the cause may be.

Mr Barzani should be looking to take the mandate that he will be given to put pressure on the international community to give the Iraqi Kurds the support they deserve to implement the equitable settlement that they have been promised for years.

The debt of gratitude, and the justice of their case, should generate the greatest possible diplomatic support for Kurdish aspirations that fall short of a demand for independence, and will give Baghdad the chance to demonstrate that it can, in fact, deliver a political settlement for all the peoples of Iraq.

But if the Iraqi Government once again falls short of living up to its responsibilities, it will be difficult not to see Kurdish independence as the only way forward.

\*Lt Gen Sir Simon Mayall, KBE, CB, is a retired British Army officer and a Middle East adviser at the Ministry of Defence



**TERROR WATCH**  
ISIS HAS USED CHLORINE AND MUSTARD GAS AGAINST THE KURDISH ARMY, RESURRECTING FEARS THAT SURFACED IN THE SADDAM ERA

## RESIST THE TOXIC DAESH WAR MACHINE

buried in the contaminated mass graves in Halabja. Sadly, as Daesh began to spread its evil web in northern Iraq, the Kurdish people and their valiant troops, the Peshmerga, had to focus all their efforts on defeating it. Their Arab neighbours had initially capitulated to Daesh, leaving the Peshmerga to hold the northern front. This they did with skill and bravery, but very little materiel, facing Daesh forces well equipped with captured Iraqi tanks, artillery and heavy weapons. Nevertheless, these mountain fighters who opposed Saddam Hussein's murderous Anfal campaign made up for the shortfall of weaponry with grit and determination.

When Daesh started using chemical weapons from 2015, I became directly involved in helping the Peshmerga. After Halabja, everybody in Kurdistan is acutely aware of the terrifying effects of chemical weapons – Saddam Hussein allegedly used them more than 400 times during the Anfal campaign, killing upwards of 200,000 Kurds. This shocking history made the

chemical weapons, which have killed more than 200 and injured hundreds more, but it is the psychological impact that would have broken the will to resist, and would have done among lesser troops.

This is why despots and terrorists are using chemical weapons ever more frequently, and we all must take some blame. If the Kurdish people decide to move to an independent Kurdistan, I for one will be delighted and support them in every way I can. I hope the British Government will do the same, and ensure the Peshmerga have all the military capability they need to protect and stabilise this region, and continue to defeat the jihadists, rather than us having to fight Daesh on UK streets.

\*Hamish de Bretton-Gordon, OBE, is a chemical weapons expert and an adviser to the Peshmerga on chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) defence. He was a British Army officer for 23 years and commanding officer of the UK's CBRN Regiment and Nato's Rapid Reaction CBRN Battalion.

# THE UK MUST START TO SUPPORT THIS REMARKABLE NATION

**ROBERT HALFON,**  
CONSERVATIVE MP  
FOR HARLOW,  
TELLS OF HIS  
EXPERIENCES  
IN KURDISTAN



working people get a fair slice of the cake. I have spoken to women's organisations that put domestic violence on the agenda and helped reduce female genital mutilation in co-operation with the government.

People of different religions flee there knowing they will be protected.

Jews, who were a substantial community, were expelled many decades ago through no fault of the Kurds, who enjoy good relations with them. President Barzani told me that if Iraq recognised Israel, there would be a consulate-general in Erbil the next day. The relationship with Israel could be a major asset for both countries.

I have much sympathy with the Kurds' desire for independence so that they can always protect themselves. The UK must support this remarkable nation.

\* Robert Halfon will donate his fee for this article to the SEED Foundation in Kurdistan, which supports survivors of violence and conflict.

that used chemical weapons and created many mass graves, some of which are still being unearthed. It is now a museum – but the past remains live for its survivors and their families. The destruction continues to undermine agriculture in the region.

I was proud to lead a committee of Kurds, MPs, academics and legal practitioners that successfully persuaded the Commons in 2013 to formally recognise Saddam's genocide. Some people then asked why we focused on the past but some of the mentality that allowed Iraqi soldiers to conduct genocide is still obvious in the condescending and high-handed manner in which Baghdad treats the Kurds.

But there is one place I will never visit again: the Red House in Slemani (Sulaimania). It was a horrific Baathist torture centre where thousands were murdered, tortured and raped in clear imitation of Nazi and Stalinist methods. It formed part of the wider genocide.

There are also the beginnings of a vibrant civil society. I have met the trade unions several times, and they need sharp elbows to ensure that

Kurdistan has its problems, but also has the essential ingredients for a flourishing society, as I have seen on my five visits there. It is an extraordinary place run by a progressive Muslim government dedicated to improving property rights, boosting private enterprise, encouraging inward investment and developing respectful relations between religions and ethnic groups.

