

— — — — —
The
Unfinished
Journey
— — — — —
of a Kurd — — — — —

—Jamal Alemdar remembers—



The Unfinished Journey of a Kurd

Jamal Alemdar remembers

Copyright © Jamal Alemdar 2026

Nicola Gustafsson-Woods, Word Curator

Cover photo: Georg Kristiansen

All other images from the author's archive

Publisher: Apec, 2026

ISBN: 978-91-89863-34-7



To my beloved son Sherwan

Your bright spirit was taken from us far too soon at the young age of seventeen. Your light continues to guide us through our deepest sorrow. This memoir is dedicated to you, with all my love—and with the memories of you that will live in my heart forever.

Contents

Publisher's Note	10
Foreword.....	11
Writing a Memoir—Why?.....	11
Family.....	11
A Few Words to My Beloved Shirin, Sherko, Sherwan, and Kamran.....	11
The Arrival.....	20
A Life Across Borders: Navigating Love, Loss, and Homecoming.....	23
To My Darling Wife, Bahrin.....	24
My Mother.....	28
My Father.....	32
Aunty Dursun.....	35
Aunty Shukria.....	37
My Maternal Grandfather, Haji Aswed.....	39
Moving Around.....	42
Baghdad.....	42
Qara Tepe.....	44
Hewler (Erbil).....	46
Duhok.....	51
Kirkuk.....	53
From Military to Architecture.....	55
At the Turkish Embassy.....	56
My First Trip Abroad.....	57
Ankara.....	59
Generals in the Classroom.....	60
First Voyage to Europe.....	60
Moving to Istanbul.....	62
New Life in Istanbul.....	63
A Student in Need.....	65
Teaching at Istanbul Technical University (ITU).....	65
Turkish Nationalism in the Ranks of the ITU.....	67
Cultural Tensions.....	68
Inexplicable Hostility Towards the Kurds.....	70
Historical Background.....	70
Recognition, Not Suppression.....	71
My Arrest Changed Everything.....	74
Interrogation and Torture.....	75
The Price of Refusal.....	76
A False Confession as the Price of Freedom.....	77
Interrogation by the Chief Intelligence Director.....	78
Inside Seven Prisons.....	82

Balmumcu Military Garrison Prison.....	82
Orhaniye Military Garrison Prison.....	85
Zirhli Birlıklar (Armed Forces) Prison.....	86
Mamak Military Prison.....	88
Sultanahmet Prison: Sad News from Afar.....	91
At the Fifth Criminal Court of Istanbul.....	94
Fleeing to Freedom.....	97
One Door Slammed, Another Door Opened.....	97
Visit of the Swedish Immigration Delegation.....	100
Escape to Athens.....	103
Sweden, At Last!.....	105
My First Days in Sweden.....	106
My First Experience Living with a Swedish Family.....	112
Working at a Psychiatric Hospital.....	113
Committees to Support the Kurdish Cause.....	116
The Forgotten War.....	121
The Finnish-Kurdish Committee (FKK).....	122
A Good Response to the Turkish Government.....	123
The Birth of the Norwegian-Kurdish Committee.....	125
The Icelandic-Kurdish Committee.....	127
Why Märta Hansson Cared So Deeply About the Kurdish Cause.....	129
My First Journey to Liberated Kurdistan.....	133
Suddenly, I became a Holy Man.....	134
In Armenia, Even Maps Belong to the Military.....	134
A Nice Evening with Azeri Students.....	135
In Tehran.....	136
A Change of Plans for Hans.....	136
A Surprise Visit to My Old Roommate.....	137
In Liberated Kurdistan.....	137
A Tour in Liberated Kurdistan.....	138
Abdul Soran: A Humorous Encounter.....	147
A Peshmerga's Odyssey.....	149
Dr. Mahmood Osman: A Life Dedicated to the Kurdish Cause.....	151
Meeting Mullah Mustafa Barzani for the First Time.....	153
Incompetent Iraqi Pilots Cause Fear.....	154
Split in the Ranks of the Revolution.....	156
A Sad Aspect of the Kurdish Revolution.....	157
Impressions of My Visit to Liberated Kurdistan.....	160
Jalal Talabani.....	169
Kurdish Student Society in Europe (KSSE).....	169
Membership of the KSSE in the International Union of Students (IUS).....	173

The 14th Congress of the KSSE in Stockholm, 1970.....	175
Amusing Moments at KSSE Meetings	176
Spies Among Us	177
The Demise of the KSSE: A Pivotal Moment in Kurdish History	178
An Offer Declined at an Uncomfortable Lunch.....	179
The Genesis of the March 11, 1970 Agreement: A Memoir of Diplomacy	182
Prior to the 8th KDP Congress: Where Vengeance Was Rejected.....	184
The Kurdish Office in London	186
London Calling	187
The British Kurdish Friendship Society (BKFS).....	187
The First Diplomatic Recognition for the Kurds	188
Sami Abdul Rahman: A Complex Legacy.....	191
The Gradual Decline of the Kurdish Office	194
A Kurdish Odyssey	195
Resigning from the KDP	197
Post-Resignation Fallout	198
The Story of a House	199
Smear Campaigns and Failed Conspiracies.....	201
The Final Chapter of Sami Abdurrahman	203
During the London Office Days	204
From Politics and Idealism to the Reality of Business	206
The Kurdish Nation in the UN	208
Memorable Kurdish Friends	211
A Misunderstanding and a Test of Character	211
An Incident at Idris Barzani’s Memorial	212
Dr. Shafiq Qazzaz: Tribute to a Kurdish Luminary	214
Baba Ali Sheikh Mahmood.....	216
Towfiq Wahbi.....	218
Another Colorful Anecdote.....	220
Awni Yousef’s Captivity in Kurdistan	221
A Diplomatic Dinner Disrupted	222
More Memorable Personalities.....	223
Jarjis Fethullah	223
Noori Shawais	225
Professor Kamal Majeed: A Kurdish Advocate and Engineer	227
Abdurrahman Qassemlou	229
Professor Ihsan Sherzad.....	230
A Forgotten Kurdish Hero in World War II: Ramzi Younis Nafii Agha (1920-1943)....	233
Through the Mountains	235
Betrayal: Their Refuge Proved Temporary	236
Aftermath and Memory.....	236

Sheikh Tahsin Ezidi: A Spiritual Luminary and Business Entrepreneur	237
Caught Between Loyalty and Dilemma.....	239
Dr. Ferhan Baqir: A Quiet Lesson in Prayer.....	241
Free Iraqi Council (FIC).....	243
Federalism: Our Condition for Joining the FIC	244
Visiting Saudi Arabia	244
Dr. Fakhri Shehab: A Legacy of Economic Mastery and Diplomatic Acumen ...	245
A Visit to Iran	248
The Beirut Conference of the Iraqi Opposition	252
Mustafa Barzani: A Legacy Forged in the Mountains.....	258
A Personal Reflection: Glimpses of a Legendary Leader	259
The Roots of Barzan: A Community Built on Shared Values.....	259
Return from Exile: The Kurdish Struggle Continues	262
The Enduring Legacy of Mullah Mustafa Barzani:.....	263
A Leader Rooted in Values	263
Barzani’s Long March: As Recounted by Aziz Shemzini	264
A Tale of Betrayal and Sorrow	268
Sait Kirmizitoprak (Dr. Şivan)	270
Barzani and the Kurdish Revolution in Iran	272
Barzani’s Return to Iraq	273
Interesting Moments with A Great Leader: Barzani Interviews	275
The Farther from Israel’s Border, the Braver you Become	276
Barzani Strove to Save the Kurds from Poverty.....	277
Acknowledging Barzani’s Standing.....	280
Barzani: A Man of His Word.....	282
Barzani and Hejar Mukriyani (Mam Hejar)	282
For Barzani, Kirkuk was a Red Line	285
Barzani Admits to Getting Old.....	286
Barzani’s Diplomacy During the Six-Day War	287
Janpolat and Barzani: A Tale of Friendship and	289
Cultural Connection.....	289
A Humble Leader’s Distaste for Adulation.....	290
Writing the Life Story of Barzani	291
Barzani’s Enduring Legacy of Humility and Leadership	294
Two Assassination Attempts Against Barzani	294
Nine Mullahs Sent to Kill Barzani.....	296
Barzani and Ismet Sharif Vanly.....	298
My First Encounter with Masoud Barzani.....	301
Memorable Encounters and Experiences	303
President George H. W. Bush.....	303
Sweden	306
Olof Palme: The Man I Met and Reflections on His Assassination	306

Prince Bertil Oskar Bernadotte: A Swedish Prince's Venture into Business.....	308
Ignatius Ya'qub III: A Meeting of Two Worlds in Sweden.....	309
Israel and a Sojourn in Jerusalem: General Yitzhak Mordechai.....	312
Dr. Yossi Beilin	313
The Kurds and the Jews	314
The Jewish Presence in Kurdish Iraq: Ancient Roots.....	318
More Memorable Encounters	321
Cetin Altan: A Pen Meant for the Oppressed	323
Jordan	327
Syria.....	328
Elevating Syrian Sovereignty.....	330
Brazil.....	331
Armando Conde: A Banker with a Heart	331
Africa.....	334
Kenya	334
Three Kurdish Women Stuck in Kenya	338
Zimbabwe	340
Socialism, Zimbabwean Style.....	340
Eastern Europe	342
Romania: Empowering Unity	342
Between Ideology and Reality: Kurdish Students in the USSR.....	343
Tatarstan: A Journey to the Middle of Nowhere	344
Ba'athists Exposing Their True Nature: Hardan al-Tikriti	347
Tariq Aziz	348
Samir Abdul Aziz Al Najm: Everything Has a Price	349
Aftermath of the Collapse of the Kurdish Armed Struggle.....	350
Heir to a Legacy: Nechirvan Barzani	353
Laying the Foundation: Masterplan for Kurdistan	355
A Reflection on Respect and True Development	358
A Diplomatic Encounter.....	359
A Tale of Injustice and Redemption	360
Nechirvan and The Malaysian Project:	361
A Tale of Ambition and Disappointment.....	361
The Complexities of International Business.....	364
Tiny Rowland: The Ugly Face of Capitalism.....	364
The Rise and Fall of Rifaat El Sayed: A Diplomatic Enigma	368
Ashraf Marwan	370
Carl-Gustav von Rosen: Establishing The Kurdish Air Force.....	372
China: Launched into an Unknown World.....	374
An Invitation from Beijing to Chicago from the Mid-America Committee.....	377
China: Where Integrity is Still Alive.....	377
Conflict Avoidance in China	378

Women's Rights the Chinese Way	379
China's Secret Medication.....	380
The Journey to China	381
The Final Diagnosis.....	382
Saudi Arabia & Uruguay.....	383
Uruguay to Saudi: A Business Outside the Box	384
From Palaces to Wheat Fields: A Royal Partnership.....	389
Expanding into the Transportation Business	391
Pilgrimage to Mecca.....	392
Zamzam Water: A Heavenly Mystery	393
A Near Loss in Jubail.....	396
Dammam Resort Development.....	398
Morocco.....	400
A Milestone Conference.....	400
Encounter with Shimon Peres.....	400
Lessons from Greece	402
Armenian Congress in Athens.....	402
Andreas Papandreou	403
A Few Final Words and Reflections: Turkey	405
Beyond Atatürk	405
The Cost of Nationalism	405
Leaders Without Vision	405
The Futility of Erasing Identity	405
The Strength of Inclusion.....	406
The Cost of Conflict.....	406
A Call for the Future.....	406
The Price of Being Gentlemen: A Final Reflection	407
If Kurdistan Is to Rise	409
No Regrets	410
Questions That Refuse to Fade	410
A History of Contribution and Denial.....	411
The Crisis of Political Culture	411
Reflections Without Conclusion	412
History in Motion	412
A Future Yet to Be Written	414

Publisher's Note

It is with both respect and careful reflection that I present Jamal Alemdar's memoir. This is not a story written to impress, but to deepen understanding. Not to persuade, but to bear witness.

From the very first lines, we encounter a voice that hesitates to step forward—a voice shaped by a sense of responsibility rather than self-assertion. Jamal Alemdar does not write to place himself at the center; rather, he writes to contribute to a broader context and to open a path for future generations to better understand the past. At a time when historical experiences are too often simplified or forgotten, this account is both urgent and necessary.

The memoir moves between the personal and the political, between the intimate moments of family life and the larger forces that have shaped an entire region and diaspora. We follow a journey that begins in a time of upheaval and continues through migration, education, and professional life—from the early years in Sweden, through studies at the KTH Royal Institute of Technology, to a life marked by engagement and responsibility on the international stage.

Yet it is perhaps in the everyday portrayals—encounters between people, the interplay of cultures, and the importance of family—that the story resonates most deeply. Here, a portrait emerges of a life lived between worlds, where identity is shaped at the intersection of Kurdish heritage and the European context.

One of the memoir's greatest strengths is Alemdar's candor. He does not claim to offer definitive truths, but rather his own perspective on events, leaving space for the reader to draw their own conclusions. It is an approach that builds trust and invites reflection.

As publisher, I see this work not only as an individual life story, but as part of a broader historical record. It is a story of migration and belonging, of struggle and opportunity, and of the choices that shape both individuals and societies.

It is my hope that this book will find its place among readers seeking understanding—not only of one man's life, but of experiences shared by many, often left unwritten. Within these pages there are not only memories, but also insights that deserve to be preserved and passed on.

Ali Ciftci

Foreword

Writing a Memoir—Why?

Writing this memoir has weighed heavily on me for some time. Family and friends have urged me to share my story, suggesting that not doing so would be a form of betrayal—both to them and to younger generations eager to understand the past.

I hesitated, unsure of how my story would be received. I worried about coming across as self-important or drawing too much attention to my personal experiences. The difficulty of being objective about my own life also made me wary and I feared that some of my reflections might cause discomfort.

But after much thought, I decided to move forward. The goal is to shed light on the past, helping younger generations grasp the events that shaped our present and learn from past mistakes.

I am not here to praise or criticize anyone. My aim is to share the facts as I see them and allow readers to form their own judgments.

This memoir is not an exercise in self-indulgence or a mere recording of history for the sake of it, but a humble recounting of the life I have lived, the people I have met, the stories I have heard, and the lessons I have learned.

My hope is that it helps the younger generation understand how the present came to be, while shining a light on the individuals who have left their mark on my journey. These pages are for those seeking insight into the past, and I trust that they will find value in what I share, ultimately contributing to a deeper understanding of our collective history.

Family

A Few Words to My Beloved Shirin, Sherko, Sherwan, and Kamran

Before delving into the deeper story of our extended family, I sense your eagerness about our past, and I first want to share my own journey—a tale of perseverance and triumph in the face of many challenges. A key milestone on this journey was the day I landed in Sweden—a chilly April 30, 1965, to be precise—marking a new chapter in the life of the Alemdars.

The transition was challenging. I found myself living in a refugee camp in Söderköping, struggling to adapt to an unfamiliar environment while having to learn Swedish. Three months later, I began working in an architect's office in Stockholm and eventually gained admission to the Royal Institute of Technology (KTH). Thanks to my prior education in Istanbul, I was able to complete two years in one year and finished in three years, despite having to start over. By 1970, I had earned a master's degree in architecture from the Royal Institute of Technology (KTH).

The year before, in 1969, another defining chapter of my life began when I met your mother, Ingegerd. It all started thanks to Leif Olsson, my former Swedish teacher from the Söderköping refugee camp. Out of the blue, Leif called to ask if he could stay with me for a few days while visiting his girlfriend in Stockholm—he couldn't afford a hotel. Of course, I said yes.

During his stay, Leif and his girlfriend were invited to dinner at the home of two sisters, Gunvor and Margit, who lived in the Gärdet area of Stockholm with Margit's son, Hans. When they heard the friend that Leif was staying with was Kurdish, curiosity got the better of them. They pulled out an old encyclopedia to learn more about the Kurds. The entry they found showed a fierce-looking man with a large mustache, armed with rifles and daggers, described as an "intelligent warrior." Somewhat alarmed, they called Leif and asked if he was sure it was safe to bring me. He laughed and assured them that I bore little resemblance to the man in the picture. When we finally met, all apprehension disappeared. The sisters were warm and welcoming, and before long, I was a regular guest at their home—almost part of the family. It was through them that I met your mother, Ingegerd. They had met her on a holiday trip and stayed in touch afterward. One evening, they introduced us at their home. Ingegerd and I had an instant connection, and before the year was over, we were married.

On July 16, 1970, our daughter Shirin was born, bringing immense joy to our young family. From her earliest days, Shirin displayed an alert and inquisitive nature, her beautiful, large eyes observing the world around her with curiosity. Some of my Kurdish friends cherished taking her out in a stroller—memories they still remember fondly. In August

1972, the birth of Sherko brought further joy to our family. Later, Sherwan's arrival in June 1974 lifted our spirits to new heights.

In 1971, we moved to London for my appointment as the representative of the Kurdish revolution in Europe, a diplomatic position recognized for the first time in Kurdish history by the British government. London had been generously offered as a base for our activities. Initially, we rented a house in Willesden Green. We later purchased a home in West Acton, a neighborhood you particularly loved due to the friendly neighbors, many of whom you remain in contact with to this day. We swiftly embraced the British way of life, adopting English as our official language at home—a practice we maintain today, even after our relocation to Sweden, thanks to Shirin's encouragement.

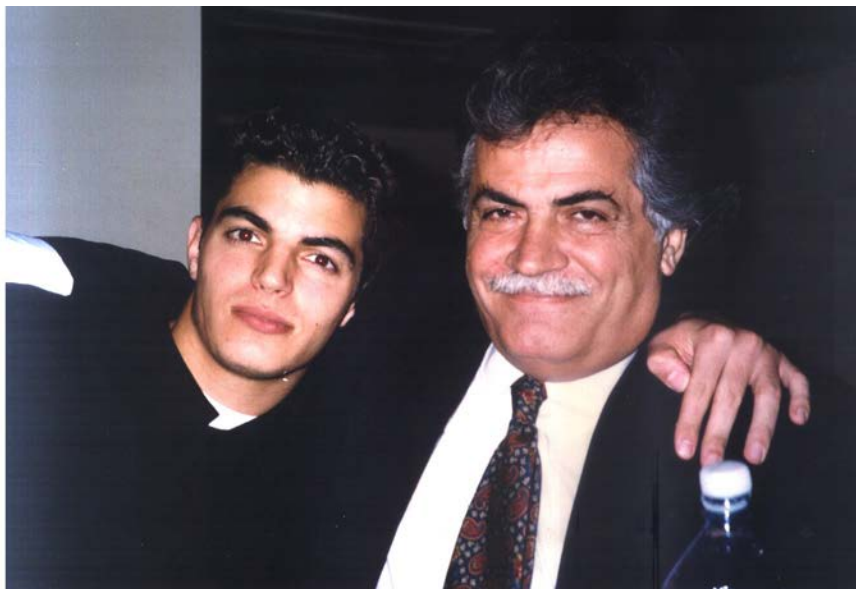
While in London, despite well-meant suggestions from friends to enroll you in private schools, your mother and I decided to place you in local community schools. We believed this choice would foster a more authentic connection with the real world, steering clear of the materialistic mindset often associated with profit-oriented private institutions. Our decision was validated by your behavior and genuine concern for your less privileged classmates, evident in your invitations to them to come and share a meal at our home. This contrasted starkly with the attitudes of students from private schools, who were often concerned with materialistic displays and comparisons of wealth, highlighting a significant disparity in life's true values.

Eight years after Sherwan's birth, we were blessed with Kamran, completing the family's happiness. Your upbringing was shaped by the distinctive blend of two cultures, forming a beautiful harmony that has ultimately defined your unique identity and character.

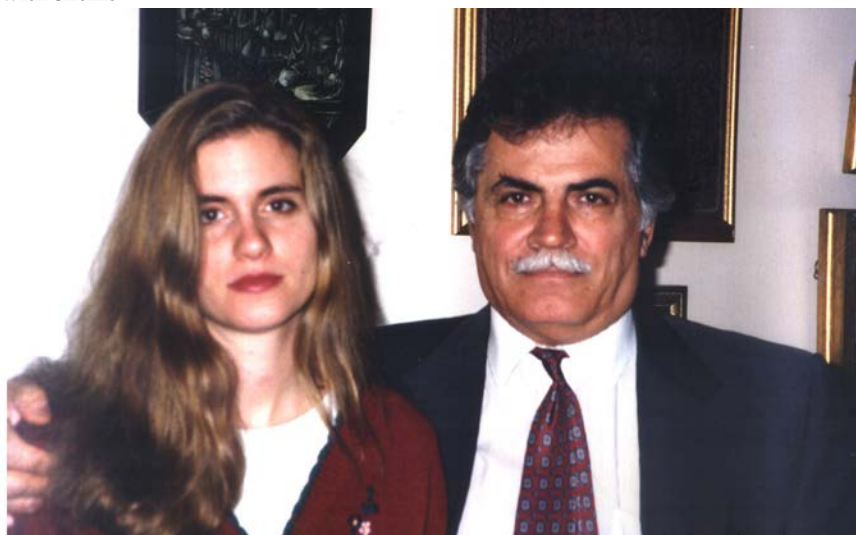
Your mother, Ingegerd, wholeheartedly embraced her role as a full-time homemaker and devoted mother, tending to the myriad needs of raising children. Meanwhile, I grappled with the delicate balance of being a good father and husband while at the same time pursuing my professional and political endeavors.

We spent the summers in Sweden, staying in Långvid at the summer cottage of your maternal grandfather, Anders—a cherished retreat located some 300 km north of Stockholm. Over time, we extended our living quarters there by building an annex and buying the neighbor's cottage, to

ensure more space and comfort for our summer holidays. The joy we found in spending our summers in Sweden, along with your mother's frequent complaints about London's polluted air, prompted our family's move to Sweden. I then had no choice but to commute between these two contrasting cities.



With Sherko



Shirin, insisting on looking serious



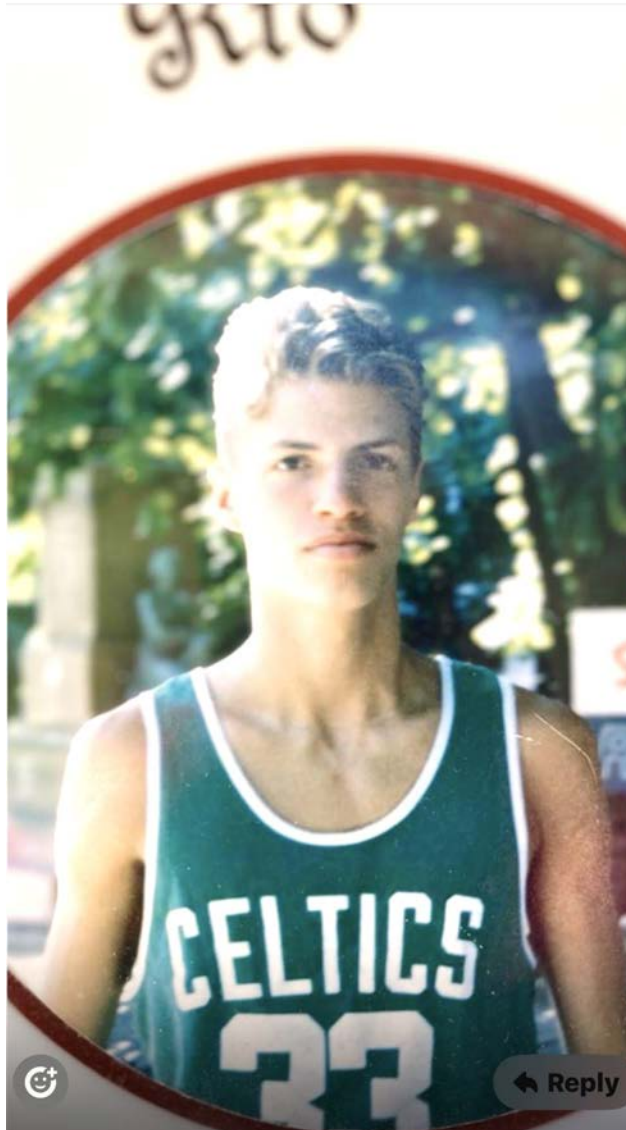
With Kamran and my beautiful granddaughter, Alina



Celebrating my 70th birthday



Sherwan entertaining with a flute



Sherwan in his basketball attire—his favorite sport

The tragic passing of Sherwan left a deep sorrow that devastated our entire family and continues to linger within me. His life was tragically cut short at the age of 17 by what we were told was a fatal aneurysm from a sporting accident. His death shook me to my very core, its cause still elusive, and it played a major role in the separation between your mother and me.

Sherko and later Kamran sought intellectual pursuits in the United States, more specifically in Rhode Island—a decision I now deem wise and commendable, while Shirin pursued her studies in Uppsala, Sweden.

Today, I take profound pride in witnessing the outstanding individuals the three of you have become—exemplary parents, devoted spouses, and all successful in your own right. The journey, marked by its challenges, most notably the heart-wrenching loss of Sherwan, has profoundly affected each of us. Yet, as Kamran cleverly observed in his youth, “We had one Sherwan, but now each of us carries our own Sherwan in our hearts, a timeless presence that transcends the years.”

Your upbringing stands as a testament to moral fortitude, dignity, and honorable values. We will always remember your mother’s unwavering dedication and sacrifices in raising such beautiful and balanced children.

I vividly recall the day that you, Shirin, met my mother, your paternal grandmother, during her visit to Sweden. It was then that your fascination with our Kurdish heritage was first kindled, sparking a barrage of questions. You wondered aloud, confused as to whether you were a Kurd, a Swede, or perhaps a blend of both worlds.

To all of you, I have offered the same guidance I gave that day: You are not apples to be cleaved in half, but unique souls with a fundamental right to your own identities. Strive, above all, to be people of virtue and kindness. Labels will find their place in due time. Be a noble Swede rather than a misguided Kurd, or vice versa.

Our conversations—with each of you at different moments—often turned to matters of faith. You asked whether religious identity was truly important. I encouraged you to become compassionate human beings first; affiliations with Christianity, Islam, or any other faith are secondary. The truth that has resonated with me throughout my life is this: the worth of a human being is not defined by the labels they adopt, but by the ethical and moral principles they uphold and the respect they show for their fellow beings.

You also asked, if that is the case, why I dedicate so much of my heart and soul to the Kurdish cause—why defend their rights over those of others? I answered then, and I answer now: because I belong to the Kurdish people. As long as they are denied their rightful place among the free nations of the world—relegated to second-class status in their own homeland, stripped of their language, culture, and history—it is my solemn duty to stand up for

them. They, too, deserve dignity, freedom, and the security to be who they are without being made to feel ashamed of their heritage.

I must admit, before my years in Turkey, I did not fully grasp the depth of my Kurdish identity. It was only through the injustices I witnessed and endured there that something within me awakened. Each act of silence, each moment of oppression, tempered my spirit and gave shape to my purpose—to seek the recognition and dignity long denied to our people.

As I now set out to write this memoir, I invite you—Shirin, Sherko, Sherwan, and Kamran—to walk beside me on this journey. Your questions draw me back to the memories and milestones that shaped my life, and perhaps, along the way, shed light on your own.

With heartfelt love,

Dad

Stockholm, January 30, 2026



Shirin, Sherko, and Kamran with their mother Ingegerd, spouses, and children enjoying the summer in Långvind

The Arrival

I entered this world on a spring day in Sidekan, a serene town nestled in the northern reaches of Southern Kurdistan, near the Turkish border. The date was April 4, 1940—a momentous day when the caretaker of our house rushed to the local police station, where my father, a police officer, was working. It was there that he received the news, “You are blessed with a son.”

Upon hearing this, my father briefly set aside his duties to go and congratulate and honor my mother, Zubaida. Yet, amid the celebration, a shadow of past sorrow lingered. It was a poignant reminder of the loss they had endured with their firstborn son, Mohammed, whose fleeting presence graced their lives only to depart at the tender age of three months.



Me at age 13



Me at age 15



My family and I in 1953. Back row, from left: Me, Najat, and my mother, Zubaida. Front row, from left: Ibtisam, Sabah, Hana, and Qadria

The responsibility of naming the newborn was entrusted to my mother, a decision that held much deeper significance than just choosing a name. While my father had first suggested calling me after his father, Mohammed, in remembrance of the lost child, my mother's influence ultimately shaped the final decision.

In the company of the supportive women who had stood by my mother through her early days of motherhood, the name Jamal emerged—meaning beauty in Arabic. True to the spirit of that name, and to protect me from envious or malevolent gazes, they kept me hidden for nearly three months. It was more than a tradition; it was an act of love—a quiet testament to the protective circle of care that surrounded my first months of life.

In that part of the world in those days, our family, like many others, did not celebrate birthdays in the Western sense.

Yet the very thought of birthdays takes my mind across continents—to China, a land I called home for seven and a half years, and one I continue to admire deeply. In some parts of China, birthdays are marked by a unique tradition. It begins by honoring the mother—the symbol of

sacrifice and resilience before shifting focus to the birthday child. This custom reflects a deep appreciation of the maternal joy that shapes life's journey. Therefore, even gift-giving commences by honoring the mother.

In keeping with this meaningful Chinese tradition, any praise given should be directed towards the enduring memory of my beloved mother Zubaida, who stands as a symbol of devotion and sacrifice, raising ten children, often through hardship and adversity.

A Life Across Borders: Navigating Love, Loss, and Homecoming

For a significant part of my life, I felt stretched between two worlds. My professional career flourished in the vibrant energy of London, while my family, my wife Ingegerd and our children—remained in Stockholm. I deeply desired to bring us all together under one roof, but Ingegerd cherished the serenity of the Swedish countryside and could never imagine herself in a bustling metropolis. This difference in vision kept us physically and emotionally apart.

Our lives took a devastating turn with the tragic loss of our beloved son Sherwan. His passing shook us to our core. Though we grieved together, the geographic distance persisted. My work commitments continued to anchor me to London, while the family carried on in Sweden.

Tensions escalated further when, after a long absence, my mother visited us in Sweden. During a later stay, she abruptly disappeared from our home. Ingegerd explained that she had sent her to my sister's, citing communication difficulties due to the language barrier.

I found this decision deeply painful and unacceptable, revealing the growing distance between our values. Eventually, with our children grown and our paths diverging, Ingegerd and I made the difficult but amicable decision to separate.

After our divorce, I focused entirely on the children's wellbeing and their academic future. Sherko and Kamran pursued higher education in the United States, while Shirin remained in Sweden to attend Uppsala University.

Sometime later, I found the warmth and companionship I had been missing in Nooshin, an Iranian colleague who worked as my secretary. We married and shared a brief period of happiness. Tragically, she was diagnosed with cancer and passed away in 1996, at the age of 36, just two

years into our marriage. Her loss left a profound void, and for many years, I had no intention of remarrying.

Then, in 2000, a turning point came. Erbil, my hometown, had finally been liberated after years of oppression. I returned for my first official visit, an emotional homecoming, which reconnected me with my roots.

