

Alliance or Self-reliance?

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Throughout their history the Kurds have been supportive of their neighbors' causes and national liberation movements in near and distant lands, yet, with a few exceptions, other nations have generally not only not been supportive of the Kurdish cause but have been against it and sometimes vehemently so. This attitude towards the Kurds is not limited to the peoples of the states that occupy Kurdistan but extends to the rest of the Arab and Islamic world and, I dare say, even beyond.

The Kurds have promoted other peoples' causes but this has always been a one-way street, for their support and good will have never been reciprocated. They fought for the spread of Islam, yet the states that occupy their homeland and commit genocide against them are none other than Islamic states, and the rest of the Islamic world is not only not supporting Kurdish human and national rights but opposing it. The Kurds have supported Arab causes from Algeria to Palestine, yet the Arabs are adamantly against any and all Kurdish rights.

And as for the rest of the world, the situation hasn't been much better. If there have been any so-called alliances, they have never benefited the Kurds, for once the other side achieves its goal it sells the Kurds out without a moment's hesitation. The Kurdish cause has always been something to be used by others for their own ulterior motives without any regard for the interest of the Kurdish people. Examples abound. In 1963, for instance, after the pro-Soviet Iraqi regime was overthrown, the Soviet Union tried to retaliate against the new regime by using the Kurdish issue for its own end. Thus, there were rumors that Mongolia, a Soviet satellite, would raise the Kurdish issue at the UN. But as soon as the Soviets got some concessions from the Iraqi government, the Kurdish issue was dropped. And twenty years earlier, a short-lived alliance between the Kurdish Republic of Mahabad and the Soviets ended as soon as the Soviets found it advantageous for them to abandon the Kurds.

The story of the Kurdish-American covert alliance in the early seventies and overt alliance in the nineties and especially during the Iraqi Freedom Campaign, and the abandonment of the Kurds as usual, is well-known to us all. And Europe's support of Kurdish national rights has been either non-existent or cosmetic at best. And let us not forget that the architect of the division of Kurdistan after World War One and all the tragedies that the Kurds have suffered as a result of that division was Britain. And even today, despite all his courageous policies on Iraq, Tony Blair, the British prime minister, insists that "Iraq's territorial integrity must be absolute."

Despite the Kurdish people's legitimate right to freedom and independence, like all other nations of the world, Arab and Islamic nations have, without exception, supported the occupying states against the Kurds and their legitimate struggle for freedom. Even when Saddam was gassing the Kurds in Halabja and elsewhere and burying them alive by the thousands in the infamous Anfal genocidal campaign in the late eighties the only feeble condemnations we heard came not from their neighbors and people of the same faith but from the West. We didn't hear a single protest or condemnation from the Arab and Islamic world against all those horrible crimes.

And when we look at the majority race of the states dividing and occupying Kurdistan, we find that they are generally against Kurdish human and national rights. This anti-Kurdish attitude

oftentimes reaches the level of hysteria. Apart from some lip service to the rights of the Kurds by some among them they have been supportive of their governments even when those governments have been guilty not only of human rights violations but of outright genocide. These people are denying the Kurds the same rights they take for granted for themselves and their own kind. I have yet to meet a single Arab, Turk, or Persian who has unequivocally supported the Kurdish people's right to independence even though they readily support all other oppressed people's right to independence.

Historically, the Kurds have blamed their misfortunes only on the governments of the countries that hold them captive but never the people of those countries. But the fact remains that despite all the oppression, the destruction, the ethnic cleansing, and genocide that the Kurds have suffered at the hands of the governments of the occupying countries, the majority race in these countries have neither condemned their governments for their crimes nor supported the Kurds' right to self-determination. Some groups may support Kurdish rights in theory and as long as they are out of power, but the minute they get into power they behave as horribly as all the other groups before them. A glaring example is the statements, actions, and non-actions of various Arab Iraqi groups who were in opposition to Saddam but who are now in power regarding Saddam's horrible legacy of Arabization and ethnic cleansing. All these groups now want to legalize and make permanent the ethnic cleansing that Saddam committed against over three hundred thousand Kurds.

Given the negative and hostile attitude by the majority race in the occupying states and the rest of the Arab and Islamic world, one wonders if building any kind of alliance would be possible between the Kurds and these people. That leaves the nations of Europe, America, and the West as a whole. To be fair, while there has been sympathy for the Kurds and their fight for freedom, especially in the last decade, there has been little support and nowhere near their support for other oppressed people in similar situations.

One could arguably say that this lack of support in the past was due to the fact that the Kurdish issue was not as well known in the West as those other issues. But even now when the Kurdish issue is becoming much more known than in the past, there is a lot of reluctance to lend any real support except lip service. This is due mostly to the undue influence of the occupying states and their friends in the West, their distortion of the Kurdish cause, and their negative propaganda against a people that has never aspired to anything more than being left alone to live freely in their own homeland.

In light of all of this, I believe the answer to our dilemma, at least for now, is self-reliance rather than alliance, not because we like it so but because others simply don't want to bother with allying themselves with the Kurds. "He who depends on his neighbor for dinner will go to bed hungry," according to a Kurdish proverb. So far, we have seen little evidence to disprove the saying "The Kurds have no friends but the mountains." And so, while we work on changing the hearts and minds of some and hopefully build alliances for the future, we must rely on ourselves and the strength and justice of our cause.

That our cause is just we have never had any doubt. That our cause is not *against* anybody but *for* our people we have no doubt. That we abhor violence and want to achieve our freedom through peaceful and democratic means we have no doubt. That with our self reliance and whatever alliances we can forge we will win our freedom and there will be a free, democratic, and independent Kurdistan we have no doubt either.