There are also the beginnings of a vibrant civil society. I have met the trade unions several times, and they need sharp elbows to ensure that



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## HELP KURDISTAN HEAL

MARY GLINDON  
MP FOR NORTH TYNESIDE

Ps have heard much disturbing testimony about girls enslaved and raped multiple times by Isis, who also slaughtered family members in front of them. The psychological traumas will last forever but can be treated. Governments should help increase the number of clinical psychologists in Iraq and Kurdistan.

But British citizens are practising their own aid and diplomacy. The founder of the Newcastle-Gateshead Medical Volunteers, Kurdish-born Prof Deiair Kader, mobilises health professionals from the North East to visit Kurdistan several times a year. They provide free orthopaedic care and are literally putting many Kurds back on their own two feet through free hip and knee operations, which are beyond the capacity of the health system there, or for which people would have to wait many years. The charity also teaches local staff to raise surgical care standards and provides blankets and winter clothing to Yazidi refugee camps in Duhok.

\* Mary Glindon has donated her fee for this article to Cancer Research.

# HISTORY, CULTURE AND DIVERSITY

RICHARD WILDING TELLS OF HIS YEARS WITH THE KURDISTAN PEOPLE, DOCUMENTING THEIR LIVES AND HISTORY

The area inhabited by the Kurdish people sits at a crossroads of civilisations, where different cultures and religions intersect. In its long history, the region now known as Kurdistan has been conquered and fought over by Sumerian, Assyrian, Babylonian, Median, Achaemenid, Greek, Parthian, Roman, Byzantine, Islamic, Mongol, Ottoman and British rulers. In more recent times, Kurdistan has sat between powerful Arab, Persian and Turkish neighbours, but has held on to its unique identity, language and values.

Following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire after the First World War, the Kurds were promised an independent state in the 1920 Treaty of Sèvres. However, Kurdish dreams were crushed by the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, which saw the region divided between the states of Iran, Iraq, Syria and Turkey.

Since 2012, I have been creative director of Gulan, a non-political UK registered charity formed to promote Kurdish culture and preserve the heritage of Kurdistan for the benefit of all people. I have travelled extensively through the Kurdistan region of Iraq documenting the region's archaeology, ethnic and religious diversity, history of persecution and renewal, and the recent refugee crisis.