During that visit, I met my cousin Bahrin and her daughter Sana for the first time in decades. We had first met in 1968, when she was only seven. Now, thirty-two years later, our paths crossed again under different circumstances.

Bahrin, the eldest of six children born to my aunt Shukriyya and her husband Rostem, was born on January 16, 1961, during my years of study in Turkey. After excelling academically, she entered Mosul Medical College in 1982 and graduated as a physician in 1988. She later opened her own clinic in Erbil, where she earned widespread admiration not only for her medical expertise but also for her compassion. Devoting one day each week to caring for less fortunate patients free of charge, she often even supplied them with medicine at her own expense. In 1985, she married my brother, Nadhmi, a respected and kind-hearted lawyer. Together, they welcomed their daughter, Sana, in May 1986.

But tragedy struck again. Nadhmi was killed in an Iranian airstrike on April 7, 1988. So Bahrin was left as a widow at a young age, left to raise their two-year-old daughter while continuing to serve the community as a physician. Bahrin chose not to remarry, later explaining, "I couldn't bear the thought of a stranger replacing Sana's father."

Earlier, my father suggested that I should consider marrying Bahrin. He admired her strength and saw in her a wise and capable partner. I hesitated, concerned about our age difference, her lack of experience abroad, and whether she could adjust to life in Europe. But upon reconnecting with her in Erbil, I was moved by her resilience and devotion to her daughter. After heartfelt discussions, we agreed to marry.

To My Darling Wife, Bahrin

Whenever I think of our marriage, I feel blessed beyond words. In the quieter autumn years of my life, after so much struggle and loss, I found not only comfort but also love and companionship in you.

I can still see you clearly in my memory as a little girl of seven, visiting me with your family in Haji Omran, the headquarters of the Kurdish revolution. Later, in 1970, after the peace treaty between the revolution and the government in Baghdad, I was finally able to come to Erbil.

From then on, I would hear about you often, how my cousin Bahrin was thriving in school, how you became a doctor, and how you married my brother, Nadhmi. Then came that dark day in London when I received the heartbreaking news: Nadhmi had been killed by an Iranian plane in Erbil, leaving you alone with baby Sana, only two years old.

I, too, carried my share of sorrow. I lost my beloved wife, Nooshin, to an aggressive cancer after just two years of marriage. She was only 36. That loss cut deeply, and I promised myself I would never marry again. Instead, I poured myself into work, moving to China in search of distraction and a different life.

When my father later settled in Sweden, he worried about me living alone, carrying my burdens in silence. He spoke of you, and I was reminded of the strength and devotion you showed as a mother. You chose not to remarry, so that Sana would never have to accept a stranger in her father's place.

Still, I hesitated, our age difference, your ability to adapt to Sweden, so many questions weighed upon me.

But then I returned to Kurdistan, invited back by the leadership. It was there that I truly saw your strength, your warmth, your character. And in that moment, I asked for your hand. To my joy and gratitude, you said yes, despite all the reasons to hesitate.

You and Sana soon joined me in Sweden, and I will never forget how quickly you made a new life for yourself. You embraced everything with courage, learning the language, earning your Swedish driver's license, and even mastering medical Swedish so you could continue your career. You worked tirelessly, and through your determination, you rose to become a consultant at Södersjukhuset hospital.

Sana adjusted just as gracefully. She completed high school, studied pharmacy at Uppsala University, and began working for a pharmaceutical manufacturing company in Stockholm. She later married Riyadh, a fellow Kurd from Kirkuk. Together, they have two children, Milan and Helin, whose weekend visits fill our home with joy.



Enjoying a holiday in Japan, 2016

Now, over 25 years later, as a married couple, we have found love, warmth, happiness, and tranquility. You, Bahrin, are loved by everyone around you, especially my children. Truly, I count myself lucky every day to walk this journey with you.



Bahrin



Bahrin with grandson Milan training football 2025



My mother, Zubaida, with my sister Ibtisam while visiting Sweden

My Mother

My mother (1925-2003) possessed a calm and gentle nature, a trait she inherited from her father Haji Aswad. Many have said that I take after her in that respect. Her warmth and steady optimism brought harmony to our home, serving as a striking counterpoint to my father's fiery temperament, which melted away the moment she smiled.

Married to my father at just fifteen, she had a remarkable gift for gently persuading him to grant the children's wishes. I can still picture her soft laughter easing his anger, a sound that always seemed to melt the tension in the room.

With no formal education, my mother was an exceptional homemaker. She raised ten children with remarkable skill, adeptly navigating my father's moods and graciously hosting a constant stream of guests. Her many talents spoke for themselves.

In the early days of their marriage, my father, a striking figure, often drew admiring glances, especially when wearing a police uniform. He once shared an anecdote of framing pictures of Hollywood actresses to

hang on their bedroom wall, only to find them defaced by my mother in a fit of jealousy, something my father took as a compliment and seemed to find amusing. Despite my father's attempt to project a macho façade, he held a deep respect for my mother, evident in how he treated her.

My grandmother, Ghurbet, did not think much of my mother, convinced that her son should have married someone more suitable, as many mothers believed in those days. Undeterred by Ghurbet's disapproval, my mother remained committed. Efforts by Ghurbet and sometimes my Aunt Dursun to find a new wife for my father were firmly rejected by him.

My mother was an unassuming person. While I was studying in Turkey, she found comfort in frequent visits to a local religious figure, Sayyed Jasim, inquiring about my wellbeing and progress abroad. His reassuring words brought her solace, though they came with a price.

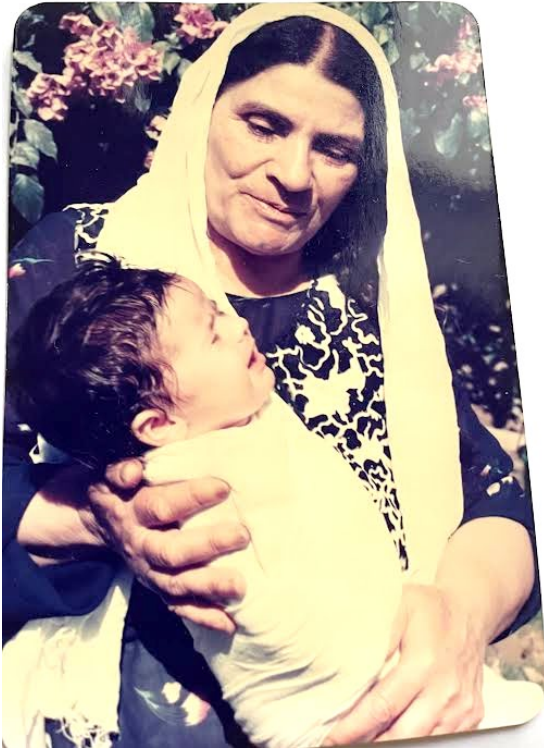
A Different Sign of Respect

In our family, significant habits were woven into the fabric of everyday life, laden with layers of respect and consideration. Smoking, for example, was not just a casual act; it carried significant weight as a symbol of certain values. A family code of conduct dictated that children, even grown-ups, refrain from smoking or drinking alcohol in the presence of their father. The same custom was observed by younger boys in the presence of their teachers or elders, a reflection of the deep respect for authority.

My mother embodied this respect for my father, even as she quietly indulged in one or two cigarettes a day. She took great care to hide this habit in his presence, though not always successfully. My father, in turn, graciously pretended not to notice, choosing to overlook what he surely knew—an unspoken understanding that quietly preserved harmony in our home.



With my mother, when she visited me in Sweden



My mother holding her newborn granddaughter Sana in 1986

This allowed her to partake secretly in her vice, though the lingering scent of smoke could never be entirely concealed.

This silent accord sustained the equilibrium of their relationship for decades. Although my father never smoked himself, he granted my mother's habit the same quiet respect, revealing the intricate dynamics that defined their enduring bond.

Death of a Son and Brother

As mentioned before, in a tragic turn of events, my brother Nadhmi, a distinguished lawyer in Erbil, lost his life in an Iranian airstrike during the Iran-Iraq war in 1988. Overcome with the profound grief that enveloped our family, my mother struggled with thoughts of suicide. Yet her deep longing to see me again became a powerful deterrent, preventing her from taking such a devastating step.

In 1997, my mother made the poignant decision to relocate to Sweden, hoping to establish a permanent home. She quickly grew fond of the country and often wore her Kurdish attire with pride, drawing admiring glances on our shopping trips. Later, my father joined her in Sweden, where he also found happiness, and they both developed a high appreciation for the Swedish way of life.



Sherko and Kamran with their grandparents

They both departed from this world while living in Sweden. My father was laid to rest in Upplands Väsby, situated in the suburbs of Stockholm, while my mother was returned to Erbil for burial. Their separate resting places echo the diverse paths of their life journeys.

My Mother's Faith

An Arabic proverb says: "The prayers of a Kurd are not worship, but habits." This stems from the fact that most Kurds do not understand the Qur'an, which is in Arabic, except those who learn the language in school.

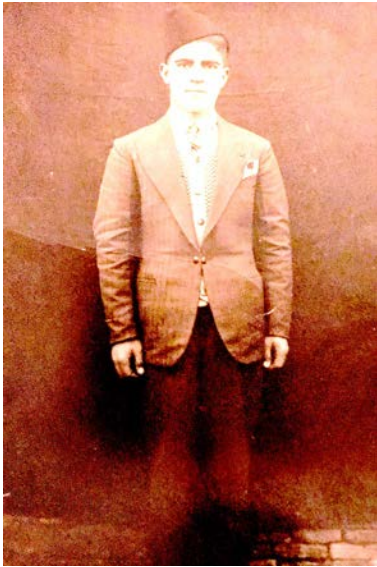
On one occasion, my mother accompanied me to a wedding at a church in Uppsala. The rituals and melodic voices of the young choir moved her deeply. As we left the church, she confided in me about her wavering faith and the questions she carried about certain contradictions in our own religion. She also expressed admiration for the kindness and sincerity of the Swedish people, despite the way they were often labeled as infidels within our Muslim community. I reassured her that her reflections were genuine and that God would indeed understand her thoughts.

My Father

My father was called Shakir Muhammad Mustafa. He was born in Erbil in 1914 and passed away in Sweden in 2001.

The seeds of his remarkable journey were sown in his humble childhood. His father, my grandfather, Haji Muhammad, was a hardworking man from Akre who sought fortune in Erbil as a young man. With staunch determination, he toiled as a laborer in a wool workshop, mastering the craft and eventually establishing his own modest workshop.

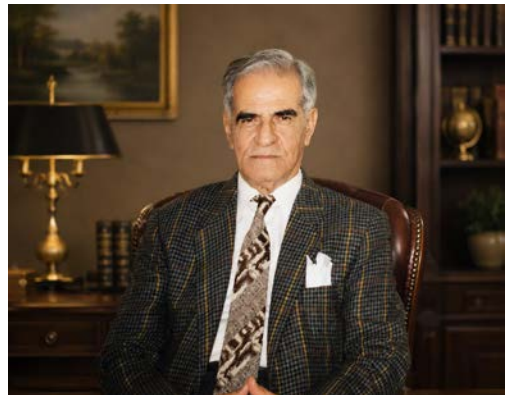
My grandfather's path crossed with a woman from Erbil, Ghurbet Mela Mawlood, whom he married in 1906. Their union was blessed with five sons and one daughter, Dursun. However, life took a tragic turn. Four of their sons passed away, leaving only my father and his sister, who were left to endure the trials of existence.



My father at different stages of his career.
Left: as a student in intermediate school, 1932
Right: 1962 and 1967 as a police officer



My father in uniform



My father in his final years in Sweden

Regrettably, my father's dreams of pursuing an education were constrained by his own father's financial circumstances, and he was expected to assist in the family workshop, seemingly destined for a life of labor. However, hope

emerged when a compassionate schoolteacher saw potential in young Shakir and urged my grandmother to envision a better future for her son. She secretly enrolled him in school, giving him the chance to learn beyond the confines of his father's workshop.

Defying the constraints of circumstance, my father pursued his studies while working. He also took on responsibilities as a bookkeeper in a number of shops in Erbil to support the family.

After completing his intermediate studies, he chose a path of law and order, the Police High School. Three years later, he emerged as a determined and principled police officer.

My father's journey took a new turn when he sought my mother's hand from Haji Aswad Mullah Mawlood (Ghurbet's half-brother). He then took up his first post as a police officer in Sidekan, where he and my mother began a life together, one filled with sacrifice and steadfast devotion.

I was the eldest of nine siblings—four brothers and five sisters:

Jamal, born 1940; Qadria (1943–2024); Hana, born 1946; Sabah (1948–2002); Ibtisam, born 1951; Najat, born 1954; Nadhmi (1956–1988); Payman, born 1958; Serbagh, born 1960; and Serbaz, born 1964.

Ignorance is a Blessing!

As early as the final years of primary school, a deep-seated passion for literature began to cast its enchanting spell on me. The world of the Arabic language, along with translations from other languages—novels, poetry, and prose, beckoned me with an irresistible allure.

My father gave me a modest allowance, which I carefully saved to buy one or two books a week.

Over time, our home gradually evolved into a cherished haven, a miniature library that welcomed friends seeking solace in reading or, on occasion, borrowing books. In my little library, you could find collections of works by Khalil Gibran and Mustafa Al Manfalooti, Taha Hussein, Anatole France, Balzac, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Charles Dickens. I also had many translations of Tolstoy, Maxim Gorky, Dante, Voltaire, and series like the *Reader's Digest*, *Kitabi* by Hilmi Murad, and various other publications.

Yet some memories have a way of staying with us—vivid, enduring, and impossible to forget. One fateful day, as I returned home, the smell of burning paper filled the air. Stepping into the garden, I was met with a devastating sight: my beloved books, ravaged by relentless flames.

With tears welling up in my eyes, I rushed to save what I could and confronted my father, desperate for an explanation for this heartbreaking act. His eyes were heavy with regret as he spoke of a friend who had genuine concerns about my love of books, fearing it might lead me down a dangerous path, a labyrinth of risky political ideologies that would eventually land me in prison.

Despite the pain and loss, that moment marked a turning point in my literary journey. It was a testament to the profound power of literature, its ability to stir hearts and minds, even to the point of fear and misunderstanding. From that day onwards, I vowed to navigate the world of literature with greater wisdom and discernment, guided by the light of knowledge rather than the darkness of fear and ignorance.

Aunty Dursun

Aunty Dursun was my father's sole surviving sibling, a woman who had triumphed over the hardships of her era and the passing of time. Older than my father, she commanded his deepest respect and affection, a bond rooted in admiration and love.

She was an extraordinary person, with a distinguished character that deeply endeared her to the family, especially to her brother. As a young widow, having lost her husband, Noori Talib Qassab, too soon, she took on the formidable challenge of raising their seven children, six sons and one daughter single-handedly. She dedicated herself to educating three of her sons: Abdurrahman, Dhia'uddin, and Sherzad, while Abdul Wahid, Khaireddin, and Sadiq followed in their father's footsteps, becoming butchers.



Aunty Dursun (1909-1969)



Abdul Wahid Qassab, Dursun's oldest son



Sherzad Qassab, Dursun's youngest son

Aunty Dursun supported the family by sewing clothes for her neighbors. She continued until her youngest son, Sherzad, graduated as a police officer, following in his uncle Shakir's footsteps. Once all her children were settled with their own families, she retired and lived independently. Though she welcomed visits from her children, her sole interactions beyond this immediate family circle were reserved for visiting our home.

Aunty Shukria

My beloved Aunty Shukria—my mother's younger sister and also my mother-in-law—was born in 1935 and left this world in 2025. Yet, according to her official birth certificate, she was born in 1933. The truth behind that small discrepancy tells a story of family resilience and loss.

Her older sister, also named Shukria, had died at the tender age of two. To spare themselves the hardship of obtaining a new birth certificate, the family gave the same name to the next daughter born—my aunt—and kept the old document. From then on, she carried not only her own life but the echo of another.



Aunty Shukria (1936-2026)

From her earliest days, Shukria shone with intelligence and a quiet strength that drew people to her. Though her parents did not allow her to attend school, her hunger for knowledge could not be contained. She taught herself to read and write, secretly studying whatever books and papers she could find. As a teenager, she became the heart of the household—a devoted daughter, a helper, and a source of calm in every storm.

In time, she married Rostem Samin, a man of traditional ways. Together, they had six children: Bahrin, Sawza, Namam, Shler, Simko and Dilshad. Rostem believed education was unnecessary—that daughters should remain at home, destined to become wives and mothers, and that sons should learn a trade to support the family.

But Shukria's vision stretched far beyond those walls. She wanted more for her children—not just comfort, but opportunity. Defying her husband's wishes and the heavy constraints of circumstance, she quietly began to earn money by sewing clothes for neighbors. Night after night, she worked by lamplight, her hands moving tirelessly over fabric, her heart full of hope that her children would one day live the life she had been denied.

Her faith was not in vain. All six children succeeded—a testament to her will.

- Bahrin became a respected physician.
- Namam and Sawza became teachers.
- Shler trained as a nurse.
- Simko rose to become a judge.
- And Dilshad became an electrical engineer.

Rostem passed away before seeing most of their successes; he lived only long enough to witness Bahrin's graduation. Yet Shukria never faltered. With every challenge, she stood taller, driven by the dream of seeing her children established, educated, and at peace.

When I began writing these memories, she was still with us. I visited her just two days before she died. She looked at me with a gentle smile and said she knew her time was near. "I am ready," she whispered. "My children are happy. My grandchildren surround me. I do not want to be a burden to them any longer."

Her words pierced my heart. I took her hand and told her, "You have given everything for your children. Whatever they do for you now could never repay even a tenth of what you have done for them."

Two days later, she was gone—leaving behind not sorrow alone, but a legacy of love, strength, and quiet heroism.

May God bless her soul and grant her the eternal peace she so deeply earned.

My Maternal Grandfather, Haji Aswed

My maternal grandfather, Haji Aswad, was the pillar of our family. I vividly remember my father turning to him for guidance on nearly every challenge he faced. Though Haji Aswad lacked formal education, life itself was his most excellent teacher. Despite his humble origins, he carried himself with quiet dignity and wisdom.

Aswad, meaning "black" in Arabic, was an ironic epithet given his fair complexion and hair. This paradoxical name was believed to ward off the evil eye—a superstition of the times. His real name was Osman.

I was his preferred companion, often translating verses from the Qur'an and the Hadiths of the Prophet Muhammad for him. We frequently attended evening gatherings at the nearby mosque, where discussions spanned a range of topics, including religious, ethical, and social matters. My grandfather embodied a true and benevolent faith, marked by a deep commitment to justice, compassion for the less fortunate, and the moral values he held dear. Financially, he fared better than his peers, who held him in great esteem. Haji Aswad was happily married to my grandmother, Jawaher.



Left: My maternal Grandfather Haji Aswad (1901-1968), and his son Haji Hamid Chakmakchi (1933-2021)

But their fortunes changed when he fell in love with a widow named Zubaida, who had been married to Khidir, his brother-in-law. The two families lived in the same house, though in separate quarters. After Khidir's death, Zubaida and her two young children continued to live with Haji Aswad's family.

Zubaida carried herself with a beauty that transcended age. She awakened deep feelings in Haji Aswad, feelings he struggled to reconcile with his conscience, given that she was a relative of his wife and that he was already married with children.

Haji Aswad kept his inner turmoil quiet for some time before it began taking a toll on his wellbeing. In the end, he confided in his daughter—my mother—confessing through tears the feelings he knew were wrong.

As my grandfather's health declined, my grandmother, Jawaher, faced the painful truth that the only way to restore his peace of mind was for him to marry Zubaida. With remarkable grace, Jawaher approached Zubaida and gave her blessing for the marriage. In accordance with Haji Aswad's faith, such a union could not happen without Jawaher's consent.

It was not easy for Jawaher to seek separation as she and her children depended on Haji Aswad for financial support. Haji Aswad believed he could maintain fairness and balance between his two families. After marrying Zubaida, he provided a new home for Jawaher and her children in Tayrawa, north of Erbil. Zubaida and her children remained in the old house in the Arab district, south of the city. His workshop was located in the city center.

In his effort to be just, he carefully ensured that both households received equal provisions—even the children's clothing was chosen in matching colors. He alternated his nights between the two homes, always welcomed with a warm meal. As a teenager, I often accompanied him between these households, quietly appreciating the culinary variety.

In this arrangement, Haji Aswad found a measure of contentment, though his first wife carried the pain of sharing his affection. Despite the underlying tension, he continued to visit both families, doing his best to maintain harmony between them.

As his favorite grandson, I often commented playfully on his unconventional lifestyle. During one joint visit from both wives, I teasingly asked which of them he loved the most. Smiling, he replied that he loved them both the same. Later, I put the question differently, "If you were in a boat that was sinking with both your wives, and only you could swim, which one would you save first?"

Tactfully, he answered that he would save them both at once. But when I persisted, he gently turned to grandmother Jawaher and said, "You can swim a little, can't you?"

It took me a while to calm my grandmother afterward, assuring her over and over that it was all said in jest.

Moving Around

Baghdad

The nature of my father's profession led us on a nomadic odyssey, moving from one place to another.



An image of Baghdad in the 1940s



A horse-pulled carriage on rails in Baghdad in the 1940s

The first journey I remember began in 1944, in the early days of the Second World War. My father was called away from the tranquil confines of Sidekan, where I was born, to the bustling headquarters of the Mobile Forces in Baghdad.

My memories of this time are seen through the rose-tinted glasses of childhood, going back to when I was four years old. During these early years, I took my first steps in education at a religious school, much like a modern-day kindergarten.

Our tutor was a devout Mullah, whose teaching philosophy leaned heavily on discipline and corrective measures. With great solemnity, he wielded the cane, endeavoring to shape us children between the ages of four and six into paragons of obedience.

Our humble abode in Baghdad, built from sturdy bricks, was nestled in a neighborhood primarily inhabited by Shiite Arab households. Here, my family stood out as the sole Kurdish presence. Yet, amidst these cultural differences, an unexpected bond formed with a Christian family from Mosul. Our lives seemed to be intertwined, the shared experiences of our households creating a camaraderie that transcended societal boundaries.

We lived in an area known as Gahwet Shukur, a testament to the legacy of Shukur, who took refuge in the area. He eventually established a Coffee House, which wove its own tales into this historic area, situated on the eastern (the Resafa) side of the Tigris river, between Bab El-Sheikh and the Sinek district.

Two vivid memories of Baghdad stand out in my mind. First, the enigmatic trams gliding gracefully by on rails, drawn by sturdy steeds. Second, the rickety marvel of a bridge, made of hollow floating barrels, ingeniously linked together to form a crossing for everyday traffic. This bridge spanned the Tigris River, connecting the Al Adhamia and Al Kadhimia districts. The crossing often echoed with a cacophony of fearful shouts and fervent prayers, an enduring memory of those times.



The bridge was built on barrels connecting the Al Adhamia and Al Kadhimia districts

My mother often took me along on her visits to the revered shrines of Imam Musa al-Kadhim in Al Kadhimia, a significant figure in the Shia tradition, and Sheikh Abdul Qader al-Ghailani, an esteemed Sunni spiritual leader.

Her perspective reflected a vision of unity within the Muslim community. She regarded both as sanctuaries of a shared faith, in contrast to the wider Arab public, who often view them as adversaries. This division within the Muslim community has sown seeds of discord, leading to deep hostilities with lasting consequences.

Qara Tepe

Following the winding path that led my father away from the heart of Baghdad, we found ourselves in Qara Tepe, a sub-district south of Kirkuk.

Qara Tepe was home to a diverse community, which included Shiite Turkmens, known for their fervent Husainiye ceremonies, marked by intense displays of devotion. These rituals often involved striking themselves with chains and swords, symbolizing their deep sorrow and regret for the tragic fate that befell Imam Hussein, the grandson of the Prophet Mohammed, and his family, nearly 1,400 years ago. They were martyred by the army of Caliph Yezid bin Mu'awiya.



A Husainiye ceremony, at which Shiite Muslims hit themselves to express sorrow and regret for betraying Imam Hussein 1400 years ago

Tuz Khurmatu-First Days at School

In 1946, we were on the move again, this time to Tuz Khurmatu, a sub-district situated between Baghdad and Kirkuk. It was in Tuz Khurmatu that I embarked on the first chapter of my educational journey.

Though my mother never sat at a school desk herself, she became my first teacher, helping me with my homework.

As a child, I found myself drawn to my left hand when I began writing, a tendency that did not sit well with my father. A man of steadfast conviction, he was determined to realign my pen with my right hand.

From this interplay between my two hands came a quiet ease with both—an unexpected ambidexterity that allowed me to write comfortably with either hand, each stroke of the pen reflecting a sense of balance I had come to value.

Hewler (Erbil)

After four difficult years in Tuz Khurmatu, the passage of time led us back to Erbil. With more than 7,000 years of history, Erbil is believed to be the world's oldest continuously inhabited city.



Erbil in the fifties



Erbil Citadel



Aerial view of Erbil Citadel

In 1950, I entered the classrooms of Al-Thaniya Primary School, where my educational journey in Arabic continued. This was different from those who attended the Al Oula Primary School, where Kurdish was the language of instruction. This experience later brought its own challenges for them when it came to pursuing a higher education.

My primary school days in Erbil were a treasure trove of memories, each one more precious than the last. I stood tall among my classmates, guided by kind and caring teachers who shaped my journey. Not all teachers were of

such stature, however. Among them was Jihad Efendi, a harsh and unkind figure. His stick, a tool of cruelty, inflicted undeserved pain on our tender palms—a chilling display of his dominion over us. His formidable reputation instilled fear, and his arbitrary punishment revealed a lack of empathy.



My teachers in front of Al Thaniya Primary School in Erbil, 1950. Far left; Sheikh Hussein Barzanji. Far right: Haider Othman

Curiously, Jihad Efendi seemed intent on unraveling our dreams, probing the depths of our aspirations. The desire to become a teacher sparked only his mild disapproval, while ambitions of a different nature earned his harsh wrath. I recall Abdul Wahid, a quiet and reserved figure who had managed to evade Jihad Efendi's attention and stick, until one unfortunate day, he uttered his ambition to become a governor (*mutasarraf*). This revelation ignited Jihad Efendi's fury, swiftly expressed through the sting of his stick.

Each morning, the schoolyard came alive with verses and songs, blending into a harmonious rhythm. Our voices soared with enthusiasm in praise of the king and the flag that fluttered with gusto. The school's director, Naji Efendi, a man of Jewish descent, commanded respect with his air of wisdom and authority. Alongside him was Zeki Barokh, another luminary of Jewish heritage. And then there was Haidar Othman, a beacon of inspiration, who connected us with sports, the arts, and the

rhythms of our Kurdish soul. His lessons in patriotic songs carried a sense of defiance against the prevailing order.

Looking back, faces of old schoolmates emerge from the mist of time: Franso Hariri, who would one day stride onto the stage of Kurdish leadership; Haidar Mousa, Fakhreddin (Mandoob) Merdan, and Enwer Merdan, all leaving indelible footprints on our journey. Tariq Sayyid Hassan and his brother Farouk, Nawzad Ahmed Othman—these names are etched in my memory, like faded ink on the pages of a cherished diary. Recently, I attempted to revisit my old school. Alas, time had not been kind, and the once-proud edifice had succumbed to neglect and decay. This sanctuary of friendship and learning now lies buried beneath the debris of forgotten yesteryears, a mere echo in the tapestry of bygone eras of wonder and exploration.



Me, second from left, with classmates at the Al Gharbiyya Intermediate School, Kirkuk 1952

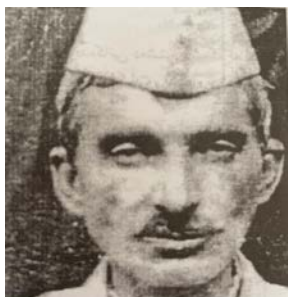
In 1953, having passed the junior baccalaureate exam, I was granted entrance to intermediate school. It was known as Al Mulhaq, which means “The Annex,” and was located outside the confines of the main secondary school building. It was here that I stood on the threshold of a new experience, thanks to a teacher of Arab descent. This kind and wise instructor not only imparted more of the treasures of the Arabic language and history, but also opened my eyes to a world beyond Erbil, one of broader perspectives.

I cannot leave the subject of Erbil without mentioning the Erbil Citadel—a remarkable urban settlement built atop an ancient archaeological mound. It stands as the product of thousands of years of continuous habitation, with layers of diverse civilizations accumulating over time. The traces of this long history remain visible today, bearing testimony to a cultural continuity that has vanished elsewhere.

During my tenure with the British conglomerate Costain International, we proposed a renovation scheme to develop the citadel while preserving its historical aspects.

The Postman Who Brought Me the World

Following the tragic loss of my books, and in the quaint and unassuming backdrop of Erbil, my imagination became my guide to carrying me beyond the confines of our small city. Within this simple world, I discovered an extraordinary passion—writing to pen pals in distant corners of the globe. I found solace in the exchange of letters, each a gateway to a new culture. The anticipation of receiving letters from faraway lands and the enchanting realm of Europe became an integral part of my daily life. These exchanges, woven through pen and paper, breathed life into my English language skills, propelling me to the top of my class.



Karim Efendi, Erbil's first postman—on foot

A remarkable and tireless figure, Karim Efendi was the embodiment of Erbil's postal service. Despite his failing eyesight, he diligently navigated the city's labyrinthine streets and narrow alleyways on foot, searching for recipients and carrying a precious cargo of letters dispatched from other cities in Iraq.

Many envelopes lacked proper addresses, so he would roam the streets, teahouses, shops, and offices in search of the addressees. At times, he would not hand over the letter until he received a few coins, especially if he suspected that it carried good news or a message from a loved one.

A unique bond formed between Karim Efendi and me. I had become familiar with the exact moment the postbag would arrive from Baghdad, and often joined him in this daily ritual. Sitting on the floor beside him, I eagerly helped him sort the new batch of mail. This act of camaraderie

stemmed from the fact that a significant portion of these incoming parcels belonged to me—a treasure trove of cherished letters and beautifully illustrated magazines.

Many years later, I heard that Karim Efendi had passed away. His son, Jamal, replaced him and improved the system by delivering the mail around the city by bicycle.

Duhok

The spring of 1953 remains a defining moment in my memory. Our class received a special invitation thanks to the efforts of an inspirational soul—our Arabic language and history teacher. We were invited to visit the Duhok Intermediate School, a groundbreaking experience for both our class and our hosts.

The journey from Erbil to Duhok took nearly a full day by bus, over winding, uneven roads that threaded through villages and mountains. It was dusty, slow, and unforgettable—our first real glimpse beyond the world we knew.

Duhok, with its rugged mountains and meandering streams, embraced us with breathtaking beauty. Among its many charms, one sight stood out: a sanctuary for the Royal Birds. Enclosed under a vast, transparent net, the majestic creatures belonged to the King of Iraq, who reportedly visited the site a couple of times a year.

Our time in Duhok was filled with camaraderie and immersion in the local way of life. We arrived in the evening and were welcomed into the school, cocooned in blankets and cushions lovingly provided by our new friends. The aroma of homemade delicacies drifted through the air—exotic to us, an alluring contrast to the familiar flavors of Erbil.

The night unfolded with songs, a feast celebrating both culture and friendship, and speeches that stirred the soul. Jokes and laughter echoed long into the night, a reflection of shared excitement, discovery, and pure youthful joy.



Duhok City, 2005

The bonds we had forged would forever bind us across the miles. On the bus back to Erbil, we sang as one, our voices carrying the joy of everything we had just experienced. And so it was, even as the world around us shifted, the melodies of our friendship remained steadfast.



Classmates from Al Mulhaqiyya Intermediate School during a trip to Duhok, 1953
I am at the far bottom left

In the years that followed, some of us kept our friendship alive, nurturing the enduring connections that had been kindled during those magical days in Duhok.

Kirkuk

At the age of 14, destiny turned the page to a new chapter in my life. My father's duties called us to Kirkuk, a city enriched by the presence of the British Petroleum Company (BP) and a dynamic British community. To me, Kirkuk was a canvas splashed with vibrant colors; stepping into its streets was like stepping into the very heart of Europe.

The city of Kirkuk is the symbolic capital of Iraqi Kurdistan. It is home to almost all of Iraq's ethnic and religious groups, including Kurds, Turkmen, Arabs, and Assyrians. Located on the Khasa Su river, Kirkuk is quite an affluent city and is built around a citadel. Kirkuk offered a high quality of life compared to Hewler. I enrolled at Al-Gharbiyya Intermediate School, an institution led by director Musa Samad, who was a fellow native from Erbil and an acquaintance of my father. Most of the teachers were of Kurdish descent, creating a familiar setting. Two tranquil years passed before the impending challenge of the secondary school baccalaureate exam. Despite the many moves we had made, I succeeded with commendable scores.

Upon transitioning to Kerkuk High School, I met many kindred spirits and made Kurdish friends, among them the enlightened Ali Askari. Under his tutelage, I embarked on a journey of self-discovery, unraveling the essence of being a Kurd and understanding the weight of our collective responsibility towards the liberation of our people and land. I attended gatherings with him, absorbing the wealth of knowledge he imparted, bringing Kurdish history, culture, literature, and patriotism to life.

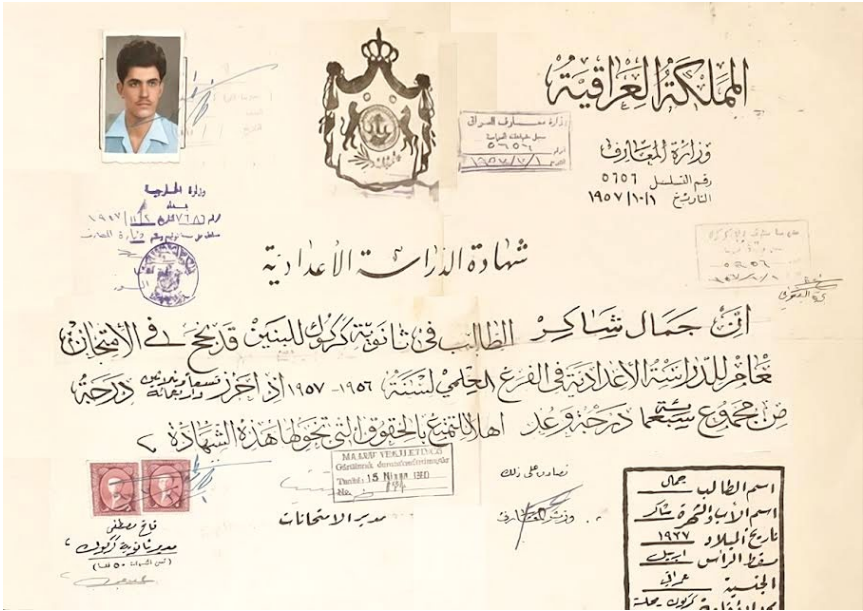
As the son of a police chief in Kirkuk, an unexpected blessing graced my path. Whenever we set out to take to the streets for demonstrations, my father's prior knowledge of our plans allowed me to inform my friends and adjust our plans at the last minute, ensuring our safety from police intervention.

The atmosphere at school had changed profoundly. It quickly became clear that the student body was divided along national lines. Foremost among these groups were the Turkmen, galvanized by financial and moral support from the Turkish embassy in Baghdad. Their emblematic

display of Turkish flags and images of Atatürk adorned their attire. However, beneath their camaraderie, an animosity towards the Kurdish students often simmered.



Teachers and classmates in Kirkuk Secondary School.
Fatih Efendi, standing second from right



Secondary school baccalaureate diploma

Immersed within the Kurdish group, I naturally became an advocate for our cause, bolstered by my ability to converse in the Turkmen dialect. This skill proved instrumental in navigating many early disputes. Tensions sometimes boiled over into verbal clashes, leading to us being summoned before the school director, Fatih Efendi, who would impose penalties as he saw fit. While competent as an administrator, Fatih Efendi, a Turkman himself, often displayed bias in favor of the Turkmen in his rulings.

The situation took a sharp turn one day, when in a moment of frustration, Fatih Efendi began hurling insults at Ali Askari, the leader of our group. Driven to a breaking point, Ali struck Fatih Efendi, causing him to tumble to the ground. This quarrel led to Ali's expulsion from the school.

From Military to Architecture

After passing my baccalaureate exams in 1957, I received an unexpected proposal from my friend Ali Askeri, on behalf of the KDP leadership. They urged me to apply to the military college in Baghdad, envisioning my role as a well-prepared military personnel member serving Kurdistan. Despite my father's initial reservations, my determination to follow this path ultimately won his approval.

I successfully passed all the required assessments and had the honor of being selected for the prestigious Pioneers unit, where we received advanced training and served as role models for our fellow students to follow our example. Among my classmates was Prince Hassan Bin Talal, the brother of King Hussein of Jordan.

While the experience was exhilarating, I grew increasingly discontent with the harsh treatment from the instructors and the limited opportunities for personal development.

During my second weekend in Baghdad, I stumbled upon an opportunity to join a classmate, Enwer Abdullah, as he prepared for the entrance exams to the Middle East Technical University in Ankara. Reluctant to go alone, Enwer persuaded me to accompany him to the Turkish embassy, where we both successfully registered for the exams. This spontaneous decision marked a turning point in my life, steering me away from the military college and towards a new educational path.

At the Turkish Embassy

The examinations were held at the Turkish embassy in Baghdad and the schedule was demanding: four examinations in a single day. Physics and English were conducted in the morning, followed by chemistry and mathematics in the afternoon, all held in English. The examination hall buzzed with anticipation as eighty-four eager candidates prepared to compete for four coveted spots. The applicants chatted away fluently in English—a clear reminder of the stiff competition ahead. The following day, I left Baghdad to resume my studies at the military college.

Upon returning to my hotel the following Friday afternoon, I was met with unexpected news. Enwer eagerly informed me, “You made it! You placed second among the four who passed the exams!” Initially, I thought he was joking, but his insistence that we rush to the embassy to collect my certificate from the Turkish ambassador dispelled any doubts. I asked about his results. “Regrettably, I didn’t make it,” he said.

At the embassy, a list displayed the names of the successful students, and my name was posted as second. When I came face-to-face with the ambassador, wearing my military uniform, I could see he was impressed. With a nod of approval, he remarked, “It’s truly a pleasure to meet such a bright and capable soldier.”

I called my father to share the good news. We agreed that I should resign from the military college and return to Erbil to prepare the necessary documents for my journey to Turkey. However, the resignation process proved to be more challenging than I had anticipated. When I informed our chief officer of my decision, he gave me a week to reconsider.

Undeterred, I clarified that I had been accepted into the Technical University. Despite my explanation, Captain Abulrazzak launched into a passionate speech on patriotism, extolling the virtues of military service and insisting that a soldier's duty was to die for his country on the battlefield, not in bed.

My determination remained firm. With no other option, I sought an audience with the highest authority in the college, General Abdul Latif Al Darraji. When I met him, I presented my resignation, along with the certificate given to me by the Turkish ambassador.

To my surprise, the general asked me to sit down and expressed his understanding of my decision, calling it a wise choice for a brighter future. However, he noted that his support was contingent on the authenticity of the certificate I had presented. After inspecting it, he instructed Captain Abulrazzak to initiate the resignation process at once.

Reluctantly, the captain complied with the general's orders, though not without imposing a penalty; I was charged for the cost of my meals during my time at the college. Without waiting for the resignation to be finalized, I left for Erbil, where I found that my father had already prepared most of the necessary documents for my journey to Turkey. An exciting new chapter in my life was about to begin.

My First Trip Abroad

My journey began in Mosul, where I boarded a train that would transport me to an unfamiliar world. This marked my first venture beyond the borders of Iraq, an experience filled with anticipation. This was the first step towards realizing a once-distant dream.

On this journey, I was soon confronted with a disturbing aspect of Turkish society—their prejudice directed towards certain nationalities. I shared my train compartment with an Iraqi Armenian student en route to Europe via Turkey. He planned to change trains in Istanbul to continue his journey to Germany. Upon entering Turkish territory, the customs officer insisted on inspecting our belongings. The officer's attitude

became confrontational when he examined the Armenian student's passport. In a rather aggressive tone, he asked, "Are you Armenian?" The young man calmly replied, "Yes, but I am an Iraqi citizen, as evident from my passport." Undeterred, the officer's hostility escalated as he snapped, "I don't care about your passport; you're Armenian. You shouldn't be entering Turkey." The Armenian student calmly explained that he was only passing through Turkey in transit, which the officer grudgingly accepted—though not without a stern warning. He proceeded to scrutinize the young man's luggage, seizing most of his precious gifts and valuables, leaving his bag almost empty.

Throughout this trip, I could not help but reflect on the complexities of human interaction and the prejudices that often cloud our perceptions. Yet, undeterred, we pressed on, eager to embrace the opportunities ahead and determined to overcome any obstacles that lay in our path on this remarkable journey.

I recall how my first day at school was marked by the amusement of fellow students who could not help but notice my closely shaven head, a vestige of my brief time at the military college in Baghdad. I became the target of playful jokes, with questions like, "When did you escape from jail?" and "Why aren't you on the battlefield?"

In the summer of 1962, on my way back to Ankara from Hewler after my summer vacation, I had an intriguing encounter set against the political aftermath of the United Arab Republic—the short-lived union between Egypt and Syria. This union was met with strong opposition from General Abdul Karim Qasim, the prime minister of Iraq, and a central figure in the country's political landscape at the time.

As the train crossed into Syrian territory, a Syrian security officer named Abu Fawwaz boarded and began fervently chanting slogans against General Qasim, branding him a traitor and a communist. He then turned his attention to the students on the train, entering their compartments to engage them in conversation. When he reached me, he inquired whether I identified as an Arab or a Kurd. I responded, "As a Kurd." He assumed, "Then you must support Qasim." I asserted however that I was just a student and was unconcerned with politics.

Unsatisfied, Abu Fawwaz persisted, asking me to join in denouncing Qasim as a traitor. I stood my ground and refused to undermine my country's

leader. Enraged, he confiscated my passport and told me that I would be forced to disembark in Aleppo, barred from continuing to Turkey unless I complied and condemned Qasim. My resolve remained unshaken.

Upon arriving in Aleppo, I was detained, and my bags were held at the train station. The train continued on its way without me. I was subjected to an extensive interrogation that lasted well into the night by another security officer. In the end, he decided to release me, returned my passport, and permitted me to board the next train to continue my journey to Turkey.

Ankara

Middle East Technical University

During my time at the Middle East Technical University, I made several Kurdish friends from Iraq, including Dr. Anwar Dizayee, Dr. Gulzar Rashid Jawdet, Abdul Baqi Dabbagh, Dr. Adnan Asaadi, and others. I also formed friendships with Turks and was welcomed into their homes.



With classmates from the Middle East Technical University, Ankara I am standing fourth from the left

It was during one such visit that I experienced my second shock. When I mentioned that I was a Kurd from Iraq, the father of my friend, a colonel of the Turkish Army, reacted with fury. He muttered the Arabic expression, “Asteghfirullah” (God forgive me), a phrase often used by Turks to express moral offense or disapproval.

Generals in the Classroom

After the 1960 military coup, around 8,000 army officers, including generals, were expelled from the army accused of their loyalty to the Menderes regime. A special decree was issued to keep them under control, allowing them to enroll in university or high school without having to take entrance exams.

We had three high-ranking officers in our class: a general, a brigadier, and a captain. They struggled to keep up with the lessons and compete with their younger classmates. One of them, Ata Bey, sat beside me. He was very friendly and took a liking to me because I occasionally helped him with his schoolwork.

One day, while sitting in the university cafeteria, a classmate said half-jokingly, "Ata Bey, how come you're friends with Jamal? Don't you know Jamal is a Kurd?" Ata Bey jumped up from his seat and yelled, "No, he is not!" "Ask him yourself if you don't believe me," the student responded. Ata Bey looked at me and quietly asked, "Is that true, my son Jamal?" I replied, "Sorry, I didn't hear what you were saying. Is what true?" He didn't want to say the word "Kurd." When the classmate repeated the word Kurd a few times, I finally stated, "Yes, Ata Bey, I am a Kurd." He looked very disappointed and grumbled, "That can't be. Your face and appearance resemble a true Turk. You should be proud of being a genuine Turk." I replied, "But Ata Bey, shouldn't I be the one to appreciate my own origin and be proud of what I am?" He retorted, "In that case, you have no place in this country. This land belongs only to the Turks." I tried to explain that being a Kurd does not make me an enemy of the Turks, especially since I chose to come to Turkey to study. But nothing helped; he refused to speak to me again.

First Voyage to Europe

In the summer of 1959, before moving to Istanbul, I decided to spend my summer holidays working in Germany. Encouraged by my schoolmate Mohsen Zamiri, an Iraqi of Iranian descent who had already secured a summer job in a steel factory in Karlsruhe, Germany, I followed his lead.

Excited for the adventure, I boarded a train at Sirkeci Train Station in Istanbul, bound for Germany. As the train crossed into Austria, an enchanting transformation swept over the landscape. The pristine surroundings left

a lasting impression, and the professionalism of the police and customs officers reflected a level of civilization I had long yearned to witness. It was clear that I had entered a world entirely new to me.

Upon my arrival at the Munich train station, I transferred to a local train bound for France via Karlsruhe. Exhausted, I could hardly keep my eyes open. I turned to the only other passenger in my compartment, a kind-hearted German who spoke little English, and asked if he could wake me up when we neared Karlsruhe. He graciously acknowledged my request with a nod.

My nap was abruptly interrupted by the French border police inspecting passports. To my dismay, I had unwittingly missed the Karlsruhe stop. My German friend was still in his seat. Bewildered, I inquired why he had not woken me. He replied, "You were fast asleep, and I didn't want to disturb your rest."

I explained my predicament to the French policeman, who advised me to disembark and purchase a new ticket back to Karlsruhe. I finally arrived in Karlsruhe after midnight, the world around me cloaked in darkness. Tired and desperate for a place to rest, I hailed a taxi and asked the driver to take me to an affordable hotel, stressing my status as a student. After circling the city and checking four fully booked hotels, the compassionate taxi driver suggested taking me to the nearest student hostel without charging any extra fare.

He pulled up in front of a towering edifice. At that late hour there was nobody around to guide me. I scanned a list of student names at the entrance and noticed a Turkish name, "Nizamettin Kaya." I rang the bell, hoping for help in finding accommodation. A groggy, half-awake student answered, and I pleaded for assistance in Turkish. When he learned I was Kurdish, he revealed that he shared the same heritage. He welcomed me into his abode and kindly allowed me to spend the night. Later, we became good friends and eventually worked together in the Kurdish Students Society in Europe (KSSE).

At the crack of dawn, I hailed another taxi and made my way to the steel factory, where I was to meet my friend Mohsen Zamiri. There, we met the factory's chief engineer and I was registered as a laborer, receiving a monthly stipend of 300 Deutsche Marks. I managed to secure a room in a nearby hostel.

A few days later, the chief engineer learned of my Kurdish heritage and mentioned that one of the factory's principal shareholders was also of Kurdish descent. He promised to introduce me to him during his next visit to the factory.

Some time later, I was summoned to the chief engineer's office to meet the Kurdish shareholder, a man in his forties from Iranian Kurdistan. He had come to Germany to study mechanical engineering and had eventually become the factory's primary partner. Over the weekend, I was invited to his residence to meet his family, who were eager to meet another Kurd.

Upon reaching his home, I marveled at the expansive garden, where signs bearing the cautionary message, "Achtung vor dem Hund" ("Beware of the dog") were strategically placed at various spots. Proceeding cautiously, I approached the house, expecting to encounter a formidable guard dog. The door opened, and out stepped the man and his wife, trailed by a diminutive canine companion. I could not help but ask about the warning signs, to which he replied, "We put those up so you wouldn't accidentally step on our little friend."

Our conversation took an intriguing turn when he discovered I spoke fluent Arabic and Turkish. He suggested that I leave Turkey to continue my studies in Germany, offering to arrange a scholarship for me through his factory. But there were conditions: I would have to switch my field of study to mechanical engineering and take on the role of representative in the Middle East, tasked with opening branches in Arab countries, where my proficiency in Arabic would be a significant asset.

Thrilled by this enticing offer, I wrote a letter to my father to seek his permission. Despite my excitement, his response was a firm refusal, insisting that I first complete my initial objectives. I relayed my father's decision to the Kurdish industrialist, who wisely sided with him, "You must honor your father's wishes." With a heavy heart, I returned to Turkey.

Moving to Istanbul

I found the Middle East Technical University disappointing in many ways and the allure of Ankara had begun to wane. There were no proper buildings, and there was a shortage of qualified teachers. Most classes took place in temporary barracks, located on a big site behind the new Turkish Parliament. The atmosphere was a mix of American and Turkish influences, which did not particularly appeal to me. This prompted me to seek new

horizons in 1960 and relocate to Istanbul Technical University (ITU), a prominent institution recognized for its esteemed faculty. Finally, I felt like I was attending a genuine university with proper infrastructure—a stark contrast to my experience in Ankara.

Once in Istanbul, I helped establish the Kurdish Students Society alongside several fellow Iraqi Kurds. What began as an academic initiative soon evolved into a broader cultural and social mission. Our aim was to raise awareness within the Kurdish community in Turkey about its rich history and vibrant culture, while also sharing this heritage with the wider Turkish public. We translated Kurdish books and literature into Turkish, organized social gatherings on national occasions, and kept the Turkish press informed about developments in Southern Kurdistan.

Amid the bustling streets of Istanbul, our efforts became more than a student undertaking; they grew into a cultural and social odyssey that would leave a lasting mark on our lives. As our activities gained momentum, the Turkish authorities responded by imprisoning us in 1963. Paradoxically, this repression brought public recognition. Our trials appeared on the front pages of major newspapers such as *Milliyet*, *Cumhuriyet*, and *Hürriyet*. The extensive media coverage and court proceedings played a significant role in rekindling long-suppressed national sentiments among Kurds in Turkey.

All things considered, leaving Kurdistan at a young age and experiencing the complexities of Kurdish-Turkish relations had a profound impact on my life. It strengthened my commitment to preserving Kurdish culture and identity, despite the high price I knew I would have to pay. Amid the bustling streets of Istanbul, our journey became more than just an academic pursuit; it became a cultural and social odyssey that would forever shape our lives.

New Life in Istanbul

Istanbul soon transformed from just a city into a place where I felt a profound sense of belonging. The classroom atmosphere was unlike anything I had experienced before and brought me newfound comfort. The pinnacle of my academic journey was architecture, which became my major, taught by the illustrious American architect, Mr. Means, who had been sent to our institution by the United Nations. Thanks to my proficiency in the English language, I quickly found myself in Mr. Means' good graces.

In a remarkable turn of events, the school selected seven students who were good enough in English to form an exclusive group under Professor Means' mentorship. We became known as the "Meansciler," a name that reflected our allegiance to this exceptional mentor.



The Meansciler (Means group) with Professor Means, from left Cengiz Giritliođlu, Jamal Alemdar, Güven Birkan, Professor Means, Cengiz Karpak, Cahit Őlkü and Cevdet Fahri



Back row: Cevdet Fahri, Güven Birkan, Professor Means and Cengiz Giritliođlu
Front row: Jamal Alemdar, Cengiz Karpak and Çelen Mirata, who was missing in the previous picture

A Student in Need

One day a classmate called Hasan G. approached me, explaining that he had to leave school because his father could no longer afford to support him financially. I felt particularly bad, as I was renting a large flat in Cihangir, a district in Istanbul close to the university. The money I received from home was more than a general's salary. I told him that he could come and stay with me and that I would pay his daily expenses, so he would not need to rely on his father.

Hasan was delighted and deeply appreciative. He continued his studies, and we often hit the books together. Just a few weeks before my arrest—an event I will describe later in more detail—we were making plans for life after graduation. Hasan said, “Jamal, how can I ever forget your kindness? You saved me. Without your help, I would never have become an architect. However, you’re lacking one thing.” I responded, “What’s that?” “You’re not a Turk,” he said. I could hardly believe my ears and replied, “My dear friend Hassan, I’m as happy with my nationality as you are with yours.”

He said, “No, you don’t understand what it feels like to be a Turk. I wake up every morning and thank God for making me a Turk.” Later, I found out from close friends of Hassan that he actually came from an Arab background.

Teaching at Istanbul Technical University (ITU)

In those days, professors at Turkish universities enjoyed a very high status and wielded considerable authority in their respective fields. Each subject had its dedicated department, where the professors and their assistants were stationed. In some universities, the dean was treated like the monarch of the institution, with a giant bell ringing to announce his arrival.

One standout figure was Professor Mustafa Aytac, the surveying instructor at ITU. Known for his eccentric personality, he firmly believed that surveying was of the utmost importance for societal development. His classes ran for four hours every Saturday morning, starting at 8:00 a.m., with military-like discipline. Most students tried to avoid him because they would be barred from advancing to a higher class if he took a dislike to them. Many students were forced to leave the university for that reason.

One Saturday morning right before the university closed for the summer, Professor Aytac handed out booklets he had authored about surveying, instructing us to review them and return them at the end of the lesson. However, I misinterpreted his instructions, thinking he wanted us to keep the booklets over the holidays to study. So, during the second hour, I quietly left the class with the booklet in my possession, heading to the Haydar Pasha train station for my journey home to Erbil.

When I returned from the summer break, my fellow students warned me that Professor Aytac had been furious when he collected the booklets on the Saturday I left, and found that one booklet was missing. He had written my name in his notebook, intending to punish me upon my return. I was genuinely worried; being on Aytac's blacklist was not a position anyone wanted to be in.

I started devising a plan to solve the problem and escape unscathed. Then I remembered an old Arabic proverb, "If you praise the fool, he becomes your servant." I decided to apply this concept to Aytac, willing to take a risk.

I entered his office while my classmates waited outside, more excited than I was about the outcome. At first, Aytac did not recognize me and asked how he could help. I quickly fabricated the following story: "Sir, I just returned from Baghdad, where I met some professors from the Surveying Department at Baghdad Technical University. They were thrilled when I told them that I was your student, having heard of you and admiring your work in the field. I showed them your booklet and they were deeply impressed. They asked if they could get your permission to translate it into Arabic and use it as part of their curriculum."

Aytac instantly stood up and said, "Of course, my son. That would be a great honor for me. You should have taken more copies of the booklet with you." Before I left the room, he shook my hand warmly and accompanied me to the door.

When my classmates waiting outside saw our friendly encounter, they were astounded and burst into laughter. They could not believe how I had managed to tame this seemingly unyielding professor. Even today, when I run into some of my former classmates, they fondly recall the incident.

Turkish Nationalism in the Ranks of the ITU

During those years, the political atmosphere in Turkey was extremely tense. In September 1960, a military coup unfolded with students taking to the streets, shouting slogans in support of the military against the elected government of Adnan Menderes. Menderes was eventually sentenced to death and hanged alongside two ministers following a highly theatrical military trial.

At that time, merely uttering the word “Kurd” was forbidden. As a foreigner from Iraq, I felt somewhat free to declare my Kurdish identity and discuss Kurdish politics with a few leftist and liberal students. However, most looked at me with suspicion. One day, during a lecture on the history of art and architecture, the topic of the Hittites came up. Our gentle and intellectual professor, Sabahattin Eyüboğlu, remarked that the statues of women recovered through excavations in Eastern Anatolia were dressed exactly like Kurdish women today. Suddenly, a student leaped to his feet and shouted at the professor, forbidding him from saying the word “Kurd.”

Calmly, the professor responded, explaining that as a university student, one should be more tolerant of undeniable historical facts. The student immediately left the room and after that day, we never saw Professor Eyüboğlu again.

I have often reflected on the persistent hostility that many Turks express towards the Kurds, a subject still largely off-limits in public discourse. It defies reason that a state could be built on the denial of identity and dignity for a quarter of its own citizens, especially when the Kurds have never posed a threat to the Turkish people. On the contrary, we stood beside them at every stage in the founding of the modern Turkish Republic. Nearly all Kurdish names of cities, towns, villages, mountains, rivers, and even people were replaced by Turkish ones. It was deeply troubling to see ordinary people adopting such hostility towards anything Kurdish. Kurdish songs and music were banned, and even possessing a cassette of Kurdish music could result in up to seven years in prison. Once in a while a classmate would whisper in my ear, acknowledging their Kurdish identity but cautioning me not to tell anybody.

Cultural Tensions

In Iraq, while we Kurds faced ups and downs with various governments, the Arab population was generally welcoming. When the Kurdish leadership was on good terms with the Iraqi government, the Kurds were often praised in the media. However, when those relations soured, the situation would shift dramatically, leading to insults, hatred, and even massacres against the Kurdish population. Despite these political shifts, our bonds with the Arab people remained largely unaffected. They were generally friendly and understanding.

In Turkey, on the other hand, most people were opposed to the Kurds. Aside from a few students who identified as leftists, the rest did not hide their disdain towards me. One day, the head of the Turkish Students Union at the university approached me, handing me a printed document. “Take this, read it, and learn. I’ll be back to hear your opinion,” he said. It was a declaration from the Student Union, labeling certain nations as enemies of the Turkish people. The list began as follows:

Turkish Youth, know your enemies:

- *Russia:* *Your Historical Enemy*
- *America:* *Your Tomorrow’s Enemy*
- *Greece:* *Your Border Enemy*
- *Armenia:* *Your Religious Enemy*
- *The Kurds:* *Your Internal Enemy*
- *The Arabs:* *Your Duplicitous Enemy, etc.*

Written in capital letters at the bottom of the list was: “*THE ONLY FRIENDS OF THE TURKS ARE THE TURKS.*”

The student leader was not pleased when I said that I felt sorry for the Turks and asked how come they do not have any friends in this big world? He shouted proudly, quoting the last line of the list, “Of course we don’t. The only friends of the Turks are the Turks, and that’s enough for us.”

I invited him to sit down. I wanted to share a lesson of wisdom with him that I had learned from a high school teacher in Kirkuk. I began recounting the story enthusiastically, and he agreed to listen.

Our physics teacher at Kirkuk Secondary School, Mohammed Saleh, was an exceptional figure—more than just a teacher, he was a guardian of

our wellbeing. He commanded respect, and we all looked up to him with great affection. He was our compass, our mentor, and a cherished fatherly presence, someone who was there for us whenever we faced one of life's challenges. Above all, he was renowned for his mastery of physics.

A bittersweet farewell loomed as we neared our final days of high school. On that momentous day, he began, "Today, my dear students, we embark on a lesson that transcends the boundaries of physics. It is a lesson far more significant." After a brief pause, he continued in an unexpected tone, "I must confess, you have disappointed me greatly. Selfishness and backwardness have distorted your potential. I had such high hopes for you."

Our collective gasps filled the room as we implored him to explain. "Why, dear teacher? We thought of you as a father figure, someone we admired and respected. What's wrong?" we pleaded. In response, he calmly declared, "I will step out for a few moments. When I return, we shall discuss this further." With that, he left the room, leaving us to reflect on his words. The moment he departed, we unleashed a flood of doubts, questioning his authenticity and sincerity. We felt betrayed.

Upon his return, he wasted no time pointing out how our faith in him had wavered. "Today's lesson begins now," he said with a knowing glint in his eyes. "To earn your trust, I had to invest two years of hard work. I understand your deep attachment to me, but it took just a few words to make you question everything. Remember this, my dear students, it's incredibly easy to make enemies, but forging true friendships is a difficult task."

His words resonated deeply within us. "Don't take pride in making adversaries," he emphasized. "Instead, take pride in building friendships. Carry this lesson with you on the journey of life." With these parting words, he made his exit, and our tears flowed freely.

Ultimately, we discovered that building friendships is an art worth mastering, while making enemies is all too easy. Our teacher's unexpected lesson remains etched in our hearts as a reminder to choose the path of friendship over animosity.

The student leader, overwhelmed by the profundity of the moment and this invaluable lesson, quietly left without saying a word.

Inexplicable Hostility Towards the Kurds

Historical Background

The Treaty of Sèvres (1920)

The Treaty of Sèvres, concluded after World War I, formally recognized the possibility of establishing an independent Kurdish state. Nevertheless, this provision remained unfulfilled due to the nationalist resistance movement led by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. Determined to incorporate the Kurdish-inhabited regions into the emerging Turkish Republic, Atatürk employed a strategy of persuasion and political maneuvering.

He sought the cooperation of handpicked Kurdish tribal leaders by offering assurances that Turks and Kurds would jointly share the new republic. As part of this strategy, these leaders were encouraged to appear in the Turkish parliament in traditional Kurdish dress and sign a letter addressed to the international representatives gathered at Sèvres. In this letter, they renounced the prospect of Kurdish independence.

This carefully orchestrated gesture significantly influenced British policy. Once advocates of Kurdish self-determination, the British abandoned their position and ultimately supported the Treaty of Lausanne (1923), in which Kurdish national rights were excluded entirely.

Atatürk's broader vision for the Turkish Republic was anchored in the construction of a unified, homogenous national identity. This project entailed the assimilation of diverse ethnic groups under the banner of Turkishness. Consequently, a series of policies was introduced that actively suppressed Kurdish cultural and political expression. The Kurdish language, traditional attire, and cultural practices were banned; references to "Kurdistan" were systematically erased from maps, literature, and official documents. Furthermore, the public use of Kurdish, including in schools, government offices, and other state institutions, was prohibited.

Historical records show that Kurdish leaders initially joined forces with Atatürk, believing they were fighting not only to expel foreign invaders following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, but also to establish a republic where Kurds and Turks could coexist as equals. However, this promise was broken, leading to the suppression of Kurds and the systematic denial of their national, cultural, and historical identity.