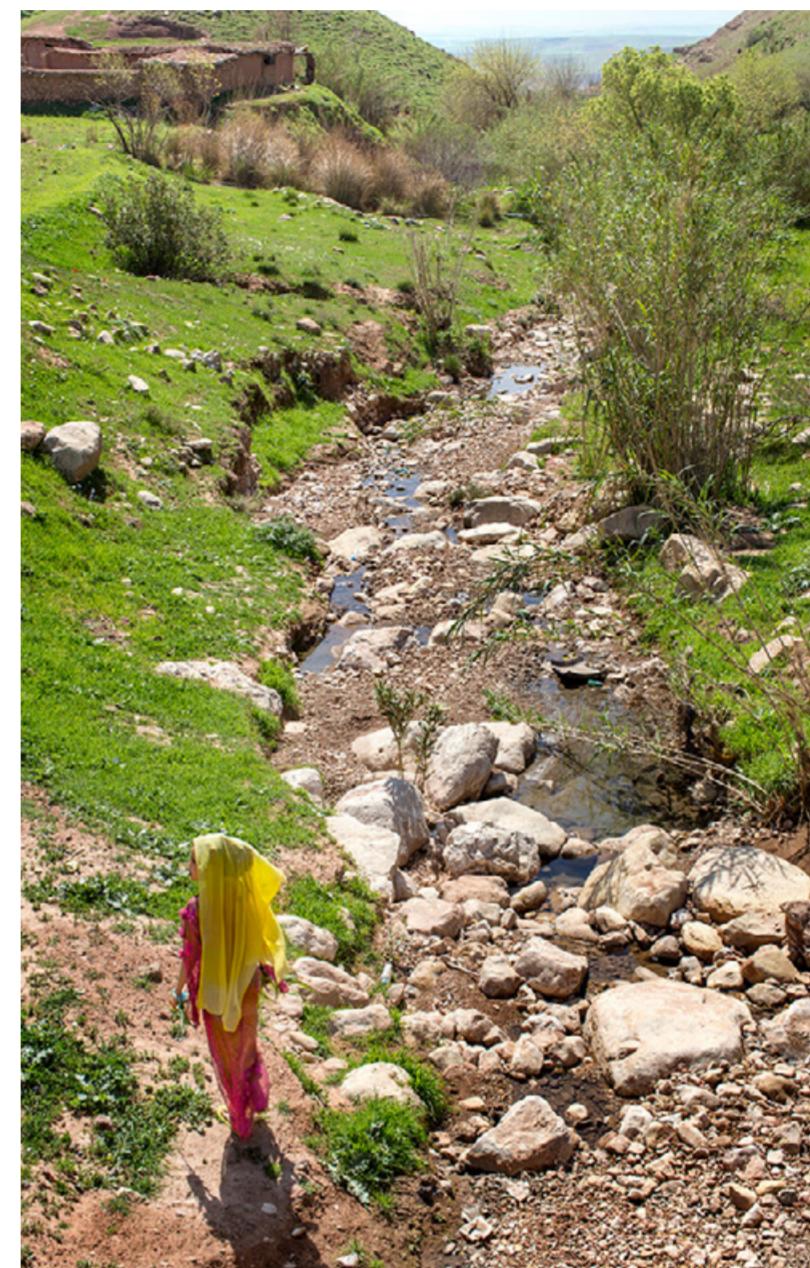
## BIOGRAPHY

Richard Wilding is a London-based photographer, writer and public speaker working internationally with museums, charities and governments. He specialises in the documentation of archaeology, culture and costume in the Middle East. Many of his images of Kurdistan appear in the pages of this supplement.

Wilding has given public talks at Leighton House Museum and the Ismaili Centre, London. He has given lectures for the Reconciliation and Peacebuilding programme at the University of Winchester, for the Department of Archaeology at the University of Reading, for the Sackler Research Forum at the Courtauld Institute of Art, London and at the University of Exeter.

The exhibition Return to Kurdistan shows Iraqi Kurdistan and Northern Iraq in photographs by Richard Wilding alongside historical photographs by Anthony Kersting. In 2016, Return to Kurdistan was exhibited by Gulan in Erbil and Sulaymaniyah in the Kurdistan region of Iraq, and in 2017 at the Courtauld Institute of Art, London and University of Exeter. In late October 2017, Return to Kurdistan will be exhibited in the Houses of Parliament, London by Gulan and the All-Party Parliamentary Group on the Kurdistan Region in Iraq.

\* For more information visit [richardwilding.com](http://richardwilding.com) and [gulan.org.uk](http://gulan.org.uk)



## ANCIENT HISTORY

Kurdistan is on the north-eastern edge of Mesopotamia, or the "land between rivers". The convergence of the Tigris and Euphrates produced fertile soil and water for irrigation that allowed the first non-nomadic societies to emerge from c6500BC to 3800BC. This "cradle of civilisation" gave birth to the first cities and the earliest developments in writing, mathematics, astronomy and agriculture.



## ASSYRIAN RELIEF, MALTAI

The Maltai reliefs, dated to c689BC, can be found overlooking Dohuk. The reliefs depict an Assyrian king, probably Sennacherib, accompanied by the god Ashur, goddess Ninlil, the moon god Sin, the god of wind Enil, the sun god Shamash, the storm god Adad and the goddess of love Ishtar.

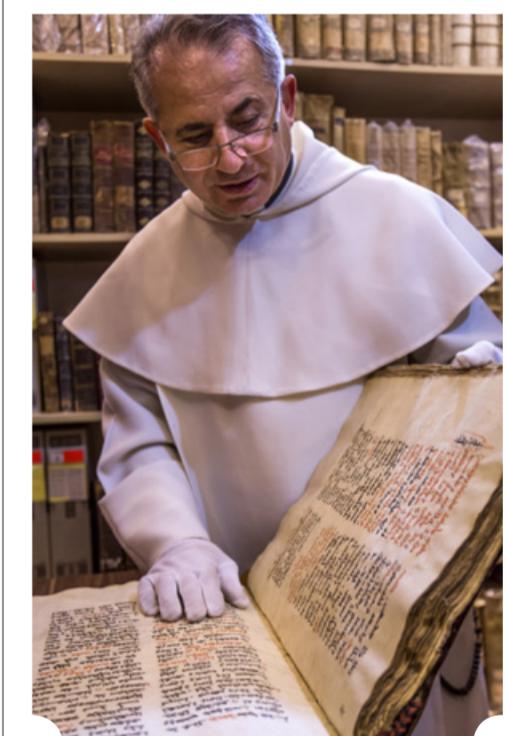
## SENNACHERIB'S AQUEDUCT

Constructed in 690BC, Jerwan is the world's earliest known aqueduct. It formed part of a canal built to take water from the mountains in present-day Iraqi Kurdistan to supply the palace and gardens of King Sennacherib's royal capital in Nineveh (now Mosul).



## FATHER NAJEEB

In 2014, after taking control of Mosul, Isis was advancing on Qaraqosh. With minutes to spare, Father Najeeb fled with boxes of rare religious manuscripts in the boot of his car. They are now being restored in a safe location in Iraqi Kurdistan.



## SHANIDAR CAVE

The Shanidar cave, first excavated in 1951 by Ralph Solecki and his team from Columbia University, sits on the side of Bradost Mountain. The remains of 10 Neanderthals, dating from 35,000 to 65,000 years ago, have been found within the cave.