Recognition, Not Suppression

As the proverb says: “You may hold a gun to my head and still not win my mind.” Few sentences capture the Kurdish experience in modern Turkey more accurately than this one.

Kurdish resistance to the early policies of the Turkish Republic culminated in several uprisings, most notably the Sheikh Said Revolt of 1925. The state responded with sweeping repression. Kurdish leaders were executed. Expressions of Kurdish identity were criminalized. Language, dress, and even the very word “Kurd” were treated as threats to national unity.

The consequences were not only political—they were psychological and generational. Many Kurds concealed their identity to survive. Cultural memory was interrupted. A people were asked, implicitly and explicitly, to forget themselves.

In the early years of the Republic, Kurdish parliamentarians who entered the newly established Grand National Assembly wearing traditional Kurdish attire were accused of undermining national unity. Under Article 125 of the Penal Code, they were executed. The message was unmistakable: visible Kurdish identity would not be tolerated.

One story from the trials of Sheikh Said remains especially haunting. Among those arrested was a twelve-year-old boy detained with his father, a leading figure in the uprising. Before his trial, relatives urged him to renounce his father and deny his Kurdish identity to save his life. When brought before the court, he repeated what he had been coached to say: that he was a Turk and a son of Atatürk.

The judge responded coldly, “If a child betrays his father, how can he be loyal to Atatürk and the Republic?” The boy was sentenced. Repression may produce obedience. It does not produce loyalty.

Shared History, Denied Identity

During my years in Turkey as a student and later as a visitor, I struggled to understand the extraordinary sensitivity surrounding the word “Kurd.” I witnessed situations in which simply acknowledging one’s Kurdish identity was treated not merely as political dissent, but as provocation. The reaction often came not only from officials, but from ordinary citizens shaped by decades of official narrative.

Yet the history between Kurds and Turks is not solely one of conflict. Kurds played a significant role in the formation of modern Turkey. A visit to the Çanakkale Martyrs' Cemetery shows that a substantial number of those who died defending the Ottoman homeland in World War I were Kurds, identifiable by their places of birth. They fought not as outsiders, but as part of a shared struggle.

Today, Kurds constitute at least a quarter of Turkey's population. It is difficult to reconcile their demographic weight and historic contribution with the prolonged denial of their identity that followed the founding of the Republic.

Some early measures may have been driven by fear of fragmentation. Nation-building is rarely gentle. But when temporary precautions become permanent policy—when language is banned, culture erased, and identity denied for generations—the justification weakens. What begins as anxiety becomes injustice.

The Illusion of Forced Unity

For decades, whenever Kurds demanded basic cultural, linguistic, or administrative rights, they were accused of separatism and treason. The argument was simple: recognition would lead to division.

My experience suggests the opposite. It is not recognition that divides nations. It is the denial of recognition.

Consider Finland, where the Swedish-speaking minority constitutes about six percent of the population. Their language is officially recognized. Public signs are bilingual. They maintain their own institutions to preserve their culture. Yet their patriotism towards Finland is unquestioned. They do not seek union with Sweden. They defend Finland as their homeland. Recognition strengthened unity; it did not weaken it.

Contrast this with Turkey, where for decades Kurdish language and music were banned, the term "Mountain Turks" replaced identity, and words such as "Kurd" and "Kurdistan" disappeared from textbooks and maps. In some regions, children who spoke only Kurdish were denied proper access to education until they learned Turkish—even when their parents themselves had never been permitted to learn it.

And Still, Loyalty was Expected

Imagine two people living in the same house. One has access to every room; the other is denied basic space and dignity. It is only natural that the latter begins to imagine a home of his own. If he leaves, it is not necessarily because he hated the house—but because he was never allowed to live in it as an equal.

True integration cannot be built on fear. It can only be built on recognition.

A Broader Lesson

The Kurdish question in Turkey has never been solely about separation. It has been about dignity. About language. About the right to exist openly without shame.

A state that fears cultural recognition reveals insecurity. A confident state can afford generosity.

Suppressing identity may produce outward compliance, but it does not create belonging. Belonging grows when citizens feel seen, respected, and equal before the law.

Unity enforced by force remains fragile. Unity built on recognition endures. A gun may silence a man—it will not persuade him.

And no nation grows stronger by denying the existence of its own people.

My Arrest Changed Everything

My university education at ITU was progressing well, particularly under the guidance of Professor Means, an American instructor commissioned to teach at the university. His exceptional teaching methods set us apart from other students and we were fortunate to benefit from such high-quality instruction designed to shape us into skilled architects.

However, this idyllic academic journey came to a dramatic halt on the night of June 3, 1963. At around 2 a.m. three military policemen stormed my apartment in Abidei Hurriyet Street in Şişli, Istanbul, an event that would forever change the course of my life.

The agitated officers burst into my home, shouting orders. Their leader, wary of a hidden threat, frantically searched the kitchen. A collection of seemingly innocuous items, including Kurdish and Arabic books and architectural drawings, was carelessly thrown into a sack. A transistor radio was also seized and scrutinized.

Escorted out of my apartment in handcuffs, I was met with the astonished gazes of my neighbors. Three military jeeps, packed with armed personnel, stood waiting. I was forced into one of the vehicles. The journey led us to the Balmumcu Military Garrison, a dilapidated brick building on the Asian side of Istanbul. I was herded into a damp, dimly lit basement, joining other Kurdish detainees. We sat on the cold, muddy floor for two nights, our suits soiled by seeping sewage water.

On the morning of the second day, a military officer ordered me into the back seat of a waiting jeep. Just before I got in, a young Kurdish officer approached to handcuff me. He leaned in and whispered, "I wish I didn't have to do this humiliating job." I assured him, "Don't worry, these handcuffs are a badge of honor."

Flanked by two officers. I inquired about our destination. One replied, "You'll see when we arrive." As we crossed the Bosphorus, a cloth bag was pulled over my head. I resisted, grappling with the sudden darkness, to no avail. Eventually, I gave up.

At first, I assumed we were headed to Haidar Pasha Railway Station for deportation to Iraq. I later learned that the Iraqi government had requested the Turks to surrender me and the other detained Iraqi Kurds to the Ba'athist regime. This was the pan-Arab nationalist political movement that ruled Iraq from 1968 to 2003 and Syria from 1963 to 2024. The regime

was notorious for its authoritarian rule and brutal suppression of Kurds. Fortunately, the Turks refused, saving our lives.

After about half an hour's drive, we arrived at our destination. The guard exchanged coded signals to unlock a gate before leading me, my head still covered, to my cell. Once I was inside, the bag was finally removed.

I soon learned this was the infamous torture chamber known as "Ziver Agha Koshku." The cell was tiny, barely two meters by two meters, containing nothing but a rusty water tap. The walls were smeared with bloodstains, and a small window with iron bars near the ceiling offered a glimpse of the outside world. I could hear the sound of a train rumbling past nearby. The floor was submerged in three centimeters of filthy water, making it impossible to sit or lie down. Stripped of my clothes, left in nothing but my underwear, I stood there cold, exposed, and uncertain of what was to come. Exhausted from sleepless nights at Balmumcu, I could no longer resist the overwhelming fatigue. I sank to the wet floor, leaned against the wall, and drifted off to sleep somehow.

Interrogation and Torture

Early the following day, the door swung open. Two guards grabbed my arms and dragged me down a short corridor to another room. Inside, a grey-haired man in his fifties sat behind a desk, peering at me through thick spectacles. I was drained from sleepless nights, and my legs ached. Sitting on a chair opposite him, I stretched them, crossing one leg over the other, a move that clearly did not sit well with the man behind the desk. He reprimanded me for not sitting correctly in the presence of an elder.

I refused to comply, stating, "I would lower my leg for someone who showed me basic human decency. You've treated me badly without explanation, so you don't deserve my respect."

His face flushed with anger, and he called for the guards to force my leg down. When they obeyed, I calmly said, "Now you know, I didn't lower my leg out of respect for you." His face contorted in fury as he threatened to make me pay for my defiance.

The interrogation began with routine questions about my identity. But soon shifted to a more serious tone:

Interrogator: "Do you want a free Kurdistan?"

Me: "Yes, I do."

Interrogator: "Where do you envision the borders of this Kurdistan?"

Me: "Within the borders of Iraq."

Interrogator: "What about Turkey?"

Me: "As for Turkey, I won't say I don't wish for its freedom, but I'm not actively working towards it."

Interrogator: "Why is that?"

Me: "Because it's up to the Kurds of Turkey to liberate their part of Kurdistan."

With a scowl, he asked, "Now, tell me about your connections with the Kurds in Turkey and how you helped them get organized."

Me: "Are there Kurds in Turkey?"

Interrogator: "Of course there are Kurds in Turkey."

Me: "This is the first time since my arrival in Turkey that I've heard a Turkish official acknowledge the existence of Kurds in Turkey."

Furious, he shot back, "Do you think I'm a fool? Tell me about your involvement with the Turkish Kurds."

My answer remained the same: "I don't know any Kurds from Turkey."

His anger peaked, and he called for the guards to torture me into submission.

The Price of Refusal

As they moved in to push me down, I quickly stood on a chair, my back against the wall. With a swift kick, I sent one guard sprawling to the side. I resisted for as long as I could, but soon was overpowered, brought to the floor, and viciously beaten with metal and wooden sticks. Unconsciousness offered a temporary respite.

When I regained consciousness, I found myself surrounded by guards, my feet bound to a Falaqa, the dreaded foot torture apparatus. Unrelenting agony consumed me as a guard viciously thrashed my bare soles with a special stick. The pain was unbearable, and I screamed in anguish, hurling insults at the torturers. I fainted multiple times, only to be revived with cold water over my head, and had to endure the same torment again.

The painful swelling in my soles gradually subsided, but the guards showed no mercy. Realizing I wasn't screaming as loudly as I should, they hoisted me up and forced me to walk on a cold metal sheet. One soldier hung on my back to press me down on the sheet, while the other held my hands, reigniting the pain inflicted by the Falaqa.

A False Confession as the Price of Freedom

The torture went on for three days, seemingly a punishment for my defiance of the gray-haired official. But soon a subtle shift occurred, and the interrogator began to show a hint of friendliness. His attitude softened, and he promised to help me.

A sense of relief washed over me at the thought of freedom and returning to my studies.

But then he added, "I'll only do this if you cooperate with us." The condition: a signed confession implicating myself in meetings with Kurdish figures from Turkey and providing financial support for Kurdish activities. Refusing to yield to their falsehoods, I vehemently denied any knowledge of these individuals. The interrogator pressed on, suggesting that they knew me. I stood firm, refusing to sign a document filled with lies.

Frustrated, the interrogator conceded defeat and summoned the guards to return me to my cell, coldly warning that they would resort to "special methods" to extract compliance.

Back in my cell, the torment continued, a combination of psychological and physical anguish.

I was forced to listen to a recorded confession given by my friend, Fuad Lefte Derwish, who sounded broken, blaming me for all Kurdish activities. Then another friend, Ghazi Dizayee, was brought to my cell. He burst into tears when he saw me lying half-naked on the floor, covered in blood. "I told them everything," he cried. "Please, confess to save yourself from this situation." I spat in his face in front of the interrogator, and they immediately took him away.

Standing my ground, I demanded that they kill me rather than force me to sign that paper. Unfazed, the interrogator coldly replied, "We are not interested in you, an Iraqi. We want the Kurds from Turkey." I rejected every excuse and justification he gave.

Torture became a daily routine for the next two weeks. They used every tactic to convince me to sign the paper, but I remained resolute.

Interrogation by the Chief Intelligence Director

Two guards entered my cell one morning, ordering me to prepare to meet Turkey's chief of intelligence. They helped me to dress and shave. Exhausted from everything I had endured, I entered the room and took my seat. The chief intelligence director began speaking, "I've heard from my colleagues that you're refusing to cooperate and sign a document that poses no harm to you whatsoever. All we're interested in is punishing a few dangerous Kurds who are Turkish citizens." He leaned in and asked, "Do you really want to be a hero by being so stubborn? It's a shame for a young man like you to sacrifice your life and future, especially when most of your friends have already confessed everything against you." I responded firmly, "I don't care what others say about me. I won't sign papers filled with lies about innocent people, nor will I be the cause of their punishment."

He continued with the same persuasive tact, however I was too tired to repeat myself any longer. I lost my temper and shouted, "Don't you understand? I'd rather die than sign false accusations against innocent people!"

A nearby guard moved to strike me in the face for shouting at his superior, but he was instructed to leave me alone. The chief intelligence director's tone changed, and he said, "My son, it's a shame you're throwing away your future and life for those who speak against you. They've cooperated with us and accused you of leading Kurdish activities in Turkey. They say you received orders from Barzani to fund and support the Kurds here in getting organized."

A Shift in Interrogation Method

He pulled a piece of paper from his pocket and slid it towards me, saying, "Take this check worth 30,000 Turkish Liras. I'm willing to set you free to continue your studies or send you abroad to any country you choose. All I ask is that you sign this paper."

My response remained unaltered "I won't change my stance. No matter how hard you try, my answer will always be the same."

As he lost hope, he motioned to a guard to take me back to prison. I was ushered into a military vehicle by an officer who, before I got in, said, "Congratulations, not many leave this building without confessing."

Back to Balmumcu Prison

I was transported back to the Balmumcu military garrison. As I entered the building, guards on either side helped me to a solitary confinement cell, my injuries from Falaqa torture making it difficult to walk. Crossing the open courtyard, I could hear my Kurdish friends shouting words of encouragement from their cells.

The cell, located in a converted military base, was desolate, with nothing more than a damp earth floor, a blanket, and a pillow. The wooden door of the cell has a small gap at the bottom through which food could be passed.

Whenever I needed something, I had to knock on the door. The toilets were located across the courtyard, in a structure built of old, crumbling bricks. They became a makeshift means of communication with fellow Kurds who shared the same grim facilities.

Our secret communication channel

I knocked on the door and asked for assistance for my first trip to the toilet. Two guards came to carry me, and once inside, I noticed loose bricks in the walls. Behind one of them, I found a matchbox with a message of encouragement, assuring me that everything would be all right. I was instructed to write any requests for information on the same piece of paper using a small pencil left beside it, and then place it back in the matchbox behind the brick. Others could retrieve it during their visit. Thus, the toilet became our secret communication center. I shared the details of the torture I had endured and made it clear that I knew nothing of their identity.

While my cell was far from comfortable, the secret correspondence with my friends became a lifeline. In addition, there was a guard stationed outside my cell who seemed to relate to my Kurdish background. He began slipping cigarettes through the gap under the door. I found them unpleasantly strong and bitter, which led to a lifelong aversion to smoking.

A captain adorned with three stars on his shoulder would open my cell door at least once a day, salute in military fashion, and inquire if I needed anything. I remained silent, mistrusting his intentions and assuming he was merely trying to manipulate me into cooperating.

From time to time, I was summoned for interrogation. The officer would relentlessly question me about my connections with Turkey's Kurds, my role in helping them organize. My response never changed, "I don't know anyone."

General of the walls

One day, as I was busy writing a letter to place in a matchbox, the door swung open. Three military officers entered, one of them a general, flanked by two lower-ranking officers, including the one who saluted me daily. I remained seated on the floor as they entered. The general kicked me with his boots and declared, "I am the director of this prison, and you should stand up when I come in."

Indifferent, I retorted, "You're treating me like this, so don't expect any respect in return. You're not my director; you're the director of these walls."

He ordered a search of my belongings and found the matchbox with the letter I had just placed inside. The younger officer attempted to read it, but the officer who used to salute me intervened, declaring it a personal letter. The other officer tried to strike me, when handing the letter back to me. However, my friend stopped him. It turns out he was a fellow Kurd known for his unshakable loyalty to his Kurdish roots, even at the cost of his own career advancement. They called him Yuzbashi Kamal.



Standing from left: Hasan Buluş, Jamal Alemdar, Talaat Mukhtar, Najad Remzi, Musa An-
ter, Yaşar Kaya, Medet Serhat, Fuad L. Derwiş, Ziya Şerefhanoglu, Sait Elci, Enwer Aytakin,
Abdul Sattar Hamawandi, Firuz Falahat and Doğan Kılıç
Sitting from left: Ibrahim Mamhidir, Ergün Koyuncu, Ghazi Dizayee, Said Abdurrahman,
Ali Anagur

In the vast hall of Balmumcu, I came across the following detainees:

From Turkish Kurdistan

1. Musa Anter: writer, journalist, and intellectual.
2. Zia Şarafhanoglu: lawyer and former member of the Turkish Senate.
3. Said Elci: prominent Kurdish nationalist and leader of the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Turkey.
4. Medet Serhat: lawyer and activist.
5. Yaşar Kaya: writer, journalist, and publisher of the magazine DENG.
6. Ergün Koyuncu: lawyer, later to become a prosecutor.
7. Enver Aytekin: activist and publisher.
8. Edip Karahan: intellectual and writer.
9. Ali Anagur.
10. Doğan Kılıç.
11. Fethullah Kakioglu.
12. Hasan Buluş.

From Iraqi Kurdistan

1. Ibrahim Mamhidir: medical student, final year.
2. Najad Ramzi: medical student.
3. Talat Sharif Mukhtar: dental medicine student, final year.
4. Said Abdurrahman: technical university student, final year of civil engineering.
5. Fuad I. Derwish: medical student, final year.
6. Ghazi Dizayee: Turkish language student.
7. Abdul Sattar Al Hamawandi.
8. And me, Jamal Alemdar technical university student, a third year student in architecture.

From Iranian Kurdistan:

1. Firuz Falahat: technical university student, petroleum engineering.

Inside Seven Prisons

Balmumcu Military Garrison Prison

After nearly two weeks in solitary confinement at Balmumcu military prison, I was transferred to a large communal room in the same building. There, I found my friends waiting for me. The room was lined with rows of beds, and securing a good spot was crucial. Unfortunately, I arrived too late and had to settle for the only available bed, in the darkest corner. The room was not exclusively ours; it was shared with other prisoners. Among them was a tall, thin gentleman named Arnavut Jafer, a renowned mafia leader from Istanbul. Despite his intimidating reputation, he was surprisingly calm and polite, showing particular respect to our elders, Musa Anter and Sait Elci.

Arnavut Jafer took great pride in his Albanian heritage, insisting on identifying as Arnavut (Albanian) rather than Turk. He was keenly aware of the Kurdish people's plight and the injustices they endured at the hands of the Turkish authorities.

Two young prisoners also shared our room. Their noisy, disruptive behavior was a constant annoyance. Most of us preferred to spend our time reading or resting. Instead of complying, they reacted defiantly, claiming they were free to do as they pleased, and their loud antics were intolerable.

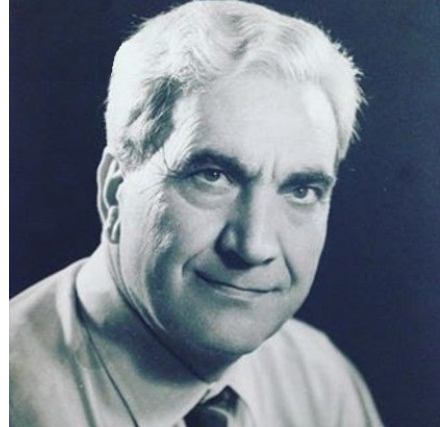
Musa Anter politely requested them to be quiet, explaining that many of us were trying to read. He calmly reminded them to be more respectful when addressing their elders, but his words only seemed to provoke them further.

With unexpected speed and strength, Arnavut Jafar sprang from his bed and approached one of the young men. In a swift, decisive move, he lifted the young man off the ground and slammed him to the floor. The young man lay writhing in pain, and from that moment on, both of the young men fell in line.

Prison regulations allowed us twenty minutes of outdoor exercise per day in the courtyard. And it was crucial to make the most of every second. One day, during our allotted time, the officer in charge abruptly ordered us back to our room, even though we still had more than ten minutes to go. When we protested and asked why, he explained that a general was about to pass through the courtyard and did not want to be seen by us.



Musa Anter (1920-1992)



Medet Serhat (1934-1994)

Medet Serhat, undeterred, argued that either the general should wait ten minutes or change his route. The situation quickly escalated, and three soldiers were sent to forcibly remove Medet, pushing us back to the room with their guns. Half an hour later, Medet was brought back, bleeding badly and brutally tortured.

Abdul Sattar Al Hamawandi

A remarkable figure of many names and talents, Abdul Sattar Al Hamawandi, caught my attention when I was transferred from my solitary cell to the common room. He had arrived in Istanbul in early 1963, fleeing the Iraqi authorities who accused him of fraudulently selling properties that were not his. These properties had changed hands multiple times.

Hamawandi was a giant with a cunning mind, skilled at selecting victims for his ruthless money-making schemes. He went by multiple names, using a Kurdish surname among Kurds and the name Faraj when among Arabs. He claimed to be a journalist, often showing off photographs taken with famous politicians and personalities such as King Hussein of Jordan, President Nasser of Egypt, and Mustafa Barzani, the Kurdish leader. He cunningly used these photographs to gain trust and manipulate people for his own gain. One of his victims was a Kurd called Doğan Kılıç Sheheanli, whose address he got from Noori Dersimi, while in Beirut.

Dogan quickly fell under Hamawandi's influence after being shown a photograph of him with the Kurdish leader, Mustafa Barzani. Confiding

in Dogan, Hamawandi claimed that Barzani had sent him to Istanbul on a mission to collect funds for the armed struggle in Iraqi Kurdistan. When Dogan pointed out that many Kurds sympathetic to their cause were impoverished and the wealthy were reluctant to contribute, Hamawandi devised a daring plan. He proposed contacting the Israeli consulate for weapons and financial support.

Unbeknownst to them, the secret police closely monitored the consulate's phone lines. When Hamawandi called, the call was intercepted, and the police, posing as consulate officials, spoke in Arabic. They arranged to meet him at a discreet café called Tashlik in Nishantash to discuss further details. During this clandestine meeting, the police, armed with substantial evidence, cornered Hamawandi and Dogan.

Suspecting connections between Hamawandi and Iraqi Kurdish students in Istanbul, they swiftly raided the home of Ibrahim Mamhidir, who was already under surveillance for openly debating Kurdish issues. This led to the arrest of Mamhidir and his newly arrived housemate, Ghazi Dizayi.

Under brutal interrogation, they revealed vital information, admitting to forming a Kurdish Student Society in Istanbul, with me as its president. It was this revelation that had ultimately led to our arrest.

My introduction to Hamawandi came as I was being transported from my solitary cell to join my fellow inmates in the spacious common hall. His cell, situated on the opposite side of the courtyard from our room, offered us a clear view through the window. It was evident from his behavior that he was curious about who we were.

He had caught wind of our aforementioned secret communication network, which we had set up by passing messages via loose bricks in the toilet walls. This prompted him to write his first letter, inscribed in Arabic and adorned with intricate hand drawings, each carrying unique symbolic meanings. This ingenious approach allowed us to establish contact from a safe distance, well outside the watchful eyes of the prison guards.

Through these covert exchanges, we got to know each other better. Hamawandi was clearly pleased when he found that we were Kurds from Iraq and spoke Arabic. He quickly devised another clever way to communicate with us, pretending to recite the Quran. He would speak to us as if he were reading the verses aloud, holding the Quran in his hands. Letting

the guards who did not understand Arabic think he was engaged in spiritual reflection, they allowed him this discreet privilege.

Hamawandi's resourcefulness went beyond our initial interactions. During his Quranic readings, he confided in us that he planned to start a hunger strike—on the condition that we secretly supplied him with food, hiding it between the brick walls of the communal toilets. We readily agreed.

Hamawandi began his hunger strike, refusing the meals provided by the prison. The guards were shocked by his unwavering resolve, attributing it to his steadfast faith, unaware of the food he secretly ate during his restroom visits. In exchange for better cell conditions, he agreed to eat.

Orhaniye Military Garrison Prison

One day, without warning, we were abruptly transferred to another military prison: Orhaniye Military Garrison. What was supposed to be a temporary move turned out to be a mere prelude to our eventual relocation to Ankara.

At Orhaniye, we were reunited with two familiar faces, Ibrahim Mamhidir and Ghazi Dizayee. Their palpable hesitancy overshadowed the reunion, as both men were burdened with guilt. As mentioned before, they had, under duress, divulged information about our involvement in the Kurdish Student Society, including our whereabouts.

I tried to console them, reassuring them that their actions were not driven by malice or an intent to assist the Turkish authorities. Rather, they have been broken by unbearable torture. Their compliance did not make them traitors. These words offered some solace, lifting a weight from their shoulders and easing the tension in the air.

In Orhaniye, we were granted visitation privileges one day a week. This day posed a peculiar challenge for Medet Serhat. It was a day of constant dilemma, as both his wife, Saniha Hanım, and his future wife, Yurdanur Hanım, vied for his attention during the brief hour allotted for visits. The discord between these two women became the focal point of something Musa Anter humorously seized upon, crafting amusing anecdotes from the situation.

All in all, these moments of levity offered a respite from the otherwise somber atmosphere. They served as a reminder of the human spirit's resilience, capable of finding humor even in the most difficult situations.

Zirhli Birlikler (Armed Forces) Prison

One fine morning, we found ourselves assembled in the courtyard of Orhaniye Military Prison, awaiting a mysterious journey. We were swiftly loaded into military trucks, with the purpose and destination of our journey kept secret. Among us was Hamawandi, whose enigmatic character and behavior made us keep our distance at first.

The journey, which lasted about two hours, felt much longer in the cold, uncomfortable confines of the military trucks and planes. When we finally arrived in what we found out was Ankara, we were taken to a building that resembled a military school. It seemed that the rooms in this training facility had been hastily prepared to accommodate us.

We were herded into a hall that resembled a large, ordinary living room. Colonel Yakup Dal, an army officer, stood with a dramatic flair, declaring himself the director of the establishment. He demanded that we stand as he entered. Our refusal to comply sparked a tense standoff, with the colonel threatening violence and ordering his guards to aim their weapons at us.

Hamawandi, the most apprehensive among us, urged us to comply, but I encouraged him to stand firm. Edip Karahan, speaking boldly with a fearless tone, defied the colonel, declaring that his threats held no power over us. Furious, the colonel ordered his soldiers to fire, but their hesitant movements betrayed their unwillingness to carry out the command.

To assert his authority, the colonel singled out Musa Anter for presumed torture. Musa responded defiantly, calling the colonel a derogatory name. Two soldiers took Musa away. Medet Serhat, a strong and athletic member of our group, intervened, seizing a young officer and threatening to harm him if anything happened to Musa Anter.

A high-ranking military general entered the room, exuding an air of gentility. He requested that we release the captured officer, and we agreed on the condition that Musa Anter be returned. The general assured us of Musa's safety, and we complied.

A Visit from the Iraqi Embassy Delegation

Before Colonel Dal left his post, we received word of a military coup against the Ba'ath Regime in Baghdad, which took place on November 18, 1963. The new government had established a peace treaty with the Kurdish leadership in Iraq.

At the request of the Kurdish leadership in Iraq, the government in Baghdad instructed the Iraqi ambassador in Ankara to monitor our case with the Turkish authorities and prevent any legal abuses. Consequently, an Iraqi delegation of three diplomats led by the ambassador was dispatched to visit us in prison.

We carefully got ready, donning our finest attire for the occasion. Only the seven of us who held Iraqi citizenship were allowed to meet the diplomatic delegation. Just as we were about to be escorted to another room in the building, Colonel Dal insisted that we wait for an interpreter, a soldier from Mardin province they had ordered, as he wanted to remain privy to our conversations with the embassy delegates.

After waiting for an hour, we received word that the interpreter was indisposed. The colonel remained in the room, unable to follow our conversation. I told the ambassador that we needed to translate everything into Turkish, as the colonel did not understand Arabic. We eventually decided that Fuad Derwish would speak in Arabic to the delegation, and I would translate into Turkish for the colonel. This arrangement seemed to satisfy the colonel.

Before we began our dialogue, the ambassador expressed regret for not visiting us sooner, citing difficulties in locating the prison. We then agreed that our conversation would proceed in this manner.

Fuad recounted the inhumane treatment we had endured in prison. In my translation, I would give a more favorable account, stating that our current place of confinement was quite comfortable. I commended Colonel Dal for treating us like his own sons, expressing that we felt more at home than in prison. The colonel accepted these words gratefully, bowing in acknowledgment. The ambassador and his associates struggled to suppress their laughter; one covered his mouth with a handkerchief, while the other hastily left the room. The colonel, however, remained blissfully unaware of the deception.

We continued our conversation in this manner until it came to a close. Unaware of our ruse, the colonel expressed heartfelt gratitude for our praise in front of the Iraqi delegation.

At the Turkish Army's General Staff Court

After weeks of uncertainty, we found ourselves before the imposing Military Court of the Turkish Army's General Staff. Three stern army officers presided over our trial. On the first day, we boldly challenged the tribunal's authority, arguing that none of us had any military affiliation, and our case was far from being a matter of war. We firmly insisted that we should be tried in a civil court instead. To our relief, the court accepted our argument and promptly dismissed the case, deeming it out of their jurisdiction.

This marked an unprecedented moment in modern Turkish history: Kurds were to be tried in a civil court.

Mamak Military Prison

Our destination shifted to the foreboding Mamak Military Prison, situated at the foot of a mountain on the outskirts of Ankara. This peculiar institution bore the hallmarks of American-style prison design. Each room housed two prisoners, and about fifteen rooms lined a common corridor, the doors made of iron bars.

Our stay at Mamak was a unique experience. It was a modern, newly constructed facility complete with robust security measures. What made it even more remarkable was that our group had an entire corridor to ourselves. We were occasionally allowed to gather in the corridor. Stepping outside into an open-air yard was a rare privilege.

By chance, we were housed alongside Brigadier Talat Aydemir and his associates, who were accused of attempting a military coup against Ismet İnönü's government. Most of them showed little interest in engaging with us, save for Colonel Fethi Gurcan, the second-in-command. He was genuinely curious about the Kurdish cause and often engaged in spirited political discussions with Medet Serhat and Yaşar Kaya, particularly about the Kurdish issue in Turkey.

Medet later recounted how Fethi Gurcan had admitted to being ill-informed on the subject and acknowledged the legitimacy of the Kurdish

struggle. He even vowed that if he ever rose to power, he would do everything in his power to resolve the matter justly and equitably.

Talat Aydemir, on the other hand, rarely left his cell and barely interacted with anybody. According to the soldiers guarding him, he was deeply depressed and spent most of his time crying.

We gathered in the corridor on March 21, 1963, to celebrate Newroz, the Kurdish New Year. We were seated at a long table decorated with oranges, our bed sheets functioning as tablecloths. As we sang the Kurdish National Anthem (“Ey Reqib”), Fethi Gurcan unexpectedly entered our corridor. Perceiving the nature of our gathering, he snapped into a military salute and stood erect until the Anthem’s conclusion. Colonel Talat Aydemir and Fethi Gurcan were executed on July 5, 1964.

A Stranger Among Us

After several days in Mamak Prison, a young man in his twenties named Hasan Buluş was transferred to our section. Hasan possessed a remarkable command of the Kurdish language and could recite numerous Kurdish poems by heart. However, none of us had ever heard of him.

Naturally, this aroused suspicion. Could Hasan be an informant planted among us to gather intelligence? Our doubts only deepened as we observed his behavior—his probing questions and his unexpected disappearances for hours at a time every week. Determined to uncover the truth, we set out to verify Hasan Buluş’s true identity.

Medet, Yaşar, and I devised a plan to interrogate him. The next time we were called out to the open yard for fresh air, Medet asked Hasan to stay behind in the corridor, saying we had matters to discuss with him. He agreed, and as the others left, the four of us remained behind.

Medet initiated the confrontation, slapping Hasan across the face and demanding, “Who sent you?” Hasan trembled with fear, but we made it clear that if he reported anything to the prison administration, there would be consequences.

Terrified, Hasan confessed that the police had indeed sent him to spy on us, specifically to gather information about the plans of the Iraqi Kurds. He explained that he was summoned once a week to report back, but assured us that he had not disclosed any information that would

jeopardize our case. He also mentioned that the police had promised to compensate him for any valuable information he might provide.

We made a deal with Hasan: we would pay him in exchange for reporting only what we instructed him to report to the police.

It became clear that Hasan had been recruited while visiting his brother, a soldier serving in the military. Both were arrested after an officer overheard them conversing in Kurdish. Hasan's release was contingent upon his acceptance of the job to spy on us, the Kurdish prisoners.

Sharing a cell with Musa Anter

In that shared space, I became cellmates with Musa Anter. He took the upper bunk, while I settled into the one below.

Musa was remarkably disciplined. Every morning at 6 a.m. he would wake me up, urging me to join him in his exercises to stay in good shape and advising against too much bread. He even affectionately dubbed me "Anter the Elder," a moniker that set me apart from his firstborn son, Anter.

Known as Ape Musa (Uncle Musa), he was a very special person with whom I had the privilege of forming a close friendship. In addition to sharing a cell with him, we spent most of our day writing and translating books. Within the prison's confines, paper and books were scarce commodities. Musa and I worked together to create a Turkish-Kurdish dictionary and a book about the history of Kurds and Kurdistan. Drawing upon our collective memory, we managed to document the history of the Kurdish people. The dictionary was eventually published after our release, although I am unsure of the fate of the history book.

Additionally, I started an English language course for those who expressed interest. Seven of us gathered in a single cell, where I took the role of mentor.

Ape Musa was surprisingly modern in his behavior and thinking, despite spending his childhood in the remote villages of Kurdistan. He considered himself a leftist and had little interest in a life of luxury.

While in prison, he constantly urged me to appear happy and positive, knowing it would frustrate the Turkish authorities, who wanted to see us sad and broken.

Ape Musa was born in 1920 in Nusaybin and assassinated on September 20, 1992. He was shot twice in the legs and once in the chest by the Turkish JITEM, secret assassination agents. His wife, Hale Anter, the daughter of a very respected Kurdish family, was born in 1944 and died in Sweden in 1992.

Sultanahmet Prison: Sad News from Afar

Despite our limited resources, we had a hidden treasure: a transistor radio, carefully hidden by Hamawandi. This small device was our only connection to the outside world, and Hamawandi kept us well informed. I vividly remember the somber day of November 22, 1963, when he broke the tragic news of President John F. Kennedy's assassination. We were all deeply saddened by this event. It was then that Doğan Kılıç, for the first time, shared his personal connection to Kennedy, revealing that they had been friends during their time in the U.S. Marines.

We endured the harsh winter months within the confines of Mamak Prison. Eventually, our plea to be tried in a civilian court was granted, leading to our transfer back to Istanbul, the city where the alleged crime had occurred. Our new destination was Sultanahmet Civil Prison. Once again, we found ourselves at the military airport in Ankara, preparing for a journey escorted by military prison trucks that would take us to our next stop. Sultanahmet Prison: a historical transformation.

In those days, Turkey was relatively unfamiliar with the concept of political prisoners in civilian prisons. While there had been instances of communists and writers being incarcerated, the arrival of Kurdish political prisoners at Sultanahmet Prison was particularly notable, drawing the attention of all the inmates. Curious gazes from behind barred cells followed us as we entered the prison.

Originally constructed by the Germans in 1845 as a university, the building later became the first prison in the heart of the Ottoman Empire. In 1996, it was remarkably transformed once again, this time into a luxurious Four Seasons hotel.

The prison was designed to hold around 200 inmates, but by the time we arrived, it was severely overcrowded, with nearly 2,000 prisoners already in residence. This presented a significant challenge. After a few hours of waiting, we were assigned to the basement, initially designated for death row inmates.

The next day, the prison guards informed us of a special visitor: Oflu Hasan. Our Kurdish friends from Turkey were excited, prompting us to inquire about his identity.

We learned that he was a notorious mafia boss with significant influence and well-established ties in government circles. Serving a five-year sentence for drug trafficking, Oflu Hasan enjoyed special privileges in the prison, including two bodyguards who followed him everywhere and unrestricted access to all sections. We were told these privileges were granted because he could incite a prisoner uprising if necessary.

Anticipation grew as the guards' unusual movements signaled his arrival. Accompanied by two imposing bodyguards, Oflu Hasan, a well-dressed, good-looking man in his early forties, entered our room. Observing our deplorable conditions in the basement, he expressed regret that intellectuals like us were confined to such a place. He identified us by reading our names from newspaper clippings. Sitting at the edge of a bed, Hasan summoned the tea boy and insisted that we be provided with the same quality of tea he enjoyed free of charge. Before leaving, he looked at us with tears in his eyes, offering his help and reassuring us that we could ask him for anything we needed.

I later learned that Oflu Hasan's nickname "Oflu" stemmed from his origins in a small Black Sea town called Of. During a visit to the Black Sea region, I heard a humorous anecdote: Many years ago, the United States government declared war on Of. Surprisingly, the town emerged victorious. After lengthy negotiations, they agreed to recognize the United States as a country on one condition: the U.S. had to incorporate the name of their town "Of" into its official name, hence the "United States Of America" was born.



We won a volleyball match against the other inmates in Sultanahmed Prison, the Kurdish team with striped shirts from left: Ergün Koyuncu, Fuad L. Derwish, Medet Serhat, Jamal Alemdar, Talaat Muhtar

Life within the prison walls

Within the prison's unique microcosm, a special plastic currency was used to purchase items from the prison mall shops.

We also learned that the building housed a library, where inmates could borrow books to read. However, this privilege was denied to political prisoners, a group to which we unfortunately belonged.

A strict, unwritten code governed prison life. One such rule involved respecting another inmate's daily "volta," a 30-minute walk in the open yard. I learned this the hard way when a prisoner angrily scolded me for interrupting his volta. Confused, I asked for clarification. He retorted, "Don't you know what volta means? If not, why are you here?" Fortunately, Medet intervened, explaining that I wasn't familiar with Turkish customs.

Interestingly, inmates were afforded respect based on the nature of their crimes. Murderers were revered, seen as individuals who had acted to protect their honor. In contrast, thieves were despised as dishonorable.

Once word spread that there were lawyers among us, almost everyone in the prison sought our advice, hoping we could help them navigate their legal troubles and plan their defense. One evening, a prison guard approached us with a peculiar request. A group of inmates accused of theft wished to visit our section. They sought advice from our lawyer friends

about their charges and how to present their cases. They bribed guards to gain secret access to our section.

A warm conversation ensued, during which they candidly discussed their despised profession. They boasted about their ability to identify potential victims from a distance. When asked to determine the most likely target among us, their leader scrutinized our faces and singled out Firuz Felahat from Iranian Kurdistan, who indeed had been a victim of theft multiple times.

Another noteworthy incident involved Zia Sharafhanoglu, a Kurd from Turkey and a lawyer by profession. He sought permission to meet with the prosecutor handling our case. After an extended absence from the prison, he returned and explained that the visit had primarily concerned procedural matters. Later, we discovered from our case files that Zia had provided a written statement suggesting that all Kurdish activities attributed to Turkish Kurds were actually the actions of Iraqi Kurds. Medet and I confronted him about this statement, expressing our disappointment. I reminded him that the more we were accused of being involved in the Kurdish activities, the more honor and respect we gained in the eyes of others.

At the Fifth Criminal Court of Istanbul

A historic event unfolded at the Fifth Criminal Court of Istanbul as Kurds were tried in a civil court for the first time in Turkey. This marked a significant departure from the traditional military court system under the Military General Staff Court in Ankara. As mentioned before, our firm rejection of military jurisdiction, coupled with the tireless efforts of over thirty Kurdish and Turkish lawyers, made this groundbreaking shift possible.

The courtroom was filled with anticipation, with a crowd of eager attendees gathered inside and outside. Turkish and foreign journalists, along with friends and relatives, were present to witness this pivotal moment.

As the session began, the prosecutor, in a tone reminiscent of a bygone era, derisively labeled the Kurds as dreamers pursuing an independent Kurdistan. He claimed that no such historical entity as the Kurds existed and that we were, in fact, Turks. He further asserted that the Kurdish language was a mere amalgamation of Turkish, Arabic, and Persian, with only 15-20 indigenous words.

Musa Anter, with his sharp wit, quickly challenged this absurd claim. He humorously retorted, “Even a hen clucks at least fifty words when laying eggs due to the pain. How can the Kurds, with a history spanning over seven millennia, have only 15 to 20 words?” The courtroom erupted in laughter, momentarily easing the tension.

A witness was called to present a secretly recorded conversation, which seemingly took place over drinks, in which Musa Anter made derogatory remarks about Atatürk and the Turkish government. The judge turned his attention to Musa and inquired how he knew the man.

The judge: “Musa Bey, do you know this man?”

Musa: “Yes, your honor, I know him.”

The judge: “How do you know him?”

Musa: “I cannot reveal that in court.”

The judge: “Why not?”

Musa: “Because my wife is present in the courtroom. If I reveal how I know this man, my wife will divorce me.”

The courtroom erupted in laughter, leaving the embarrassed man protesting vehemently and seeking protection from the court, particularly since he was a government employee and an intelligence officer. Undeterred, Musa asked the judge to ask his wife, Mrs. Hale Anter, to promise not to divorce him if he revealed the matter. After extracting such a promise from his wife, Musa said dramatically, “This man was my pimp, that’s how I knew him.” The room erupted in laughter again, while the man blushed profusely, insisting on proof of the claim and threatening to file a suit against Musa Anter. Musa continued, “Pimps do their job clandestinely, therefore proving my claim impossible.”

When the witness insisted on evidence, Musa accepted the challenge, addressing the court and the audience as if delivering a public speech, “Respected judges, prosecutors, esteemed lawyers, journalists, and our distinguished friends, I implore you all to gaze upon this man’s face carefully. does not he have the look of a pimp?”

Chaos ensued as the room erupted in laughter, while even the judges joined in. The proceedings came to an abrupt halt, and the court was adjourned.

At one point, the judge asked whether I admitted to being a Kurd, referencing the historical claim that Kurds were actually Turks. I responded, “If Kurds are indeed Turks, then why have we been subjected to incarceration and torment, shuffled from one prison to another for nearly a year? And if we are truly Turks, why does the Turkish government not support the Kurds in Iraq, who are supposedly fellow Turks, as it did with Cypriot Turks? Instead, the Turkish government actively backs the Iraqi government in its war against the Kurds in Iraq.” The judge, eager to avoid this line of questioning, promptly instructed me to take my seat.

Said Elci, a committed Kurdish patriot and a self-made man known for his kindness and strong character, protested at the end of the first court session when the judge announced that future hearings would be closed to the public. Elci argued that a court could deliver justice only if it rested on three pillars: security, speed, and transparency. He maintained that the defendants had been denied security throughout their imprisonment, that their detention had dragged on for more than a year, and that the court was now threatening to deprive them of transparency as well.

Despite his protest, the court continued holding the sessions away from the public eye. The judiciary in those days was relatively independent; it did not take orders from the government or any other authority. It was perhaps the only institution in which the Turkish people took pride during that era.



With classmates in Kerkuk, me and Ali Askari, 1956

Fleeing to Freedom

After eleven months and twenty days behind bars, we faced our final court hearing on May 7, 1964. The judge's verdict was a bittersweet mix of hope and fear: "Since there is no concrete evidence linking them to any crime against the Turkish State, and given their status as students, it is clear that some of them were subjected to severe torture, forcing them to make false confessions. Such evidence is inadmissible. Therefore, the trial will continue, but they will be released from prison," the judge declared.

As we walked out of prison, the euphoria of freedom was short-lived. The threat of re-arrest loomed large. Kurdish lawyers warned us that the National Intelligence Organization (MIT), dissatisfied with the court's decision, had issued a new arrest warrant.

Living in secrecy became our only defense. I sought refuge with a Kurdish family in a village near Yalova, outside of Istanbul, while my friends found shelter elsewhere. Isolated in my small room, I faced an uncertain future. Without a passport, no country seemed willing to offer me asylum.

Determined to find a safe haven, I focused on neutral countries with no history of hostility towards the Kurds or of disregarding human rights. Despite Britain's checkered past with the Kurds, I saw it as an ideal choice, as it would allow me to continue my architecture studies in English, sparing me the challenge of learning a new language.

The following were potential asylum destinations on my list:

1. Britain
2. Austria
3. Sweden
4. Denmark
5. Germany
6. Japan

One Door Slammed, Another Door Opened

Early one morning, I set out for the British Consulate in Beyoğlu, Istanbul, hoping to meet with the British Consul. Once in his office, I shared my plight and implored for political asylum in Britain. My plea was met

with an abrupt expulsion from the premises, coupled with a threat to summon the police if I did not leave the building immediately.

My spirit crumbled, but as I regained composure, fate intervened. Just down the street stood the Swedish Consulate, beckoning with a glimmer of a change in destiny. In the bustling reception area, a sea of visa applicants awaited their turn. A loud and aggressive receptionist, Cecilia, tried to control the crowd. My request for an audience with the consul general was denied, as she insisted that I speak with her directly.



Torsten Weman (1901-1981), Consul General of Sweden in Istanbul, Turkey

I persisted, explaining that I had an urgent private matter requiring a meeting with the consul general in person. A heated exchange ensued, culminating in the consul general's reluctant appearance. Hope flickered within me as I beseeched a private audience, revealing my Kurdish heritage and my urgent need for assistance. In that instance, a transformation took place. Torsten Weman, a distinguished gentleman in his sixties with silver hair, who had served as Sweden's consul general in Istanbul for almost three decades, immediately invited me into his office.

Behind closed doors, as I recounted my imprisonment, he pulled out a bundle of newspaper clippings—a part of the embassy's regular cache for tracking local politics, current events, and public sentiment. Some of them featured my picture, which lent credibility to my account in his eyes.



The Swedish Consulate building in Beyoğlu, Istanbul

As I spoke, Torsten's initial reserve melted away, and he started to share anecdotes from his time in Turkey. He told me how, as a young archaeology student, he had explored the ruins of ancient civilizations in eastern Turkey (Kurdistan) and had been kidnapped by a Turkish gang, only to be rescued by Kurdish farmers. In gratitude, he vowed his unwavering support for my case.

That day, Torsten and I discussed not only my fate but also the plight of seven Kurds hiding in different parts of Istanbul, desperate to escape the grasp of the Turkish police. A pact was made: Torsten would dispatch a report to Sweden detailing our encounter, and I would make weekly contact for updates. On the second call, Torsten delivered the news we had anxiously been waiting to hear: a delegation from the Swedish Immigration Centre was soon to arrive in Istanbul.

Visit of the Swedish Immigration Delegation

Three esteemed Swedish envoys, led by the General Director of the Immigration Office, Mr. Rydebeck, arrived in Istanbul. I am not sure if they specifically came to see me or if they were on a routine visit.

I explained our predicament and answered their questions with untiring resolve. When asked about my knowledge of Sweden, I admitted to having limited insight. In response to their question—“Why Sweden?”—I explained that I was looking for a safe place to continue my studies. A shared sense of purpose emerged, and the possibility of a new beginning seemed within reach.

Before the interview, I informed Torsten that there were six other applicants and that my friends were in hiding. He noted their names and began the interview. After interviewing me, they stated that they would present my case to Sweden for a decision and notify me of the outcome through the consulate. We settled on code names: I was Hans, Turkey was Hospital, and Sweden was Home.

Before leaving the consulate, Torsten assured me that he had given the Swedish visitors a positive report about the case.

In a subsequent phone call, Torsten requested that I visit the consulate as he had received good news from Sweden. Upon arrival, Torsten read the telegram from the Immigration Office in Stockholm, which stated, “HANS IS WELCOME HOME PROVIDED HE LEAVES THE HOSPITAL BY HIMSELF.”

Torsten explained that my friends and I would only be officially recognized as refugees in Sweden once we left Turkish territory. Our asylum claim was not valid while we were in Turkey, as it could be seen as interference in Turkey’s internal affairs. However, if we were arrested in Turkey, the consulate could provide legal assistance and follow up on our case.

I left the consulate to inform my Kurdish colleagues of the new development.

The list of individuals seeking asylum in this case was as follows:

1. Said Abdurrahman (Civil Engineering student, final year) from Kirkuk, born 1939.
2. Myself, Jamal Alemdar (Istanbul Technical University, Faculty of Architecture, 3rd-year student), from Erbil, Iraqi Kurdistan, born 1940.
3. Fuad Lefte Derwish (Medical student, final year) from Baghdad, born 1939.
4. Ghazi Dizayi (Economics and Trade, 1st-year student) from Erbil, born 1939.
5. Firuz Falahat (Petroleum Engineering, 4th-year student) from Urmieh, Iran, born 1939.
6. Ibrahim Mamhidir (Istanbul University, Faculty of Medicine, 3rd-year student) from Koye, Iraqi Kurdistan, born 1933.
7. Talat Sharif Mukhtar (Dentistry student, final year) from Erbil, born 1934.
8. Nazhad Ramzi (Medical student, 4th year) from Sulaimani, born 1935.

My friends were hesitant when they heard the news, perhaps because it seemed too good to be true. I told them I was planning to leave Turkey illegally and that anyone who wanted to join me should speak up now.

Their responses varied. Some asked me to explain the escape plan in detail; otherwise, they were not willing to take the risk. Based on past experience, I refused to share my plans, knowing that under pressure, they could end up revealing everything to the Turkish authorities.



In Sultanahmet prison, before appearing in the Fifth Criminal Court of Istanbul in 1964. From left, standing: Talat Sharif Mukhtar, Ghazi Dizayi, Said Abdui Rahman, Ibrahim Mamhidir, Fuad Lefte Derwish, Firuz Falahat, Nazhad Remzi. Crouching: Jamal Alemdar

Ibrahim Mamhidir was the only one who agreed to join me and follow my plan, no questions asked. Our first step was to secure valid passports since the Turkish authorities had confiscated ours. I was able to obtain a valid Iraqi passport from a Kurdish student, who later reported it lost and applied for a new one at the Iraqi consulate in Istanbul. I swapped out the photo in his passport for mine and then found a rare Iraqi coin, minted in limited numbers to commemorate the Revolution of July 14, 1958. I used the coin to press ink onto my photo, resembling an official Iraqi stamp. It was by no means a perfect forgery, but I thought it was good enough for the job.

With a “valid” passport in hand, I began considering my options for leaving the country. I found out through the newspapers that Turkish fishermen were smuggling Turkish nationals of Greek origin into Greece for a fee. So, I reached out to a Greek family who had rented me a room in their flat when I first arrived in Istanbul in 1960 to see if they could help me.

The Greek family informed me that the Turkish police had caught on to the scheme and were now posing as fishermen to catch escapees, making it a highly risky operation. As a result, I decided to abandon this plan.

The second option was to fly to Greece on a regular flight, avoiding Istanbul airport due to the risk of passport control recognizing us from newspaper reports. Instead, I considered flying out of Izmir airport, which was smaller and had only one flight a day to Athens. We headed to Izmir by taxi to the flat of two Kurdish students, Mohammed Razi and Dilshad Tutunchi, both from Erbil. We arrived late at night, and they had a place ready for us to sleep.

In the morning, I went to the Greek consulate to get our visas and buy tickets for the trip to Athens. Our flight was scheduled to take off at 9 a.m. the next day.

I hardly slept that night, planning and re-planning. We decided to arrive at Izmir airport around 8:30 a.m. to give passport control as little time as possible to check our passports and to avoid too many questions.

Escape to Athens

A Tale of Refuge and Unexpected Kindness

Our escape route was anything but conventional. In Istanbul, I worked with Torsten, the Swedish consul, to alert him about our departure from Izmir through a phone call made by a Kurdish friend. Torsten would then inform the Swedish embassy in Athens of our imminent arrival.

Thankfully, the plan went off without a hitch. Despite a frustrating hour-long delay that felt like an eternity, we finally touched down in Athens around noon. While other passengers headed for the exit, we made a beeline for the police office.

Inside the precinct, I introduced myself. The officer stood up right away and greeted us warmly with a handshake. He could not resist a few choice words about the harsh treatment by the Turks. It turned out that the Swedish ambassador in Athens, Mr. Bertil Bergman (brother of the renowned film director Ingmar Bergman), had already notified the Greek authorities of our status as accepted political refugees in Sweden.

Following Torsten's instructions, we handed over our forged passports. In exchange, we were given receipts that would serve as temporary identification documents during our stay in Greece. The police chief, offering us Greek coffee, told us that a car was on its way to take us to the Swedish embassy.

The embassy staff, clearly expecting us, welcomed us with open arms. They introduced themselves, shook our hands, and congratulated us on our newfound freedom. Ambassador Bergman, particularly intrigued by our story, peppered us with questions about our journey and experiences.

The embassy had thoughtfully arranged a room for us at the luxurious Olympia Hotel, centrally located in Athens. This five-star hotel was worlds away from anything I had ever experienced. Both the hotel staff and the Greek people we encountered impressed us with their friendliness.

Frugality became our watchword, however. We opted against dining at the hotel, worried that the cost would burden the embassy. Instead, a nearby kiosk became our go-to spot for meals. By the end of the week, the ambassador noticed the absence of restaurant charges on our bill and asked, "Aren't you eating? Your bill does not show any meals."

This prompted me to explain our ill-conceived attempt at financial responsibility, which amused him greatly. He laughed and said, "Don't worry, when you start working in Sweden, the government will take a big cut of your salary in taxes, that's just how it is."

Two weeks later, our papers arrived from Sweden. The ambassador asked us to bring our passports so he could issue our entrance visas to Sweden. I explained that our passports were with the airport police. He was not pleased and asked why we had done that. I explained that the consul in Istanbul, Torsten Weman, advised us to do so, given that our passports were forged. Fortunately, I still had my student ID, which was enough to issue a visa on a separate document to be attached to it.

Our SAS flight to Sweden was scheduled for 6 a.m. on April 30, 1965. The Swedish ambassador called to inform me that he would send an embassy employee to assist us through passport control, as we did not have valid passports. We boarded the flight on time, flying to a country I knew little about apart from the basic information Torsten had given me. I was excited, knowing that a new world and a new life were waiting for me.

Sweden, At Last!

We arrived at Malmö Airport around 11 a.m. All I had was US \$40 in my pocket and a small carry-on bag. As we entered the arrival hall, we heard our names called over the loudspeaker, asking us to go to the information desk.

A short, well-dressed gentleman was waiting for us, carrying a few dictionaries. He was unsure of which language we might speak. When I introduced myself in English, he sighed with relief, glad that he did not need the dictionaries after all.

He explained that he had been sent by the Employment Office (Arbetsmarknadstyrelsen) to assist us through passport control, as they had been informed that we did not have valid passports. His job was to take us to temporary accommodation until we could find work or enroll in a school to continue our studies. He was surprised when I told him that we had no luggage apart from small carry-on bags and no clothes other than the summer shirts and trousers we were wearing. "But it's very cold outside," he said. Realizing that was all we had, he took us to a shop, made a few phone calls, and then told us to pick out what we needed.

We left the shop properly dressed in warm clothes, complete with shoes, a hat, and even proper underwear. Later, he invited us out for lunch. I was asked to try a typical Swedish dish.

He ordered *bruna bönor med fläsk* (brown beans with pork). It tasted unlike anything I had ever eaten, accompanied by sweet jelly, which I initially mistook for dessert.

After lunch, we were taken to the train station, given a train ticket, and instructed to get off at a station called Norrköping, which we would reach around midnight. When we arrived, the station was deserted, with no one on the platform. Eventually, the silhouettes of two gentlemen emerged. They introduced themselves and asked us to follow them to their car. Our destination was a refugee camp in Söderköping, a charming little town with a population of 5,000.

Arriving in the early hours, we stopped at a small country hotel called Brunnen. The camp cook was roused to prepare some food for us. We were told that, as students, we would be staying at the hotel where the camp's administration staff was lodged, since the camp itself was overcrowded with families and too noisy.

The camp consisted of a few villas, each housing families, some with children. Most of these families had fled communist regimes in countries like Bulgaria, Romania, and Czechoslovakia.

My First Days in Sweden

A Journey of Adaptation

On my first night, soon after falling asleep, I was awakened by sunlight streaming through the windows. According to my watch, it seemed to be four in the afternoon—had I overslept? Eager to explore Söderköping, I rushed out, only to find the streets practically empty. I asked a police officer where everybody was. With a knowing smile, he told me to go back to sleep. In Sweden, the sun rises long before the people do in May; it was four in the morning!

Most of the families in the refugee camp spoke Turkish, making communication with them easy for me. The camp administration had just four employees, including an interpreter, Leif Olsson, whose Turkish was somewhat limited. This created significant communication challenges in the camp, both between the refugees and the administration and with the authorities. Eventually, Mr. Barre, the camp director, offered me a job as Leif's assistant, since I spoke both Turkish and English. I would be paid SEK 5 for each translation. I accepted the offer without hesitation. A room with a desk was allocated for my first job in Sweden. Over time, I became the primary communicator between the refugees, the administration, and even the authorities.

Solving Serious Matters

One day, Mr. Barre approached me with a serious concern. A Bulgarian refugee had allegedly threatened his life. Uncertain of the threat's authenticity, Mr. Barre sought my assistance. I assured him I would handle the situation.

The next day, I summoned the Bulgarian to my office. Speaking in Turkish, I informed him that he would be deported due to the alleged threat. Shocked and confused, he vehemently denied making any such threat, insisting it was a misunderstanding. Fearing for his safety if sent back to Bulgaria, he begged me to reconsider. I explained that the decision

was final but offered him a chance for redemption: he would need to apologize to Mr. Barre and vow to refrain from such behavior.

The following morning, the Bulgarian approached Mr. Barre during breakfast, tearfully seeking forgiveness and kissing his hands. Mr. Barre, taken aback, turned to me for an explanation. I clarified that the Bulgarian was apologizing for a misunderstanding regarding the threat. Relieved, Mr. Barre forgave him and expressed gratitude for my intervention.

A Visit to Stockholm

One day I received a phone call from Dr. Salahaddin Rastgeldi, a Kurdish doctor from Urfa in Northern Kurdistan. Having learned about us through Torsten Weman at the Swedish consulate in Istanbul, he invited us to stay with him in Stockholm for a week. He even offered to pick us up by car personally. I gladly accepted his generous invitation.

Dr. Salahaddin Rastgeldi, who had immigrated to Sweden in the 1950s to study medicine with the support of Torsten Weman, was delighted to learn of other Kurds in Sweden. He arrived at the camp in his Porsche, a tight squeeze for three people, but we made it work.

We arrived in Stockholm and stayed in one of the two apartments that he owned at Linnégatan 22, a well-known address in the city center. One apartment served as his residence, while the other housed his medical practice. Dr. Salahaddin was an exceptionally friendly and hospitable host.

Invaluable Support from Torsten

I spent nearly three months at the camp, taking Swedish classes taught by Leif Olsson and working as an interpreter. In addition to assisting refugees with everyday communication, I accompanied them to hospitals, immigration offices, and police stations, earning SEK 5 per visit, as mentioned earlier.

Each refugee received a weekly allowance of SEK 2 for cigarettes and postage, with all other necessities provided by the camp. Thanks to my job and the salary I received, I gradually became one of the better-off refugees in the camp.

Torsten Weman kept in touch, writing letters to check on my new life in Sweden and find out about any challenges that I faced. He initially wrote in English but soon switched to Swedish, encouraging me to

respond in kind. Despite the language barrier, I adapted quickly, leveraging my knowledge of German to learn Swedish. Torsten was impressed by my progress and worked tirelessly to find me a suitable job through his connections.

Subsequently, Professor Peter Celsing from the Royal Institute of Technology (KTH) in Stockholm contacted the camp. He had heard about me from Professor Nils Ahlbom, a friend of Torsten's, and knew I was in my final year of architecture studies. Professor Celsing offered me a position in his Stockholm office, a significant step forward in my new Swedish life.

Excited by this opportunity, I prepared to meet Professor Celsing. The prospect of working in a renowned architect's office was both thrilling and intimidating. On the day of the interview, I dressed in my best attire and made my way to his office. Professor Celsing greeted me warmly, and we discussed my background, experiences, and aspirations. Impressed by my knowledge and enthusiasm, he offered me a position on the spot. I was overjoyed by this turn of events, marking an important milestone in my Swedish journey.

Working at Celsing's office was a transformative experience. Surrounded by talented architects and designers, I immersed myself in various projects, eager to learn. The work was demanding, but the stimulating and supportive environment made it enjoyable. My colleagues were curious about my background and often inquired about my life and culture. This exchange of stories and experiences fostered a strong bond among us, making me feel more at home in my new country.



Kulturhuset



Filmhuset



Three projects in Stockholm that, I worked at Celsings Arkitekt kontor in Gamla Stan 1966, Kulturhuset-in Sergelstorg-Film Huset in Gärdet and Välligby kyrkan

Meanwhile, I continued to improve my Swedish, taking full advantage of the opportunities to practice through conversations with colleagues and clients. I also attended language classes regularly, determined to master the language fully. Within a few months, I was able to communicate fluently, significantly boosting my confidence and integration into Swedish society.

One evening, after a particularly long day at work, I received a letter from Torsten Weman. His support had been invaluable since my early days in Sweden. The letter was filled with encouragement and news of potential opportunities in the architectural field. He expressed pride in my progress and reiterated his readiness to assist in any way possible.

Around this time, I began to assume more responsibilities at Celsing's office. My contributions to several key projects were recognized, and I was given the opportunity to lead a small team. This was a major career milestone, bolstering my acceptance within the professional community.

At the same time, my personal life also began to flourish. I made friends both within and outside the workplace. Social gatherings, cultural events, and weekend outings became regular activities. Dr. Salahaddin

Rastgeldi often invited me to his home, where we shared stories and meals, deepening our friendship. His support and guidance were a constant source of encouragement and strength.

Reflecting on my journey from a refugee camp to becoming integrated into the professional and social fabric of Sweden, I felt immense gratitude. The challenges I faced were many, but the support from people like Torsten, Dr. Salahaddin, Professor Peter Celsing, and Professor Nils Ahlbom made all the difference. Each day brought new insights and experiences, shaping me into a resilient and adaptable individual.

As months turned into years, my life in Sweden continued to evolve. I completed several key projects at Celsing's office, earning respect and recognition in the architectural community. I also became actively involved in refugee support programs, eager to give back and help others navigate the challenges I once faced.

One memorable day, while working on a particularly complex design, I received a call from the Royal Institute of Technology. They invited me to give a guest lecture to the architecture students. It was a defining moment, symbolizing just how far I had come. Standing before the students, I shared my journey, emphasizing the importance of perseverance, adaptability, and community support.

My story resonated with many, particularly the international students who were facing their own set of challenges. I encouraged them to embrace every opportunity, stay open to learning, and seek support whenever needed. The lecture was well-received, and it opened doors to further opportunities to engage with both academic and professional circles.

In the years that followed, I continued to thrive in Sweden, balancing my professional achievements with personal growth and community involvement. My journey from a lost refugee to a respected architect and valued community member stands as a testament to the power of resilience, support, and an unwavering belief in a brighter future.

My First Experience Living with a Swedish Family

Torsten continued to help me find accommodation and arranged for me to stay in a small attic room in a villa in Stocksund, on the outskirts of Stockholm. The villa was owned by the venerable Mrs. Wilcke, a seasoned children's book author.

I stayed at her house for a month, but was forced to leave. While Mrs. Wilcke was incredibly kind, her son, who was in his thirties and also lived in the villa, was uncomfortable with having a stranger in the house. This caused problems for his mother. Fortunately, I managed to find a room in a student residence in Stockholm called Jerum.

Finishing My Studies Became a Must

Peter Celsing was reluctant to see me leave his office to pursue further studies. He reassured me that I was already as capable as a qualified architect and could continue working in his office for as long as I wished. He said that he saw no real need for me to continue studying.

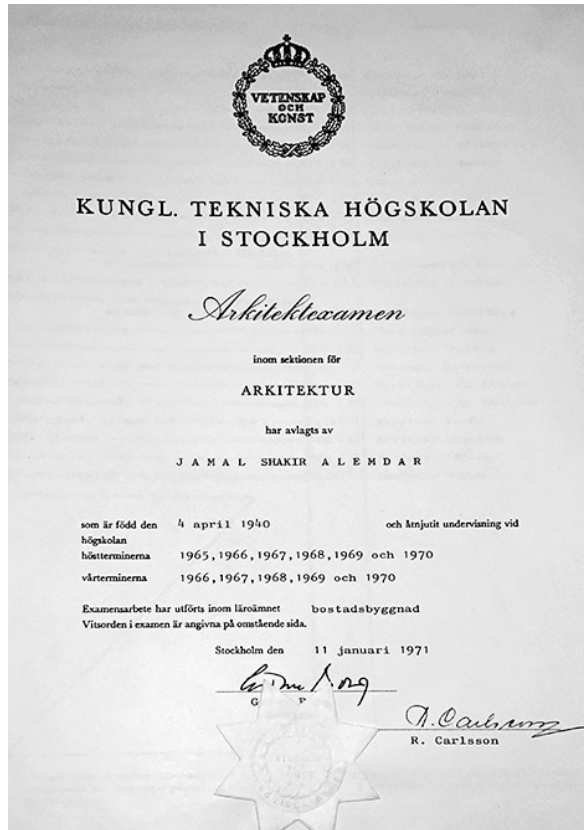
He understood, however, when I explained my situation. "The Turkish authorities imprisoned me to prevent me from becoming a qualified architect with a diploma," I said. "If I give up, they will have won, and I can't let that happen." He asked me to write a letter to the Architecture Department at the KTH (The Royal University of Technology) and promised to bring up my case at the next meeting, assuring me he would let me know the outcome.

Dr. Rastgeldi helped me draft the letter in English, with assistance from an English friend of his who worked at the BBC office in Stockholm. A few days later, Peter called me to his office to let me know that I could start next term at the university, beginning in October 1965.

Although I had studied for three years at Istanbul Technical University, my new school did not recognize the courses I had completed. They gave me two options: either start from the very beginning and finish with a master's degree in architecture, or start as a third-year student and receive a certificate stating completion of specific subjects at KTH, without qualifying as a licensed architect.

I chose the first alternative. Later, I learned that I could be exempted from attending classes for certain subjects if I passed exams arranged by the professors. Since many subjects overlapped with those I had studied

in Istanbul, I accelerated my coursework, completing the first two years in one, the next two in another, and my master's thesis in a third year—earning my master's degree in just three years.



My M.Sc. in Architecture diploma from KTH

Working at a Psychiatric Hospital

In 1967, during my exam preparations, financial constraints forced me to seek supplementary income. I struggled to cover my expenses, especially those related to my political activities and travels to meet with Kurdish Committees in various countries. To address this, I decided to work weekends at the renowned Saint Görän Hospital Psychiatric Clinic in Stockholm.

My role was to oversee patients overnight, ensuring their wellbeing and seeking immediate assistance from doctors or nurses if necessary. For this, I was paid SEK 100 per night. This not only provided financial support but also allowed me to study while the patients slept.

One weekend, I was assigned to a particularly challenging patient: a dentist who thought he was God and often exhibited aggressive behavior. He was restrained to his bed with leather straps and had not slept for two nights. As I entered his room, dressed in a white coat, I found a visibly agitated man with wide, staring eyes. Despite his confusion and nervousness, I sat down and immersed myself in my books.

He questioned my medical credentials, and I responded affirmatively, engaging in a surreal conversation about his self-proclaimed divinity. “What would you say if I told you that I am God?” he asked. I calmly assured him that if he believed he was a deity, I had no reason to doubt him. To my surprise, that simple acknowledgment seemed to calm him. He thanked me, saying, “Everyone who came before you denied it—you’re the first to believe.” As the night went on, he grew quiet and eventually fell into a deep slumber, leaving me to finish my homework in silence.

The next morning, the head nurse was astonished to find the patient at rest and inquired about my methods. When I explained the exchange, she suggested I should have confronted the patient with the truth. I responded that doing so would likely have unsettled him further. Instead, I had chosen to meet him at his level of understanding—leaving her more perplexed than the patient had been when we first met.

Brewery Days

In the summer of 1970, I graduated from the Royal Technical University in Stockholm (KTH) with a master’s degree in architecture. However, Sweden was experiencing a severe economic downturn, making it difficult to find a job. To fund my trip to the Kurdish Students Congress in Berlin, I sought employment.

I found work at the Pripps brewery, which was hiring several people to load beer crates onto trucks. When I arrived, more than fifty applicants were already in line. During my interview, the engineer was surprised to learn that I held an MSc in Architecture from KTH. Due to an old

company rule, however, he explained that he couldn't hire me as my qualifications exceeded his own.

Undeterred, I asked him to make an exception to the rule. He said that he could not, but kindly offered to introduce me to the general manager, who was also a KTH graduate—and therefore authorized to hire me. The general manager, recognizing my background, referred me to the head of the construction department. Seeing the potential value of having an architect on the team, the department manager offered me a position, which I gladly accepted—eager for any opportunity.

In time, the construction manager retired, and I was promoted to his position. During my tenure, I contributed to the brewery's architectural projects and helped several Kurdish refugees secure jobs at the factory when work was hard to come by.

My time at the brewery became a testament to life's unexpected turns—a period during an economic downturn that tested my resilience and shaped my professional growth in the most unlikely of settings.



May 1, 1966 demonstrations in Stockholm- Freedom For The Kurds

Committees to Support the Kurdish Cause

The Swedish-Kurdish Committee (SKK) was born

Despite the challenges I faced after starting my studies at KTH, I remained committed to the Kurdish cause. Feeling isolated in a country where few people were aware of the Kurdish struggle, I realized that gaining the Swedish government's support for the Kurds first required raising awareness among the Swedish public. To achieve this, I turned to journalists for help.

After a November 1965 interview in *Aftonbladet*, in which I shared my contact information, I received numerous calls, including one from Mrs. Märta Hansson, co-owner of *Natur och Kultur*, Sweden's second-largest publishing house. She expressed interest in meeting to discuss how she could support the Kurdish cause.

When we met at her well-appointed villa in Appleviken, a suburb west of Stockholm, Märta graciously offered her full backing, pledging to cover all expenses and provide publishing and meeting facilities through her company.

I proposed forming a committee of prominent Swedish figures and personalities known for their advocacy of oppressed peoples. This group would publish information, issue statements and newsletters, conduct interviews, arrange seminars, and hold press conferences. This approach would resonate more effectively with the Swedish public than direct appeals from the Kurds.

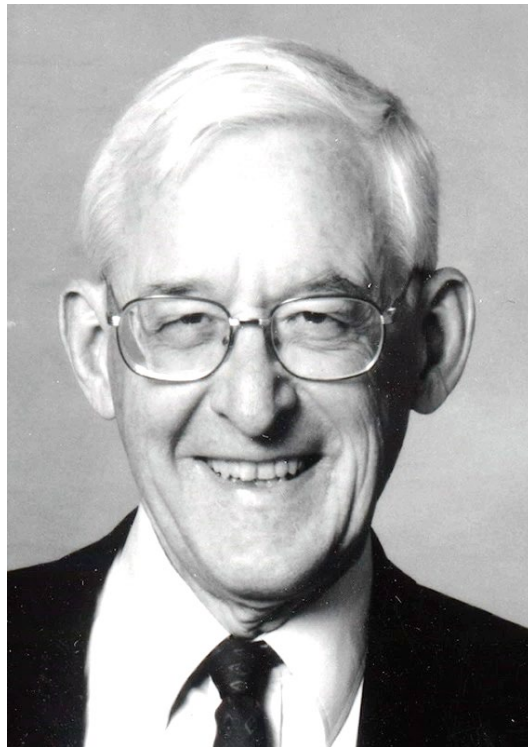
I believed that if we succeeded, we could encourage the government to take an active role in defending the Kurdish cause. Eventually, a meeting was held at *Natur och Kultur*'s offices, attended by twelve individuals: ten Swedes and two Kurds, invited by Märta Hansson and Dr. Olof G. Tandberg, Director General of the Swedish UNESCO commission.

Dr. Saladdin Rastgeldi and I were the only Kurds on the committee. The few other Kurds who were approached declined to participate, either due to a lack of interest or insufficient proficiency in English or Swedish.

At this meeting, we officially announced the establishment of the *Svensk Kurdkommittén* (Swedish-Kurdish Committee). Märta Hansson was elected president, Dr. Olof G. Tandberg vice president, and Ambassador Jan Norlander secretary. My role was to serve as a link between Sweden and Kurdistan, facilitating connections and providing information regarding the situation in Kurdistan.

Our first task was to organize a series of public events to attract media attention and inform the Swedish public. We hosted seminars featuring prominent speakers who discussed the historical and contemporary struggles of the Kurdish people, as well as various aspects of Kurdish culture. These events were well attended, drawing a diverse audience eager to learn more about our cause. Extensive media coverage followed, further amplifying our message.

Märta Hansson, leveraging her influence, arranged for several articles to be published in major Swedish newspapers. These articles shed light on the Kurdish struggle for freedom and the human rights abuses faced by Kurds in various regions. The Swedish public began to take notice, and support from human rights organizations and other groups soon followed.



Dr. Olof G Tandberg (1932-2024)
Vice president of the Swedish-Kurdish Committee (SKK)

Meanwhile, Dr. Olof G. Tandberg mobilized his extensive network to draw international attention to our efforts. By collaborating with human

rights advocates and organizations across Europe, he helped build a broader coalition in support of the Kurds. His writings and public appearances significantly boosted our visibility and credibility.

Ambassador Jan Norlander, with his extensive diplomatic experience, established formal channels of communication with Swedish government officials. He advocated for the Kurdish cause in political circles, including among parliamentarians, working to influence policy decisions and garner governmental support for Kurdish rights.

As the committee's information liaison, my role involved maintaining constant communication with contacts in Kurdistan. I ensured that the committee was kept updated on the latest developments and given firsthand accounts of the situation on the ground. This information was crucial in keeping our message accurate and compelling.

As the Swedish-Kurdish Committee became more influential, we achieved several key milestones. We successfully lobbied for Swedish parliamentary debates on the Kurdish issue, resulting in official statements condemning the oppressors of the Kurds. Our committee also facilitated humanitarian aid to Kurdish regions, providing much-needed relief such as medicine, clothing, and food to those affected by conflict and persecution.

Through our persistent efforts, we built a strong, supportive network that reached far beyond Sweden. The solidarity we fostered among Swedish academics, cultural figures, politicians, and the general public played a significant role in elevating the Kurdish cause on the international stage. Our journey demonstrated the power of unity and the impact of collective action in advocating for human rights and justice.

Dr. Salahaddin Rastgeldi, an active member of Amnesty International, played a pivotal role in our next initiative. Amnesty was already planning to send a representative to Aden to investigate the situation of Yemeni prisoners held by the British government, but lacked the funds to finance the trip. When Märta offered to finance a trip to Kurdistan, Dr. Rastgeldi immediately decided to combine both trips thanks to Märta's financial support.

The committee, or rather Märta, handled all the arrangements for Dr. Rastgeldi's journey. I contacted Idris Barzani in Kurdistan to inform the Kurdish leadership about Dr. Rastgeldi's arrival, and the news was received with gratitude.

Before his departure, the committee had a lengthy meeting with Dr. Rastgeldi, briefing him on the type of information that would resonate with the Swedish public and addressing the immediate medical and humanitarian needs in the region.

Reports had reached us that the Iraqi Army was carrying out ruthless attacks, using napalm bombs to destroy villages and agricultural fields, and even burning corpses. Carrying this weighty responsibility, Dr. Rastgeldi left, receiving a heartfelt farewell from the committee members.



Dr. Olof G. Tandberg receiving the prize of Friend of the Kurds, from Bilal Görgü, Keya Izol, and Jamal Alemdar during Newroz

Upon his return to Stockholm, Dr. Rastgeldi invited me to his flat. Deeply upset and with tears in his eyes, he recounted how Mustafa Barzani had only given him ten minutes, despite his long journey. This surprised me, as I knew Barzani to be a hospitable and humble leader. Determined to understand the reason behind it, I immediately contacted Idris, Barzani's son.

Idris explained that when Barzani warmly welcomed Dr. Rastgeldi and expressed his happiness at seeing a Kurdish doctor willing to help his people, Dr. Rastgeldi responded, "I am here as a Swedish doctor and a human being and prefer to be addressed that way only."

Disappointed, Barzani retorted, “Being a Kurd does not contradict being a human being, Doctor,” before politely excusing himself.

Nonetheless, Idris assured me that they had still taken good care of Dr. Rastgeldi, arranging all the meetings and visits he had requested. When I relayed Idris’s explanation to Dr. Rastgeldi, he admitted his mistake, later apologizing and joking about his blunder.

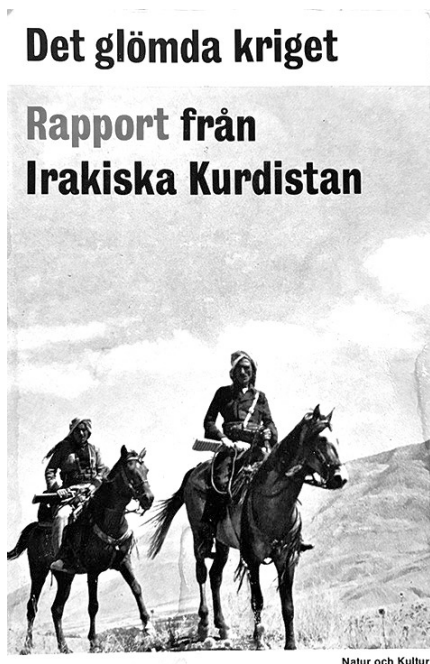


Ulla and Dr. Olof G. Tandberg

The Forgotten War

Dr. Rastgeldi had completed a manuscript titled *Det Glömda Kriget* (*The Forgotten War*) documenting his journey to Kurdistan. It was a compelling work, full of interviews with war victims, Iraqi prisoners, and photographs of devastated villages.

Märta agreed to publish it as a book. Still, Dr. Rastgeldi surprised us all by requesting time to show it to the Turkish ambassador in Stockholm, ostensibly to ensure the book contained nothing critical of Turkey.



Natur och Kultur

Det glömda kriget har sammanställts av Svenska Kurdkommittén, som bildats för att lindra den kurdiska civilbefolkningens svåra lidanden i norra Irak, där ett inbördeskrig pågår sedan sex år tillbaka. Svenska Kurdkommittén, som är politiskt neutral, arbetar i enlighet med FN:s Allmänna Förklaring om De Mänskliga Rättigheterna. Kommittén kräver att en objektiv undersökning skall företagas av FN för att fastställa om kurderna i norra Irak utsattes för folkmord.

Vidare har kommittén vänt sig till Internationella Röda Korset med värdjan om att humanitär hjälp under betryggande skydd skall sändas till den kurdiska civilbefolkningen. Bakom kommitténs båda framställningar står en rad organisationer, bl. a. SUL, Sveriges Ungdomsorganisationers Landsråd, som representerar 1,4 miljoner ungdom.

Det glömda kriget är ett lagarbete: Miljö- och människoskildringen har lämnats av den svenske läkaren S. Rastgeldi, internationellt känd för sin fräna, på uppdrag av Amnesty International utförda, Aden-rapport om övergrepp mot arabiska krigsfångar. Fil. lic. Olof G. Tandberg svarar för bakgrundsinformationen om de grymma övergrepp som företagits gentemot en bortglömd befolkningsminoritet i Främre Orienten. Jur. stud. Jan A. Nordländer, tidigare ordförande för Sveriges Studenters FN-förbund, har sammanställt litteraturförteckningen.

Det glömda kriget, som illustrerats med en rad förstklassiga fotografier, gör inte anspråk på att ge en politisk analys av läget i Irak. Den är en plädering för den enskilda människan och påvisar klart det skrikande behovet av snar humanitär hjälp åt den svårt nödlidande kurdiska civilbefolkningen i norra Irak. **Det glömda kriget** redovisar även fall av övergrepp och tortyr.

Med. dr S. Rastgeldi (Foto Eyvind Rönn)



Överskottet på försäljningen av denna bok går till humanitär hjälp åt kurderna i Irak. Boken planeras utkomma på engelska, franska och tyska.

Natur och Kultur 26:--., inb. 31:--

Det Glömda Kriget, the first SKK Report from Kurdistan

His request shocked me and the rest of the committee. When I questioned his reasoning, he explained that maintaining good relations with Turkey was essential for him because his family still lived there. This angered me even more. After enduring imprisonment and torture in Turkey without compromising my principles, it felt unjust to bow to their concerns even in Sweden. The Swedish committee members shared my exasperation.

Dr. Olof G. Tandberg, noticing my frustration, tried to ease the tension with a historical reference, "Jamal, don't get upset. Even the Great

Saladin did nothing for the Kurds; what can you expect a ‘Small Saladin’ in Sweden to do?”

Despite Dr. Rastgeldi’s request, the book was ultimately printed without the Turkish ambassador’s approval.

The Finnish-Kurdish Committee (FKK)

Dr. Olof G. Tandberg, Director General of the Swedish UNESCO commission, invited me to his residence to meet with Mr. Kalevi Sorsa, the Director General of UNESCO in Finland. Mr. Sorsa was eager to learn more about the Kurds and the Swedish-Kurdish Committee (SKK).

After the meeting, Mr. Sorsa expressed a desire to establish a similar committee in Finland. However, he noted a challenge, “There are no Kurds in Finland.” He then turned to me and asked, “Would you be willing to visit Finland and the new committee members at least once a month?” I gladly accepted his proposal.

A few weeks later, Mr. Sorsa called to ask me to attend the press conference for the inauguration ceremony of the Finnish-Kurdish Committee (FKK). The establishment of the Finnish-Kurdish Committee was met with significant interest from the Finnish public and media. Many members of the Finnish Parliament attended the press conference.

The committee members were:

- Professor Paavo Kastari (January 13, 1903 - April 27, 1991), former minister of justice in Finland, president of the FKK.
- Mr. Kalevi Sorsa (December 21, 1930 - January 16, 2004), director general of Finnish UNESCO, vice president of the FKK.
- Mrs. Jänicke, Secretary, and her husband, Mr. Jänicke, treasurer.
- Tom Grönberg (born 1941), Finnish-Swede and director general of Swedish TV in Finland.

I began making monthly trips to Helsinki to update the committee on news from Kurdistan. Finland, a fascinating country, is distinct from Sweden primarily due to its bilingual society. It is home to a Swedish-speaking community, often referred to as Finland-Swedes, constituting 6% of the total population. All signs and street names are bilingual, written in both Finnish and Swedish. There are Swedish schools and universities that

primarily serve Swedish-speaking students. This policy helps preserve the cultural identity of the Finnish-Swedish community.

A Valuable Lesson From Multi-Cultural Finland

During one of my visits, I discussed the rights of the Finnish-Swedish minority within the Finnish Constitution with Tom Grönberg, a Finnish-Swede and head of Swedish Television in Finland. When I hypothetically inquired about his stance in the event of a war between Finland and Sweden, he unequivocally stated, “Of course, I would support Finland.” Upon further questioning, he explained, “Finland is my homeland. I possess all the rights of citizenship protected by the Constitution. Not supporting Finland would be considered treason.” This principle offers a valuable lesson for many multicultural societies.

A Good Response to the Turkish Government

Another significant event involved Mr. Kalevi Sorsa, a member of the Finnish Social Democratic Party. He was elected as party leader and subsequently prime minister of Finland (1972-1975, 1977-1979, and 1982-1987), and later, president of Finland. I initially feared the committee had lost its vice president. However, I soon discovered that his commitment to the FKK and the Kurdish cause had only intensified.

The Turkish government sent a letter to the Social Democratic Party of Finland, protesting the prime minister’s membership in an organization that Turkey considers hostile. The party leadership requested that Mr. Sorsa personally respond to the letter.

Mr. Sorsa invited me to Helsinki to witness his response to the Turkish government’s letter at a specially convened press conference. The hall was packed with journalists from around the world, all eager to hear his reply, which would have significant implications for diplomatic relations between the two countries. As he entered the room, Mr. Sorsa asked, “Where is Mr. Alemdar?” He then requested my presence on the panel beside him.

Mr. Sorsa began his speech by introducing me as the representative of the Kurds in Scandinavia and the Nordic countries. He then addressed the Turkish government’s protest, stating that the Turkish Foreign Office had sent a letter to his party, objecting to his membership in the Finnish-Kurdish Committee. He then said that his response was simple, “Some

people spend their leisure time collecting stamps, others collect maps, and others raise dogs. In my spare time, I dedicate myself to defending a nation and people, Kurdistan and the Kurds, who have long been wronged. My personal pursuits are of no concern to the Turkish government.” With that, he left the conference Hall.



Kalevi Sorsa (1930-2004) former president of Finland and vice president of the Finnish-Kurdish Committee (FKK)

The Tandbergs: guests of Masoud Barzani:

In the autumn of 2004, I requested that Mr. Masoud Barzani, the Kurdish leader, extend an invitation to Mr. Sorsa and Dr. Olof G. Tandberg and their wives to visit Kurdistan as his guests, as a gesture of gratitude for their support. He readily agreed, and I proceeded to prepare the invitation letters. When I reached out to Mr. Sorsa, his wife, Elli Sorsa, sorrowfully informed me that Kalevi had passed away the day before. She expressed her regrets and explained that she could not visit Kurdistan without him.

Dr. Olof G. Tandberg and his wife, Ulla, accompanied me to Kurdistan. During our first meeting with Masoud Barzani, President of the Iraqi Kurdistan Region, I introduced Olof as a genuine friend of the

Kurdish people who had provided invaluable support. Barzani responded, “Mr. Tandberg is not just a friend but a true ally of the Kurdish people. He stood by us during our darkest hours. Today, we have many friends, but few like him.” Olof was visibly moved by Barzani’s words and expressed his gratitude repeatedly.

The Birth of the Norwegian-Kurdish Committee

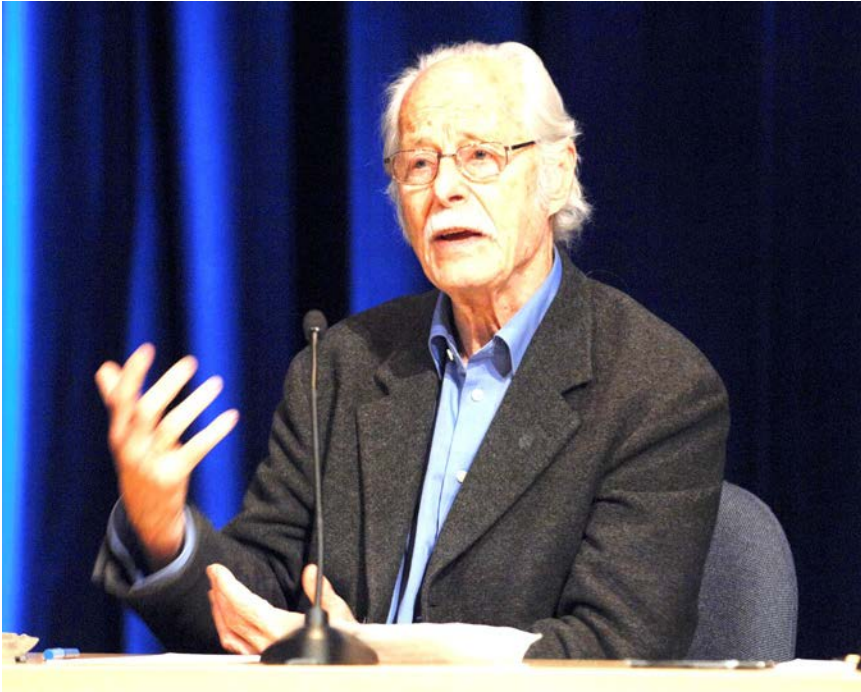
Norway has always held a special place in my heart as a potential platform for sharing Kurdish news and information. The nation’s active role in international affairs, exemplified by the Nobel Peace Prize ceremony in Oslo, made it an ideal choice. However, here too, my initial challenge was the complete absence of a Kurdish community in the country.

By chance, I learned that Professor Fredrik Barth had visited Iraqi Kurdistan in the late 1950s and had written the book *Principles of Social Organization in Southern Kurdistan* (1953).

Professor Barth was the founder of the Department of Social Anthropology at the University of Bergen in Norway. I reached out to him, and he was delighted to connect with a Kurd who was advocating the Kurdish cause in Scandinavia. I shared details about our committees in Sweden and Finland, along with our ongoing activities. He extended an invitation to visit Bergen University to conduct a seminar on the Kurdish people, an opportunity I eagerly accepted.

The seminar was well attended by both students and faculty. During the event, I had the pleasure of meeting Dr. Torstein Kungslie, a veterinarian with a keen interest in supporting the Kurdish cause. He offered to help establish the Norwegian-Kurdish Committee in Oslo, a task he ultimately took on.

Given my limited resources as a student, I collaborated with Dr. Kungslie to devise a plan in which the committee would arrange invitations from schools and other institutions for me to give lectures on the Kurdish people. The committee was formed, with Dr. Torstein Kungslie serving as president, and journalist Torid Trondheim as secretary. Trondheim also led the committee, which comprised several journalists and lawyers.



Professor Fredrik Barth (1928-2016)

During my summer breaks at university, I would visit Norway to raise awareness about Kurdish culture and the political situation in Kurdistan.

The materials I brought with me for lectures at Norwegian schools and institutions included:

1. Photographs and slides showcasing Kurdistan's landscapes, Peshmerga fighters, Kurdish women, homes, and villages.
2. Traditional Kurdish clothing, encompassing both Sorani and Badi-nan styles.
3. Kurdish music and song recordings to enhance lecture presentations.
4. Books and magazines in English covering various aspects of Kurdish life, such as religion, history, and geography.
5. A detailed map of Kurdistan to illustrate its geographical unity despite its political divisions.

These visits often involved spending time in classrooms, giving me the opportunity to explore many small towns and villages throughout Norway. I will always cherish the hospitality, warmth, and genuine interest shown by the people I met along the way.

Through my work with the committee, I had the honor of meeting the Norwegian Prime minister, members of parliament, and journalists. These interactions contributed to fostering a positive public perception of the Kurdish people, their culture, and their struggles.

The Icelandic-Kurdish Committee

When I first visited Iceland, I was fortunate to connect with Professor Erlendur Haraldsson, an Icelandic journalist who had traveled to Southern Kurdistan and met Mustafa Barzani in the early 1960s. His account of this journey, originally published in Icelandic as *Með uppreisnarmönnum í Kúrdistan* (*With the Revolutionaries in Kurdistan*) and later translated into German as *Land im Aufstand: Kurdistan* (*Kurdistan: A Land in Revolt*), sparked my interest in Iceland.

I reached out to Professor Haraldsson to discuss my plans for establishing an organization in Iceland. He enthusiastically supported my initiative and invited me to Reykjavik to meet with government officials, politicians, academics, and journalists.

In 1969, I arrived in the intriguing city of Reykjavik. Stepping out of my hotel at 7 p.m. I was surprised to find the streets deserted and all the shops and restaurants closed. The hotel concierge explained that the city's residents congregated in a single glass dome for shopping and dining.

The next day, I had a lengthy interview with Icelandic TV and met with the foreign minister. We also attempted to visit the president of Iceland, but he was out visiting a friend. The housekeeper kindly offered us a seat to wait for his return, but due to our tight schedule, Professor Haraldsson suggested we visit him another time.



Professor Erlundur Haraldsson (1931-2020), president of the Icelandic-Kurdish Committee (IKK)

Professor Haraldsson stayed actively involved in the Icelandic-Kurdish Committee (IKK) and kept me updated on its activities. In exchange, I provided updates on the Kurdish committees and organizations through my communications with Dr. Mahmoud Osman, who oversaw international relations at the Kurdistan Democratic Party.

Professor Haraldsson's dedication and enthusiasm were instrumental in the formation and activities of the IKK. His consistent communication and updates ensured that the IKK remained aligned with the broader Kurdish cause and maintained strong ties with the Kurdistan Democratic Party. This collaboration not only raised awareness in Iceland about Kurdish issues but also garnered significant international support, particularly during my visit to the United Nations in 1974.

In Reykjavik, I had the opportunity to meet with several influential figures, including prominent politicians, academics, and media representatives. They all expressed a keen interest in the Kurdish struggle for self-determination. The Icelandic media gave the Kurdish cause extensive coverage, amplifying our message. I was overwhelmed by the support and curiosity of the Icelandic people, who were eager to learn more about Kurdistan and its culture.

One of the highlights of my visit was a lecture at the University of Reykjavik. The event was well attended, with students and faculty showing

great interest in Kurdish history, culture, and the current political situation. The lively discussions that followed underscored the genuine curiosity and solidarity of the Icelandic people.

Professor Haraldsson's role extended beyond coordination; he was a catalyst for deeper understanding and engagement between the Kurdish and Icelandic communities. His efforts in translating Kurdish literature and promoting Kurdish culture were invaluable. This cultural exchange helped bridge gaps and foster a sense of shared humanity and purpose.

Strong support for the Kurds across the Nordic region

Thanks to the efforts of the SKK in Sweden, the FKK in Finland, the NKK in Norway, and the IKK in Iceland, we established a strong network of support for the Kurdish cause in the Nordic region. These committees played a pivotal role in raising awareness, garnering support, and shaping public opinion. They served as vital platforms for sharing the Kurdish narrative and advocating for our rights on the international stage.

Reflecting on these experiences, I am filled with gratitude for remarkable individuals like Dr. Olof G. Tandberg, Mrs. Märta Hansson, Mr. Kalevi Sorsa, Professor Fredrik Barth, and Professor Erlendur Haraldsson, whose support and collaboration were crucial to our success. Their dedication to our cause and their belief in the importance of cultural exchange and understanding helped pave the way for a stronger, more united effort in advocating for Kurdish rights.

As we continue to work towards our goals, the foundations laid by the SKK, FKK, NKK, and IKK remain essential. They remind us of the power of solidarity, the importance of cultural diplomacy, and the impact that dedicated individuals can have in advancing the cause of a people striving for recognition and justice.

Why Märta Hansson Cared So Deeply About the Kurdish Cause

Many people wondered why Märta Hansson was so deeply committed to the Kurdish cause. I, too, carried this question with me for a long time—until one particular day when I finally gathered the courage to ask her directly.

I was visiting Märta and her husband, Johan, when I raised the question that had lingered in my mind for years. What made her so interested in the Kurdish cause?



Märta Hansson (1908-1967) President of Swedish-Kurdish Committee

She smiled knowingly and said, “I knew you would ask me that one day.” Then she added softly, “The answer lies in my first love—a Kurd.”

She went on to explain that when she was a teenager, her father served as the Swedish ambassador in Cairo, during the final years of Ottoman rule in Egypt. Every summer, she would travel there to visit him. It was during one of those visits that she met a remarkable young man named Hilmi Beg, who at the time was the third secretary at the Ottoman embassy.

Märta fell deeply in love with him, though her feelings were never returned in the way she had hoped. Hilmi Beg would gently but firmly tell her, “I cannot marry a Christian girl,” despite her persistence. Still, a strong bond formed between them. As their relationship deepened, Hilmi confided in her about his life and revealed that he was a Kurd. He spoke

openly of how the Ottoman authorities treated the Kurds harshly and unjustly, and he described his own involvement in advocating for the Kurdish cause.

Although their paths eventually went different ways, Hilmi Beg never left Märta's heart or mind. It was through him, she told me, that her enduring desire to help the Kurdish people was born.

Curious, I asked her when he had passed away. To my surprise, she replied, "He is still alive and lives in Cairo." When I asked why he had never visited her in Stockholm, she said simply, "He believes it would not be appropriate, since I am a married woman."

Intrigued, I suggested that I might contact him on behalf of the Swedish Kurdish Committee. Märta's eyes lit up instantly. "What a wonderful idea!" she exclaimed.

I called Hilmi Beg and explained the work of the committee, telling him that Märta herself was its chairperson. He was genuinely delighted and agreed to visit Stockholm as a guest of the committee. Märta arranged his plane ticket, and a week later he arrived at Arlanda Airport, where she had secured a VIP reception room.

I will never forget the tears of joy in Märta's eyes when she was reunited with him, with Johan standing quietly by her side. It was evident that she still held deep affection for Hilmi Beg.

We accompanied him to the Grand Hotel in Stockholm. Though advanced in age and physically frail, his mind remained remarkably sharp. During conversations about the Kurds and the committee's work, he made a striking remark, "I have often wondered why God placed the Kurds in a land surrounded by some of the most primitive and cruel nations—Turks, Arabs, and Persians."

Hilmi Beg spent a full week in Stockholm, much of it in the company of Märta and Johan. It was a reunion marked by memory, affection, and a shared devotion to a cause that had been born decades earlier—out of love, loss, and enduring solidarity.

A Hungarian Perspective: Sweden's Paradox of Prosperity

I heard an amusing anecdote about my move to Sweden while taking temporary refuge in Athens under the auspices of the Swedish embassy. During my two-week stay, I visited a United Nations refugee camp, where

I encountered individuals from diverse backgrounds seeking resettlement. A conversation with an elderly Hungarian, fluent in Turkish, profoundly influenced my perception of my chosen destination, Sweden.

Upon learning of my impending journey, the gentleman expressed strong disapproval, stating, “Never reside in a nation that has not mastered the art of winemaking. They neglect the enjoyment of life and embrace excessive seriousness.” This seemingly whimsical observation proved surprisingly prescient. (I am happy to report that wine making is now emerging in Sweden.)

Sweden undeniably possesses numerous commendable attributes. The nation excels in addressing fundamental societal needs, providing a comfortable standard of living through robust education, healthcare, and social welfare systems. This commitment to ethical governance minimizes corruption and fosters a functional society focused on material wellbeing.

However, the elderly Hungarian’s critique points to a crucial deficiency: the relative neglect of life’s spiritual and social dimensions. Even with a high standard of living, many Swedes report a striking sense of loneliness and dissatisfaction. Sweden has also often been portrayed as having exceptionally high suicide rates. Still, this impression is partly explained by the country’s unusually meticulous reporting, recording, and publishing of statistics that many other societies tend to underreport or avoid altogether. It was this very openness, and the visibility it created, that once prompted Prime Minister Olof Palme to address the issue publicly, arguing that Sweden’s “high” numbers were, at least in part, a reflection of unusually accurate accounting rather than uniquely Swedish despair.

Socially, a discernible reserve characterizes Swedish interactions. Casual greetings and spontaneous conversations are uncommon, even among neighbors residing in the same building. This reticence contrasts sharply with more gregarious cultures.

Upon relocating to a Stockholm suburb after a period in London, I sought to challenge this social dynamic. I hosted a dinner for my neighbors, intending to foster a sense of community. The event revealed that many had never formally met, despite years of proximity.

My First Journey to Liberated Kurdistan

In 1968, student revolutions swept across Europe, sending shockwaves through Swedish universities, including KTH. Inspired by the uprisings—especially those in Paris—we began challenging the administration and professors, demanding reform in university policies and program structures.

As my close ties with a few so-called revolutionary students grew, so did their passion for the Kurdish cause. One of them, my classmate Hans Hågström, expressed a keen interest in accompanying me on a fact-finding mission to Kurdistan.

In early March 1968, I began preparing for our journey, my first trip to liberated Kurdistan from Stockholm. Our route took us through St. Petersburg, where we boarded a train to Tehran. From there, we crossed the Iraqi-Iranian border illegally at Haji Omran, finally entering liberated Kurdistan.

The train journey was a captivating experience, lasting five nights and six days aboard the famous Orient Express. We departed from St. Petersburg, passing through Moscow, Tbilisi (Georgia), Yerevan (Armenia), Baku (Azerbaijan), and finally arriving in Tehran (Iran).

We had a chance encounter with a Russian professor who boarded the train in Moscow, traveling to Baku. Fortunately, he spoke English, and we became good friends. He patiently answered our many questions about the journey and the regions we were passing through.

At every station, the atmosphere was unique. Passengers from diverse backgrounds, dressed in different attire, boarded the train, each bringing the distinct cuisine of their region. They often graciously invited us to join them and share their meals.

One evening, in the dining car, a gentleman who had boarded at the Georgian border joined our table. Although he could not speak English, his intense gaze revealed his fascination with our conversation in Swedish, an unfamiliar language to him. Eventually, he mustered the courage to ask if we were English. I shook my head and replied, “I’m a Kurd from Kurdistan.” At the sound of “Kurdistan,” his face lit up, and he exclaimed in Kurdish, “But I am a Kurd too!” He went on to explain, “I am an Ezidi from Georgia.”

Suddenly, I became a Holy Man

Upon learning that I was from Iraqi Kurdistan, he inquired about Sheikh Tahsin Ezidi, the spiritual leader of the Ezidis worldwide, who also resided in Iraqi Kurdistan. I replied, "Sheikh Tahsin is my friend, and I often meet him in London." Overwhelmed with joy and reverence, he embraced me and kissed my hands and clothes, seeing me as a holy person simply because I had met Sheikh Tahsin. As the train neared Tbilisi station, our Ezidi friend insisted that I disembark to meet his father, who would be very disappointed if he knew he had missed the chance to meet a friend of their revered leader. It took considerable effort to convince him to let me continue without meeting him.

A few years later, when I met Sheikh Tahsin in London, where he was a refugee, I shared this encounter with him. He chuckled and remarked, "Yes, the Ezidis from that part of the world can be quite fervent in their beliefs."

In Armenia, Even Maps Belong to the Military

As our journey continued, the train passed through Armenia, offering breathtaking views of Mount Ararat, which loomed near the Turkish border. The landscape unfolded before us in vibrant colors, with diverse trees and lush vegetation.

Upon arriving in Yerevan, the capital of Armenia, we had a few hours to spare. I hurried to a cartography shop in search of a souvenir map of Armenia. The shopkeeper showed me a colorful, beautifully illustrated map. Still, I noticed that the railway was depicted as running through the heart of Armenia, far from the Turkish border and Mount Ararat. Curious about the discrepancy, I asked if it was an old map and mentioned my recent experience of the railway running parallel to the Turkish border. The shopkeeper explained that obtaining an accurate map required a military authority license, which was beyond his reach.

Yerevan seemed to be a tranquil city, its inhabitants carrying an air of seriousness. Smiles were rare; I only saw them when they encountered my towering Swedish friend, Hans, who was an impressive 192 cm tall. Upon seeing him, their faces would instantly light up with a smile, followed by a comment in the Armenian language. Interested in their reaction, I asked our Russian professor, who explained that they were making jokes about

his height, asking things like, “How’s the weather up there?” or “Watch out, an airplane is coming!” At least Hans managed to bring a little levity to their lives, if only for a moment.

I spotted a colossal statue of a lady wielding a sword, standing atop a high hill overlooking Yerevan. It was the Goddess of Justice, which had replaced an equally grand statue of Stalin that had been removed during de-Stalinization efforts in the Soviet Union.

A Nice Evening with Azeri Students

Upon reaching Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan, we had to change trains to continue our journey to Tehran. This required an overnight stay in a government hotel in Baku, the only accommodation available to foreigners.

Early that evening, as I wandered through Baku, the city felt strangely deserted, with shops closed and streets empty. The hotel receptionist explained that it was March 8th, International Women’s Day, a public holiday. In contrast to the start of our journey, the weather in Azerbaijan had grown warmer.

I stumbled upon a lively wine bar at the end of the main street. Intrigued, I found it was full of happy young people singing and enjoying themselves. Some were in line to receive a stamped piece of paper, which they could exchange for a set of seven glasses of wine, each filled with a different color of wine, creating a beautiful spectrum of hues.

Unfortunately, the lady at the bar did not understand my Istanbul-accented Turkish, as she only spoke Armenian. Sensing my predicament, two young Azeri students approached, eager to assist with translation. They insisted on paying for my order, keen to show their hospitality to a guest, most likely assuming I was from Turkey. They were curious to hear my Istanbul Turkish dialect and saw it as an opportunity to learn more about Istanbul and Turkey.

During our conversation, they shared an interesting fact about a Soviet policy under which approximately 2,000 young, single Russian women were sent to each Soviet republic every year. The goal was to foster assimilation and create a more homogeneous Soviet nation. In Azerbaijan, this policy had a significant impact, as approximately 90% of Russian women married Azerbaijani men. In contrast, nearly 100% of those sent to Armenia returned unmarried. The Azeri students explained that Islamic traditions made it difficult for young Azeri men to find Azeri girlfriends,

while the situation was different in Armenia. They also noted that Armenia had a stronger sense of national identity than Azerbaijan.

As the night came to an end, the Azeri boys insisted on escorting me back to the hotel. When we reached the entrance, two undercover Soviet policemen intervened, arguing with the boys in Russian. Sensing the tension, I asked what was happening. They explained that it was against the rules for them to interact with foreigners.

They urged me to go inside and assured me they could handle the situation. Reluctantly, I went in, leaving the Azeri boys to face the Soviet police alone. Once inside my room, I couldn't shake my concern for them. Their genuine kindness and willingness to help a stranger had left a lasting impression.

In Tehran

The next morning, we boarded the train bound for Tehran with excitement and apprehension. As we neared the Iranian border, the landscape transformed dramatically. The lush green landscapes of the Caucasus slowly gave way to the arid, mountainous terrain of northern Iran.

Upon arriving in Tehran, I was immediately struck by the city's vibrant energy, a stark contrast to the quiet Soviet cities I had passed through. Hans and I made our way to Hotel Central on Lalezaru Street, a centrally located establishment. Here, we were to meet Shamsaddin Mufti, a Kurdish representative from Erbil, also known as Amir Qasemi. A lawyer by profession and a member of a distinguished Erbili family, Mufti would help guide us through the necessary procedures to reach Kurdistan.

We were instructed to prepare for an early departure the following morning, joining a convoy of two military jeeps and three Peshmerga fighters. Our journey would take us to Rezaiyye (Urmia), then to Khane (Piranshahr), and finally to the Iranian-Iraqi border. From there, we would continue on foot into Iraqi Kurdistan, where another convoy would take us to Nawpirdan, the headquarters of the Kurdish leadership.

A Change of Plans for Hans

With our itinerary set, we had a full day to explore Tehran. However, Hans, usually so animated, was unusually quiet. That evening, he surprised me with a sudden change of heart. He announced that he would no longer be coming with me to Kurdistan, citing his responsibilities as a

father of two and the inherent risks involved. It seemed that the revolutionary spirit so evident in Stockholm was tempered by the realities of the situation on the ground.

A Surprise Visit to My Old Roommate

Disappointed, I bid Hans farewell and continued my journey alone. Leaving Tehran the following morning, I arrived in Piranshahr by evening. As we drove through Urmia's main street, a sign caught my eye: Hashemi Pharmacy. It reminded me of an Iranian friend from Istanbul University who often spoke of his father's pharmacy in Urmia and his aspirations to work there as a pharmacist after graduation. Seizing the opportunity, I decided to pay him a surprise visit.

Upon entering the shop, I was warmly greeted by Murteza, who was overjoyed to see me. He insisted that I join him for dinner at his house, along with my Peshmerga friends. Warmth and shared memories shaped the evening, along with an easy camaraderie. The next day, I set out towards the border. Once on the Kurdish side, I descended the hill on foot, suitcase in hand. As I reached the main road, a military vehicle was waiting to take me to the headquarters of the Kurdish leadership in Nawpirdan.

In Liberated Kurdistan

The KDP leadership gave me a warm welcome, in particular Dr. Mahmoud Osman, head of the Executive Bureau and a key figure in the revolution's political affairs and foreign relations. Despite his demanding schedule, Dr. Osman, a devoted physician, managed to balance his political duties with his medical practice. He visited families facing health or social hardship, made rounds at clinics across the liberated region, and treated patients wherever he went. He was also entrusted with the health of Mullah Mustafa Barzani, the Kurdish leader, and his family.

I was invited to share a tent with Dr. Osman on the river's edge, tucked beneath the trees to evade the watchful eyes of Iraqi pilots, who frequently bombed the area. Under the protection of the Peshmerga, I was treated as a guest from Europe, despite my attempts to blend in.

Dr. Osman was rarely in the tent. Leaving early in the morning and returning late at night, his days were filled with a flurry of activities: tending to patients, attending political meetings, and overseeing daily affairs. Late in the

evening, he would make his way to the Barzani Headquarters to brief Mullah Mustafa Barzani on the day's events.

Dr. Osman's dedication and resolve were reflected in his humble lifestyle. Despite his demanding schedule, he shared meals with the Peshmerga, relying on their kitchen for sustenance.

Incredibly, within just six months, he taught himself French using only books and tapes, becoming fluent enough to converse with French-speaking visitors—a testament to his relentless determination and sharp intellect.

I learned that Dr. Osman earned a meager salary of one dinar per month, the same as a Peshmerga. He saved diligently for six months to afford a new Peshmerga uniform, which cost six dinars, choosing a life of frugality in complete devotion to the Kurdish cause.

After a few days in Nawpirdan, I received news that my family had arrived from Erbil. Excited to finally see them after seven long years, I arranged for them to stay in a small guesthouse in Choman, where they would be safe under the watchful eyes of the Peshmerga.

A Tour in Liberated Kurdistan

Two days after my family had returned to Erbil, I approached Dr. Osman, requesting permission to tour villages and small towns under Peshmerga control. My goal was to connect with the locals, share information about our activities abroad, and let them know about the support they had from people in Europe. Three horses were arranged for the journey. A young teacher named Freydun Abdul Qadir accompanied me, along with a Peshmerga guard.

The villages we visited were scattered but not far apart. Most of the inhabitants were farmers, and each village had an Agha, the head of the community. The Agha's house served as a gathering place and guesthouse, offering free room and board for up to three days to any passing stranger. This tradition was a testament to the people's hospitality and open-heartedness.

We set off in the morning on a journey through breathtaking landscapes. Freydun, well versed in the villages' customs and traditions, ensured a warm welcome wherever we went.



During touring liberated Kurdistan, enjoying fresh spring water 1968



Touring liberated Kurdistan on a mule



My Kurdistan tour companion Freidun Abdulkadir and our bodyguard 1968



With a peshmerga guard during the tour in liberated Kurdistan, August 1968

When Sweden Came Up in a Kurdish Village

In Grd Meyter, a relatively large village with well-built houses, a small health clinic, and an office of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), I requested a meeting with the villagers. I hoped to engage in meaningful conversations, exchange ideas, and update them on our work abroad for the Kurdish people and Kurdistan.

THE KURDISTAN DEMOCRATIC
PARTY
(The Politbureau)
Gelula-Kurdistan

Gelula: 19th November, 1968

LETTER OF REPRESENTATION

The Politbureau of the Kurdistan Democratic Party has nominated Mr. Jamal Alemdar (an architect by profession, and a member in the board of the European Organization of the Kurdistan Democratic Party), to the office of full power representative of our party in the Scandinavian Countries; by which he is entitled to contact any party or political organization, to attend their public meetings, conferences, and general discussions; to accept any invitation or private call on behalf of the K.D.P. as his formal representative; to sign any message or communiqué with any such bodies. In short he is vested with every authority which enables him to perform these duties.

He is authorized further, to form committees for collecting funds or accepting any sort of aid for war victims, and ask the same from other organization.

With best regards

The Politbureau Of The Kurdistan
Democratic Party



Letter of authorization to assign me represent KDP in Europe

COMMAND COUNCIL OF THE
REVOLUTION OF
IRAQI KURDISTAN
Gelala - Kurdistan

^ ^ in
Gelala in
18th, November, 1968

INSTRUMENT OF REPRESENTATION

This is to certify that Mr. Jamal Alendar is our representative in the Scandinavian Countries.

We hereby acknowledge


that Mr. Jamal Alendar (an architect by profession) is our representative in the Scandinavian Countries . He is authorised to practice the power of presenting our national cause, to the Scandinavian peoples by public statements , press conferences , or by locally organizing or asking the help of various societies and organisations, to the purpose of accepting or collecting funds and any kind of aid for our victims (wounded , invalids, refugees and the like) who suffered brutally from an unjust war waged by the Iraqi military clique, upon our peaceful nation.

He is further authorised to approach any of the Scandinavian Governments , either formally or privately on behalf of purposes above mentioned or any other design he finds fit ad libitum.

He may also seek the aid of dignitaries and other political figures in these countries for promoting our national campaign.

To this effect we issued this Instrument of Representation .

with the deepest regards


Mustafa Barzani
President of the Command Council
of the revolution



Official letter of authorization issued by Mustafa Barzani to me as representative of the Kurdish Revolution in Europe

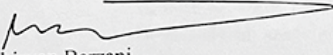
Kurdistan Region
Council of Ministers
Prime - Minister

هه‌ریڤمی کوردستان
سه‌رۆکایه‌تی نه‌نجومه‌نی وه‌زیران
سه‌رۆک وه‌زیران

Date: 2003-09-23

Authorization

This is to certify that, Mr. Jamal Alemdar, holder of Swedish passport No: 23761416, is authorized by the Kurdistan Regional Government Iraq, to contact international companies, business authorities and finance institutions, who are interested to conduct work and develop projects in Iraqi Kurdistan Region, in order to negotiate deals, and contracts with the companies, and organize the logistics for their work in the Region.


Nechirvan Barzani

Nechirvan's authorization letter

Around 50 people attended the meeting, and their excitement upon meeting a visitor from Europe was apparent. They were surprised to hear me speaking Kurdish, and I explained that I was a Kurd, born and raised in Kurdistan for 18 years before studying abroad. I shared the purpose of my visit: to inform them about the support we had received from people in Europe, hoping to boost their morale.

A question that came up was whether the outside world truly understood the plight of the Kurds, the atrocities they faced, and the ongoing airstrikes from the Iraqi regime. I reassured them that our work in Europe was focused on raising awareness of the Kurdish cause and their suffering. Many countries, including Sweden, have sympathized with the Kurdish people. I pointed out that a substantial amount of medicine had arrived from Sweden and was now in their village clinic, a tangible sign of the support they were receiving.

Throughout the meeting, our sense of connection and solidarity grew stronger. The villagers expressed gratitude for our efforts and vowed to continue fighting for their rights to build a better future for the Kurdish people.



With a group of Peshmerga in Mawet, 1968

During the village gathering, one man spoke with heartfelt gratitude about the people of Sweden. He was eager to know more about who they were, where they lived, and what drove their generosity. He marveled that, despite the great distance, it was the Swedes who had sent vital medicine

to Kurdistan—while neighboring countries had done nothing. To him and many others, such compassion from afar was truly remarkable.

Another man, guided by religious conviction, asked whether the Swedes were Muslims. When told they were Christians, he frowned and argued that Muslims should not accept help from non-Muslims. I responded by pointing out that while Sweden had sent medicine, food, and clothing, our fellow Muslims in Iraq were sending bombs and destruction. I asked how that could possibly be fair?

A heated discussion followed, some siding with the first speaker, others with the second. The local KDP representative eventually stepped in to calm the room. Quoting the Quran, he reminded us that God is not the God of Muslims alone, but of all humankind—and that judgment over good and evil belongs only to Him. His words eased the tension, and the gathering slowly settled into peace again.

A Moment at Gunpoint

During a stop on our journey, we reached a village perilously close to the Iraqi army's front lines. Before departing that evening, we were asked to leave our horses behind and continue in an Iraqi military jeep that had recently been seized. With a Peshmerga driver and two guards, we set off. Unbeknownst to us, another Peshmerga unit—unaware that their comrades had taken the vehicle—mistook us for Iraqi soldiers on patrol, deceived by the jeep's Iraqi registration plates.

They followed us, and at a strategic moment, we suddenly found ourselves surrounded by ten armed Peshmerga fighters. With their guns pointed at us, they ordered us to raise our hands. We complied, urgently insisting that we were their own people, not the enemy.

They shone a bright light in our faces, and recognizing our driver, they quickly apologized. They blamed the driver for not informing them about our journey. We thanked them for their vigilance, which gave us a sense of safety and security.



With school children and their teacher in Mawet, 1968

Abdul Soran: A Humorous Encounter

In the quiet August of 1968, during a visit to Mawet in the Sulaimani District, I met a man of wit and wisdom—Abdul Soran, a proud member of the Central Committee of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) from Sulaimani.



With Abdul Soran and his wife in Mawet, 1968

His anecdotes cast a nostalgic veil over the early days of the KDP. A pioneer within the party, Abdul spoke with warmth and humor, drawing us back to 1952, when the KDP was still in its infancy and often looked to the Iraqi Communist Party for guidance. Among his stories was one about a curious directive from the Communist Party's Sulaimani branch—an order to stage a protest against a military coup in a distant country: Guatemala.

Abdul recounted the impulsive response of a few young KDP members, including himself, who swiftly recruited around 15 individuals. Armed with bold written slogans condemning the military coup in Guatemala, they took to the streets of Sulaimani, fervently shouting for freedom and denouncing the military's actions. Their spirited demonstration, however, met an abrupt halt when a group of policemen intervened, leading to the arrest of three participants, including Abdul. Facing the youths, the police chief questioned their motives behind the demonstration. "We are protesting against the military coup in Guatemala," they declared.

The officer, puzzled, raised an eyebrow. "Have all of Iraq's problems been solved," he asked, "that you now choose to involve yourselves in Guatemala?" When no one replied, his irritation grew.

"Then tell me—where is Guatemala?" he demanded. Abdul said that not one of them had the faintest idea. Seeing their bewildered faces—and how they began glancing at each other, silently blaming one another for joining the protest—the officer finally snapped. He ordered them to be locked up until they could come up with the correct answer.

They were thrown into a small room with nothing but a few thin mats on the floor. The detained trio spent the night arguing, blaming each other, and regretting their hasty decision to protest for a country none of them could even place on a map.

Morning brought no relief. The officer returned, demanding to know where Guatemala was. When they still could not answer, he told them they would stay locked up even longer. Just as despair began to set in, salvation arrived in the most unexpected way—a new prisoner, who claimed to be a geography teacher, was brought to their cell.

Giving the right answer turned out to be their ticket to freedom. When the officer returned and asked the same question, they answered in unison, "Latin America." The officer, apparently satisfied, ordered their

release—but not before offering a final piece of advice, “Next time, learn about the cause before you protest for it.”

With a collective sigh of relief, they stepped out of the room. Abdul later admitted he was never sure whether the officer had sent the geography teacher on purpose—or if it was simply fate lending a hand.

A Peshmerga’s Odyssey

In August 1968, during my travels through Kurdistan, I arrived in Mawet, a small town in the Sulaimani District. There, I met Sheikh Mohammed Hersin, a leading member of the Kurdistan Democratic Party’s (KDP) Central Committee and later the private secretary to Mullah Mustafa Barzani. Over a luncheon at Sheikh Mohammed’s residence, I was introduced to his younger brother, Ahmed Hersin, a Peshmerga fighter who still bore the physical scars of battle with the Iraqi Army.

Ahmed spoke Kurdish with a curious Italian lilt that caught my ear. Sheikh Mohammed told me that he had been found after spending nearly twenty years in the care of a Romani family who had taken him as a child.

Ahmed recounted his extraordinary story in halting Kurdish. At the age of two, he had been taken from the doorstep of his family home in Sulaimani by a Romani woman and raised within her nomadic community in Italy. Believing her to be his mother, he often struggled to fit in with her lifestyle and was frequently accused of being lazy.

That reality was shattered years later when the woman who raised him was on her deathbed and confessed the truth: he was a stolen child from Iraqi Kurdistan, a member of the Hersin family of Sulaimani. The revelation threw Ahmed into deep emotional turmoil as he grappled with the loss of his true identity.

Ahmed set out on a journey to Kurdistan—a land he had never even heard of before. Traveling vast distances by foot, bus, and train, he searched tirelessly for his family. His journey eventually led him to Syria, where he was wrongly imprisoned and brutally tortured under false accusations of espionage.

After his release, Ahmed was transferred to a security prison in Baghdad. During endless interrogations, he repeated his story again and again, giving his family’s name and city of origin. At last, his case was referred

to the police in Sulaimani, where his account was translated through an interpreter.

One day, a call came from a sympathetic police chief in Sulaimani to Sheikh Mohammed Hersin, asking whether there had ever been a kidnapping in his family. Sheikh Mohammed confirmed that his younger brother, Ahmed, had been abducted two decades earlier. The chief then explained that they had an Italian-speaking man in custody—a man who called himself Tony—claiming to belong to the Hersin family. His age matched Ahmed's, and the chief asked for any identifying marks. Sheikh Mohammed remembered a small burn scar on Ahmed's left thigh, a detail their late mother had often recalled with sorrow, hoping she might see her son again one day.

The scar confirmed Ahmed's identity, prompting Sheikh Mohammed's immediate journey to the police station. The reunion was deeply emotional, marked by tears and a profound, wordless connection.

Bringing Ahmed home to his family was a profoundly moving experience—made all the more complex by the language barrier and the need to rely on gestures, memories, and the unspoken recognition that only family can share.

Years later, during the Kurdish September Revolution of 1961, Sheikh Mohammed and Ahmed fought side by side in Mawet. Ahmed proved to be a loyal and courageous Peshmerga. He often spoke about his years with the Romani community and the affection he still felt for the young women he had grown up believing were his sisters. His compassion for them reflected the lasting mark of his unusual upbringing—and the resilience of a spirit shaped by loss, discovery, and the enduring power of belonging.

Peshmerga Commander, Aziz Atrushi:

A Story of Dedication

During a visit to the liberated region of Southern Kurdistan in August 1968, I had the distinct privilege of meeting Aziz Atrushi, a remarkable young Peshmerga commander.

Atrushi exemplified profound commitment to his people's cause, having joined the revolution immediately after graduating from military

college in Baghdad. His story is just one testament to the unwavering dedication I witnessed throughout my time there.

In Mawet, Atrushi was celebrated for his heroic victories against the Iraqi army, notably against the Talabani group, which were allied with the Iraqi army to fight against Barzani's forces.

A year later, I heard that Atrushi was unfortunately martyred in a battle in which he led his troops to liberate the Penjwin district from the Iraqi army.

Following the Iraqi army's defeat and withdrawal from the town of Penjwin town, a tragic ambush by Talabani followers claimed Atrushi's life. He was killed while triumphantly parading down the town's main street. The Peshmerga forces, caught in panic, fled Penjwin and were unable to retrieve Atrushi's body.

Upon hearing the news, Jalal Talabani reportedly arrived and ordered Atrushi's body to be hung on a post in the main street for several days. This act was intended as a display of his power and to instill fear among the population.

However, an Arab Iraqi army commander, who arrived to witness the event, immediately ordered Atrushi's body to be taken down and buried with respect. The commander, who had known Atrushi during their time at the military college, denounced Talabani's actions, declaring Atrushi a brave and honorable hero.

Dr. Mahmood Osman:

A Life Dedicated to the Kurdish Cause

Born in 1938 in Sulaimani, Dr. Mahmood Ali Osman began his education there before continuing his studies in Baghdad, where he graduated as a medical doctor in the late 1950s. His life took a decisive turn in 1961, when he joined the Kurdish September 11 Revolution led by Mullah Mustafa Barzani.

Dr. Osman quickly rose to prominence within the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP). Amid internal conflicts between Mullah Mustafa Barzani and the Politburo, led by Ibrahim Ahmed and Jalal Talabani, Dr. Osman—himself a member of the Politburo—served as chief advisor to

Mullah Mustafa, head of the Executive Bureau of the Kurdish Revolution, and chairman of the KDP's Foreign Relations Committee.

As second-in-command to Mullah Mustafa, Dr. Osman played a crucial role in the Kurdish struggle until the collapse of the armed resistance following the Algiers Accord in 1975. This agreement, facilitated by the United States, effectively brought the Kurdish Revolution to an end.

Throughout the Revolution, Dr. Osman was highly regarded for his staunch dedication to the Kurdish cause, his selfless nature, and his humble lifestyle. He played a pivotal role in several key decisions.

When I first met Dr. Osman, I was struck by his intellectual breadth, strategic insight, and tireless work ethic. Mullah Mustafa Barzani relied on him more than on any other advisor, including his own sons, Idris and Masoud—a measure of the trust and influence Dr. Osman commanded at the highest levels of the Kurdish movement. His contributions to the Kurdish struggle reflected a deep and sustained commitment, as well as a capacity for leadership in moments of extraordinary pressure.

Beyond the revolutionary years, Dr. Osman continued to advocate for Kurdish rights in the Iraqi Parliament, where he worked consistently to promote peace and political stability. Despite periods of upheaval and personal hardship, his dedication to the Kurdish cause remained intact. His ability to navigate complex political landscapes, combined with firm principles in support of Kurdish autonomy, earned him lasting respect. Even in retirement, his experience and perspective continue to resonate with a new generation of Kurdish leaders and activists.

The collapse of the revolution, however, marked a turning point. Deeply affected by its failure, Dr. Osman entered a period of uncertainty. While in exile in Iran, he published a controversial booklet attributing the revolution's collapse to Barzani—a position that drew criticism given his own role as a close advisor and partner. He later founded the Kurdistan Socialist Party, though his involvement there was brief. Following the fall of Saddam Hussein, Dr. Osman was appointed to the Interim Governing Council and subsequently served as an independent member of the Iraqi Parliament. Now retired, he resides in Erbil.



Dr. Mahmood Othman, Head of the Executive Bureau of the Kurdish Revolution (1961-1975)

Meeting Mullah Mustafa Barzani for the First Time

Upon returning from my fascinating tour to the Politburo headquarters in Nawpirdan, I expressed to Dr. Osman my keen desire to meet Mullah Mustafa Barzani, the esteemed Kurdish leader. I had heard about his heroic struggle for the Kurdish people since childhood, and finally meeting him for the first time was an exciting moment.

Barzani had established his presence in a compound of around fifty tents near the village of Dilman. His tent was indistinguishable from the others. To find him, we had to locate his private secretary's tent, the only person authorized to guide visitors to the leader. Despite inquiring with various guards and villagers, we received no help, even though they recognized Dr. Mahmood.

However, a distinguished gentleman from Sulaiman, who had just met with Barzani, rushed towards our car and gestured towards Barzani's tent. "He's over there," he exclaimed.

Dr. Mahmood Osman commented, "Jamal, take note. We asked several people from the Barzani tribe about the location of Barzani's tent, yet

none were willing to help. In contrast, this gentleman, an outsider, volunteered to direct us to Barzani without hesitation. This highlights the strict discipline within the Barzani ranks, which undoubtedly contributes to the prowess of the Barzani tribe's Peshmerga fighters."

Incompetent Iraqi Pilots Cause Fear

As my visit came to an end, I considered making one last visit to Barzani. Dr. Khurshid Dizayee, a pediatrician who had recently joined the revolution, expressed his desire to accompany me.

Before making this decision, I consulted Dr. Osman, who strongly objected, citing Dr. Khurshid's well-known fear of aerial attacks. I argued that such fears should not prevent a committed revolutionary doctor from meeting his leader. Eventually, Dr. Osman gave his approval.

When I introduced Dr. Khurshid to Barzani, his name piqued Barzani's interest. "Dr. Khurshid?" Barzani responded, "I have heard of you. I understand that you harbor fear when Iraqi planes attack Kurdistan." Dr. Khurshid nodded in confirmation.



With Mullah Mustafa Barzani in Haji Umran, August, 1968

Barzani reassured him with a smile, “There’s no need to be afraid—just be cautious. After all, the Iraqi pilots are not very skilled; they often miss their targets.”

Dr. Khurshid responded wryly, “That’s exactly why I fear their attacks. They would not target me if they were competent, as I am just a doctor. But because they are so incompetent, they miss their real targets, like you and the Politburo, and the bombs end up falling on me instead.”

Barzani found humor in this observation and nodded in agreement.

Split in the Ranks of the Revolution

While visiting Kurdistan, I learned about an ongoing conflict between two factions of the KDP: the Politburo Group, led by Jalal Talabani and Ibrahim Ahmed, and the faction led by Mustafa Barzani.

The Politburo Group, under Ibrahim Ahmed’s leadership, sought to take control of the Kurdish Revolution both politically and militarily. In a meeting, they decided to expel Barzani from the KDP. The Politburo relied on its newly established relationship with the Shah of Iran, who pledged support in their impending military confrontation with Barzani.

In response, Barzani formed a new Politburo for the KDP, comprising members not aligned with Ibrahim Ahmed’s faction. He retained the presidency and appointed Habib Mohammed Karim as the secretary general.

Both factions exchanged accusations: Barzani was accused of tribalism, imposing tribal laws and values within the KDP, while the Politburo of the Ibrahim Ahmed faction was accused of clandestine dealings with foreign powers.

In a private meeting in London, Talabani described the origins of the conflict with Barzani: tensions escalated when Barzani’s forces captured Ali Hamdi, a Central Committee member from the Barzani clan, suspected of aligning with the Ibrahim Ahmed faction. Having one of their own accused of betraying the tribe was unacceptable.

Jalal Talabani, Noori Shawais, and Ali Abdullah, leaders of the Ibrahim Ahmed Politburo group, resolved to free Ali Hamdi.

Despite mediation attempts, no resolution was reached. Eventually, Noori Shawais decided to confront Barzani directly and secure Ali Hamdi’s release. Talabani, who understood Barzani’s character well, tried to dissuade

him, fearing a negative outcome. However, Shawais insisted on going alone, determined to see it through.

Eventually, Noori Shawais confronted Mullah Mustafa Barzani during a gathering of tribal chiefs, demanding the immediate release of Ali Hamdi, a fellow member of the KDP Central Committee. Barzani refused—and instead, ordered Shawais's arrest.

Jalal Talabani, familiar with how to handle Barzani in delicate situations, decided to intervene. He requested a private meeting, traveled to Barzani's headquarters, and waited nearly two hours before being admitted. When Barzani finally appeared, visibly irritated, Talabani greeted him in his own unique way: he sat down on the floor beside him, grabbed the hem of his coat, and refused to let go.

The gesture, bold and unexpectedly humorous, caught everyone off guard. Laughter rippled through the room as Talabani declared that he would not release Barzani's coat—or leave—until Noori Shawais was freed. Amused but unyielding, Barzani told him to let go; Talabani held on, milking the moment to the delight of everyone watching.

At last, Barzani gave in and ordered Shawais's release. Talabani, however, did not press for Ali Hamdi's freedom. He knew that, as a member of the Barzani tribe who had been branded a traitor, Ali's fate was already sealed. Shawais was released soon after, but Ali Hamdi was later executed.

In 1966, a military confrontation broke out between the two factions. After a brief battle, the Ibrahim Ahmed Politburo forces retreated across the Iranian border. The Shah's regime, which had initially provided them shelter in Hamadan near the border, soon recognized Barzani's strength and ordered the Politburo forces to leave Iran within 24 hours. Left with no choice, they relocated to Baghdad, where they signaled their willingness to collaborate against Barzani and the Kurdish Revolution.

A Sad Aspect of the Kurdish Revolution

When I arrived in Kurdistan, I was struck by the sharp divide within the Kurdish leadership. On one side stood the so-called intellectual faction, led by Ibrahim Ahmed and Jalal Talabani. Though they claimed to champion Kurdish rights, they were deeply entangled with the Iraqi government and military. Their cooperation went far beyond politics—they actively directed the Iraqi army in bombing Kurdish villages and killing civilians in areas under

Barzani's control. They also aided Iraqi intelligence in tracking down Barzani supporters in the cities, arrests that often ended in execution.

What made their actions even harder to grasp was the hypocrisy behind them. While these atrocities unfolded, the faction's leaders lived comfortably in Baghdad, enjoying the privileges of government support. To further undermine Barzani's movement, they even launched an Arabic-language newspaper, *Al-Noor* ("The Light"), using words as another weapon in their campaign.

On the other side, in stark contrast, was the tribal faction, led by Mullah Mustafa Barzani, which remained steadfast in its commitment to traditional Kurdish values and practices. Their leadership, deeply rooted in tribal loyalty and honor, resonated profoundly with the rural and tribal communities of Kurdistan.

Meeting Mullah Mustafa Barzani was a profoundly moving experience. He exuded a charisma and strength that commanded the respect and loyalty of his followers. Despite the modesty of his surroundings, he carried an undeniable aura of authority and an unshakable sense of *Kurdayeti*—Kurdish identity. Our conversations delved into the history of the Kurdish struggle, his vision for the future, and his reflections on the internal divisions within Kurdish society.

Through firsthand experience, I gained invaluable insight into the intricate and often painful realities of Kurdish politics. The tension between the intellectual and tribal factions was undeniable—one could either embrace intellectual leadership, which meant collaborating with the Iraqi government in Baghdad, or take up the mantle of tribal leadership, a path defined by relentless struggle, hardship, poverty, and suffering.

As our meeting with Barzani came to a close and we prepared to leave, I found myself reflecting on the intricate web of alliances, betrayals, and personal convictions that have defined the Kurdish struggle. Each conversation, every encounter, painted a vivid picture of a people caught between their quest for freedom and the harsh realities of geopolitical maneuvering.

On the Front Lines of Kurdistan

In the days that followed, I visited several key locations along the Rawanduz war front, bearing witness to the tangible effects of the ongoing conflict. The landscape, scarred by the remnants of battles, stood as a testament to the resilience of the people. Everywhere I went, there were stories of bravery and sacrifice, of families torn apart and communities working tirelessly to rebuild.

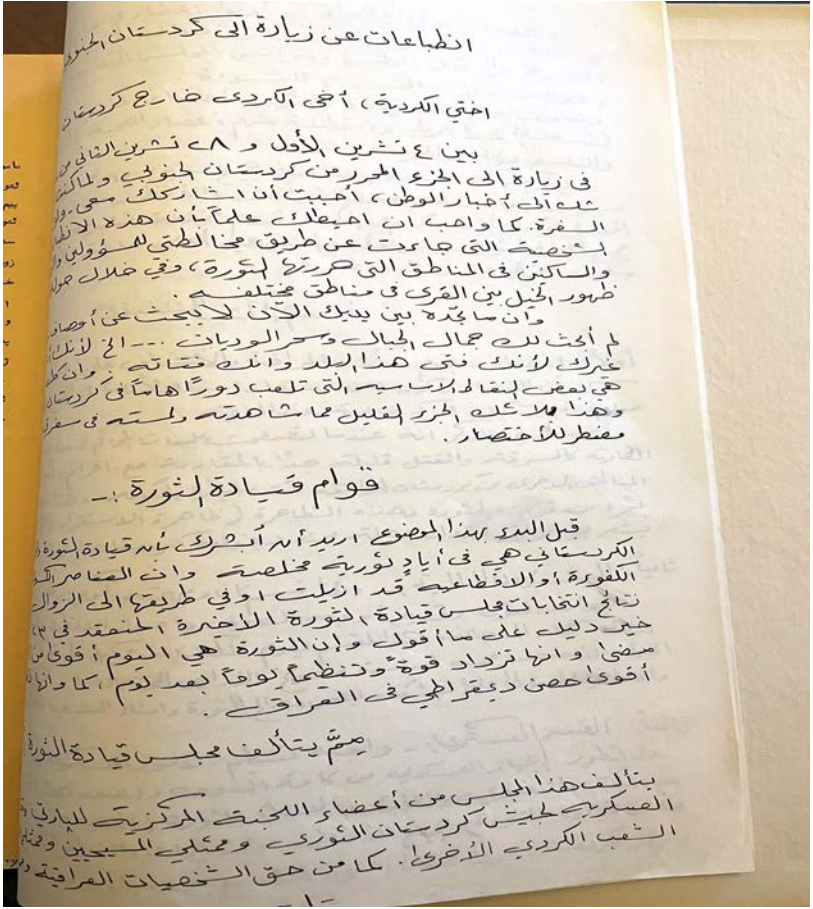
One visit stands out in my mind—a small village near Mawet. The villagers, having endured countless hardships, maintained their unshakable resolve. They spoke of their hope for a peaceful future and their determination to stand with the Kurdish Revolution, no matter the cost. It was a humbling experience that profoundly illustrated the sense of purpose and identity driving the Kurdish cause.

Looking back on my journey, I realized that the story of Kurdistan is defined by paradox. It is a land of breathtaking beauty and devastating destruction, of fierce warriors and gentle souls, of ancient traditions and modern aspirations. At the heart of it all were individuals like Mustafa Barzani and his commanders, whose leadership and vision would shape the future of their people.

As the jeep moved towards the borders, I looked out over the rugged landscape of Kurdistan, thinking about the many stories left untold. The journey had given me a profound insight into a conflict that was as much about the fight for political power as it was about the struggle for identity and self-determination.

Impressions of My Visit to Liberated Kurdistan

Here is a translation of the report I wrote in Arabic by hand about my visit, which was distributed to the members of the Kurdish Students Society in Europe.



The original handwritten impressions

Dear Kurdish sisters and brothers,
Between October 4 and November 28, 1968, I visited the liberated part of Iraqi Kurdistan. No doubt you are eager to hear news from our homeland, so I would like to share with you my impressions. These impressions are entirely my own, gathered through conversations with people in leading positions, Peshmerga fighters, and the residents of areas liberated by

the Revolution. It is a journey mainly undertaken on foot or on the backs of mules and horses.

In this report, you will not find descriptions of the wildlife or the natural beauty of the mountains and valleys of Kurdistan. As a child of the region, you already know these things better than anybody else. However, you will find some key points that play an essential role in Kurdistan and the Revolution today. Let me share with you some important moments and experiences from my journey.

The foundation of the Kurdish Revolution:

Before going further, I would like to share the good news: the Revolution and the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) are in sincere, capable hands. The incapable and feudal elements have already been removed from the leadership ranks or are on their way out. The results of the latest elections for the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC) held on September 23, 1968, serve as the most substantial evidence of what I am stating. The Revolution is stronger than ever, and it is getting more powerful and better organized with each passing day. It is now considered the strongest fortification of democracy in Iraq.

What constitutes the RCC?

The RCC consists of members of the Central Committee of the KDP, the commanders of different regions of the Revolution's army, and representatives of the Christian minority and other sections of the Kurdish people. Iraqi personalities and representatives of other political parties and minorities in Iraq also have the right to become members of the RCC, provided they are approved by the RCC, led by Mustafa Barzani, the General Commander of the Revolution.

The RCC also elects nine members of the Executive Office. Eight members are from the KDP Central Committee, while the ninth is an outsider who supports the KDP. The Executive Council is responsible for implementing all resolutions of the RCC, issuing laws and regulations to organize the various departments that manage the Revolution, and overseeing and monitoring these departments. The Executive Council is the highest authority in the Revolution when the RCC is not in session.

Departments of the Executive Council. (EC)

First: Judiciary

The judiciary monitors and inspects all judicial departments in the areas controlled by the Revolution. In liberated Kurdistan, the judiciary is independent and has the authority to establish special courts when necessary. It is worth mentioning that when I reviewed some court files, I noticed that crime rates for offenses like theft, robbery, and murder are significantly lower compared to other regions under the rule of the Iraqi regime. This is largely due to the presence of the Peshmerga forces, which instill a strong sense of security and reassurance for visitors as soon as they enter liberated Kurdistan.

Second: Financial

This body is responsible for overseeing the finances of the Revolution, regulating expenditures, and issuing orders to meet financial requirements. It also organizes special committees to manage communal land and agricultural reforms, ensuring that the interests of the Revolution and the population in the liberated areas of Kurdistan are safeguarded.

Third: Military

The Revolution strives to enhance the military capabilities of the Peshmerga by consulting with the RCC and the General Command, which is elected by the RCC, on all directives. The goal is to raise the living standards and military capabilities of the Peshmerga and to form units of the regular Kurdistan army equipped with modern weapons and training methods. These units have improved significantly compared to the early days of the Revolution. The number of Peshmerga forces continues to grow, with 3,000 newly enrolled Peshmerga registered during my time there.

There are other departments, such as Education, Healthcare, Administration, and Intelligence Services. The Revolution has introduced new training courses, including Wireless Communication and Medicare, with many students graduating to support the only two physicians working in Kurdistan.

While there, I attended the first graduation ceremony for teachers, an essential step in the fight against illiteracy. Another course for party cadres

impressed me, where prominent and experienced mentors taught them advanced subjects.

Relations between the Revolution and the Iraqi government

From the very first days after the Ba'athist takeover of Iraq, the relationship between the Revolution and the Iraqi government was completely severed. They ignored the terms of the June 29, 1966, agreement, and there were no signs of any genuine intention to implement it. Instead, they began strengthening the position of Ibrahim Ahmed, who provoked the population in Kurdish cities to help consolidate the grip of the dictatorial regime over the Kurdish people.

The Ba'athist regime did everything it could to support the Ibrahim Ahmed group, supplying them with arms and funds to fight against the Kurdish Revolution. This directly affected relations with the government, which, like previous regimes, believed it could exploit divisions between the Revolution and the mercenaries, hoping they would fight each other and weaken both sides. However, the recent battles in Qaradagh, Qara Hasan, Chwarta, and Bamo, where the Peshmerga defeated the mercenary forces and their masters and inflicted heavy casualties on them, proved otherwise.

The Iraqi government lacks the capability to wage war against the Peshmerga. Meanwhile, the Ba'athists are trying to use the mercenaries as a tool to manipulate public opinion, portraying the Kurds as supporters of the government and claiming that the Kurdish problem has been solved. In doing so, they are attempting to create a situation where Kurds fight other Kurds.

Did the government fulfill its campaign promises?

- 1- Opening of Al Sulaimani University: The opening of the university is a noble goal and a wish shared by every sincere Kurd. However, it has become a tool used by Jalal's group, not to admit students based on merit, but only those who can provide proof of supporting the group. This serves as a way for Jalal to expand his base of supporters and punish those loyal to Barzani.
- 2- Recognizing Newroz as a national day for the Kurds: Allowing Kurds to celebrate Newroz officially is seen as a positive step. However,

those unaware of the situation may not realize that Kurds have celebrated Newroz for centuries. They did not need the Ba'athists to come and offer this opportunity to the Kurds as a favor.

- 3- Establishment of the Office of Northern Affairs: This office was supposed to rebuild the destroyed infrastructure and villages, and improve the population's living standard. However, all it has done is build military garrisons, police stations, and military facilities aimed at attacking the Kurdish Revolution. The office is run by five military officers, with not a single Kurd among them.

Despite ongoing skirmishes on all fronts and occasional victories, the Revolution is not yet in a position to wage a full-scale war on the Iraqi army for two key reasons:

- A- A lack of sophisticated weapons and ammunition to conduct such a large-scale war.
- B- Insufficient time for the Revolution to fully prepare itself politically, economically, and militarily in terms of both strength and capabilities.

You may ask, why don't we start fighting them if the government is not fulfilling any of its pledges, and it is clear that they have no intentions to do so? This was one of the questions I had in mind before beginning my journey, and I believe I have found the answers. They are as follows:

War is not the only means to achieve your goals, but it should be a last resort, and only when victory is certain. At the very least, it should be a way to force the enemy to change its stance. The goal should be to establish lasting peace, rather than simply inflicting harm on the enemy or forcing them to surrender. The Kurdish Revolution must be the one to choose the time and the place for war, not the enemy.

Meanwhile, the Revolution must prioritize the wellbeing of the population in the liberated areas before considering the options of waging such a war.

The next question is: What did the Revolution gain from signing a ceasefire agreement with the government? Here are the answers:

- A- It improved the living conditions of Kurdish individuals in the liberated areas, both economically and socially.
- B- Over 3,000 people had the opportunity to join the ranks of the Peshmerga during the ceasefire.
- C- The KDP used the ceasefire period to educate the population, reorganize its ranks, and expose the true intentions of those who chose to side with the government.

While autonomy still has its challenges, it is now a reality we are living, not just a distant dream. Our people still have a long journey ahead to achieve the progress and freedom enjoyed by other liberated nations of the world.

The Revolution is working hard to develop the country, building schools and hospitals, while the other group's true nature is becoming more apparent to the Kurdish people.

Does the Revolution have shortcomings?

This is undoubtedly a question that comes to mind. And the answer is: Of course. The Revolution has many shortcomings. It would be naive to expect perfection, especially under such complicated circumstances. However, these shortcomings could be minimized if:

- There was a true revolutionary spirit among the majority of educated Kurds, many of whom were unwilling to sacrifice their comfortable living standards. As a result, most of them end up serving other nations, intentionally or not.
- Some of our society's deeply rooted habits and traditions hinder progress and were addressed, with religion being one of them.
- The lack of financing and the shortage of international aid were addressed.
- The complex geographical and political position of Kurdistan, particularly in the liberated areas, was addressed. This would reduce the limitations on the Revolution's ability to maneuver and make progress.
- The Revolution spent less time trying to neutralize the influence of Jalal's group and repairing the damage they had caused, especially considering their weakening position.

Jalal and Ibrahim Ahmed's Betrayal of the Kurdish People and the Revolution

Frankly, the actions of this group represent pure treason in every sense of the word. What they are doing amounts to selling out the rights of the Kurdish people to the Ba'ath regime, which every Kurd with even a basic sense of right and wrong widely recognizes. The regime supports the group, and they run their own prisons filled with Kurds who refuse to follow their path of serving the Baghdad regime. By serving the chauvinistic aims of the Ba'ath Party, this group has committed atrocities and executions, particularly in larger towns and cities like Erbil and Sulaimani. The level of violence reached unbearable heights just to please their masters in Baghdad.

What I am stating here is not driven by emotion or a personal hatred towards the group, but is simply part of the facts and realities I witnessed during my journey. If you have any doubts, I encourage you to visit and verify the truth of what I am saying for yourself. Below are some key facts:

- a. The regime captured hundreds of Kurds based on information provided by the group.
- b. The salaries of group members have been increased recently as a reward for their loyalty and commitment to fighting against the Revolution and its supporters.
- c. The Ba'ath regime ordered the former mercenaries (Kurdish tribes fighting alongside the Iraqi Army against the Revolution) to join the group and follow its orders. These mercenaries are referred to as Faris (Knights). At the same time, those in the group are called Faris Mumtaz (Excellent Knights), as indicated on their IDs. However, some members of these tribes refused to join the group and instead joined the Revolution, expressing remorse for their previous actions.

During my travels in the Qaradagh area of Kurdistan, I encountered six Arab commando soldiers wearing Kurdish clothing, captured by the Peshmerga. They had been fighting side by side with the group and claimed that they, and many other Arab soldiers, were supporting the group under orders from the Iraqi military command.

The government also appointed several leaders within the group to high positions in towns and cities under Iraqi control. For example, Agis Siddiq was appointed Governor of Amadiyye, and Mohammed Amin Faraj was

appointed Governor of Erbil. However, Faraj could not assume his role for three months due to fears of the local population's anger. Similarly, Sheikh Muhammed Amin, a primary school teacher, was appointed Governor of Halabja. When he took office, he had to be protected by tanks and MiG fighter jets.

The daily newspaper *AL Noor*, if you read it, serves Ba'ath's chauvinistic ideology even more than official Ba'ath publications. Simply reading it is enough to reveal the extent of their alignment. The group has now become entrenched in the swamp of treason.

My dear brothers and sisters, I am still struggling to believe what I witnessed regarding the stance of Jalal's group, especially in contrast to what we once heard about their heroic position during the Revolution. Unfortunately, what I am telling you is the truth. We must expose the true face of this group, as it can no longer hide behind bright titles like "Partisans," "the intellectual faction," or the "Kurdish Taliá (Pioneers)." They've become nothing more than servants of the Ba'athists—and of the dinar.

Indeed, we must be realistic. Accusing someone of treason is not an easy matter. However, when I say that the group's behavior can only be described as treason, it is not merely a difference of opinion. You can disagree with someone working for the same cause, but there is no longer room for dialogue when you switch sides to the enemy. They should be considered as part of the Ba'ath and treated accordingly.

I met many who responded to the Revolution's general amnesty and who returned to its ranks, disproving the lies spread by the group that the Revolution would punish those who left their ranks to join the Revolution.

Don't forget that the Revolution belongs to you, and you belong to the Revolution. As I witnessed, the Revolution is a real force and entity. Keep in mind that 90% of our people are illiterate. As an educated Kurd, it is your duty to save your people from slavery and treason. It is quite sad to learn that there are only two doctors in all of liberated Kurdistan, while in Baghdad alone, there are more than 30 Kurdish doctors.

How many Kurdish university graduates from Europe have joined the Revolution? Only two— Aziz Sheikh Redha, a graduate of Prague, and Muhammed Saleh Qaradaghi.

Look around you, where you study in Europe, and consider how far they have come in development and civilization. At the same time, our people's

fate continues to dance between negotiations and declarations with dictatorial regimes. These regimes came to power simply because someone woke up in the morning, grabbed a gun, and took over the radio station in Baghdad. They will rule until another man wakes up, overthrows the previous ruler, and declares himself a hero while labeling the former leader a traitor. We must work hard to save our people from this tragic irony.

This is all I can share for now. If you have any queries, please write to me, and I will try to respond as soon as possible.

Finally, please accept my sincere greetings and best wishes,

Brotherly yours,

Jamal Alemdar, Architect

Studentbacken 25, 115 40 Stockholm, Sweden

January 14, 1969



In a gathering in London. From left: Dr. Latif Rashid, Jamal Alemdar Mustafa Shaban and Aza Doghramachi, 1996

Jalal Talabani

A Hussainia Mosque in Sulaimani

Jalal Talabani was well known for his political agility and diplomatic finesse. Hoping to win favor with the Iranians, he decided to build a Hussainia—a Shiite mosque—in Sulaimani, a city with almost no Shiite population. The Iranians even sent two mullahs to oversee it.

Months passed, but the mosque remained empty. Frustrated by the lack of worshippers, the mullahs devised an unusual plan: they announced that anyone who converted to Shiism would receive a cash reward of two hundred U.S. dollars.

The generous offer caught the attention of two young, unemployed men struggling to make ends meet. Tempted by the reward, they decided to give it a try. Before going in, they agreed that one would approach the clerics first.

Inside, the young man was asked why he wished to convert. Not knowing much about the faith—and eager to sound convincing—he improvised, saying he had long reflected on the decision before finally choosing to embrace Shiism.

The questioning continued. When asked who had killed Imam Hussein, the grandson of the Prophet who was martyred more than 1,400 years ago, the young man looked puzzled and replied, “Is he dead? This is the first I’ve heard of it.” The clerics pressed further, asking who had killed Imam Ali, Hussein’s father. He shrugged and said, “Believe me, I didn’t even know he’d been killed, too.”

Realizing he was in over his head, the young man asked to use the restroom—and slipped quietly out of the mosque. Outside, his friend was waiting. “Did you get the two hundred dollars?” he asked. The first man laughed. “No,” he said. “Turns out it was all a trap—not to hand out money, but to find the ‘killers’ of their two colleagues.”

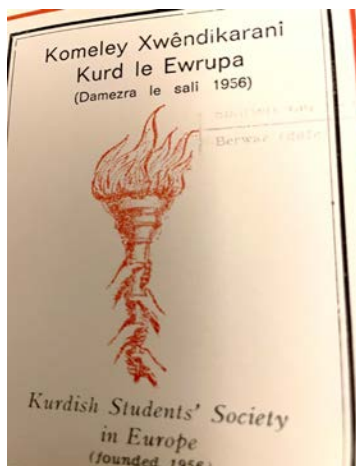
Kurdish Student Society in Europe (KSSE)

In January 1949, a visionary group of Kurdish students gathered in Lausanne, Switzerland, to establish Europe’s first Kurdish Students Association. Leading this pioneering effort was Dr. Nureddin Zaza (1919-1988), a devoted advocate for the Kurdish people. Born in the Maaden (Xarput) province of Northern Kurdistan, Dr. Zaza’s life was shaped by upheaval.

After the Sheikh Said uprising, he and his family were forced to relocate to Western Kurdistan in Syria.



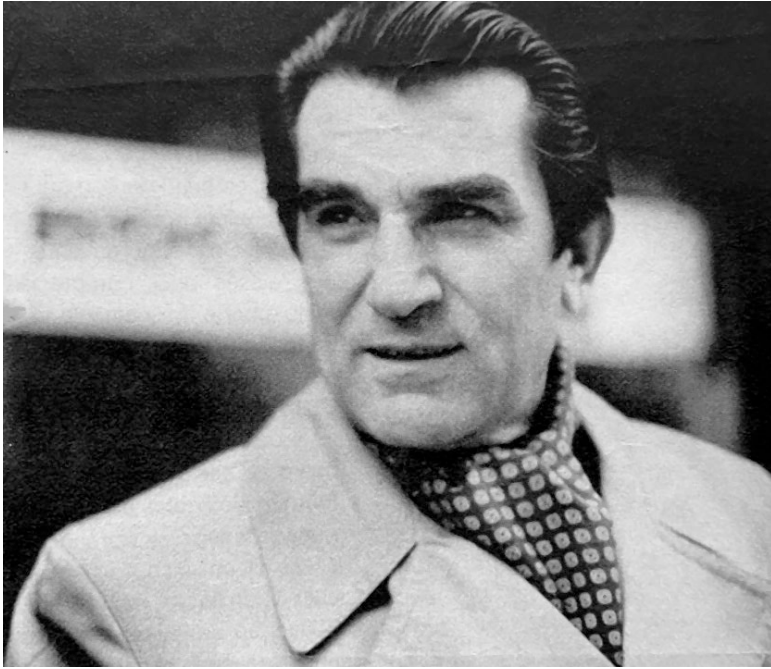
Jalal Talabani, Secretary General of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK)



The KSSE Membership Card

As the elected president of the association, Dr. Zaza sought to create a platform where Kurdish students across Europe could connect, share news about Kurdistan, and foster solidarity. He and his associates believed it was essential to have an organization that not only united Kurdish students but also amplified the voices of the Kurdish people on the global stage.

After this initial meeting, there was a period of relative silence until the landmark First Congress of the Kurdish Student Society in Europe (KSSE) on August 16, 1956, in Wiesbaden, Germany. The congress formally established the KSSE, bringing together numerous Kurdish students from across Europe. A powerful communiqué was issued during this congress, calling on European governments and influential organizations—such as media outlets, human rights groups, and advocacy organizations to put pressure on the Iranian and Syrian governments to recognize the fundamental human rights of their Kurdish populations.



Nouredin Zaza (1919-1988)

The congress became a recurring event, held in different European cities each year, whenever circumstances allowed. I had the privilege of attending the Sixth Congress, which was held in secrecy from August 22 to 26, 1961, in Münster, West Germany. There, I discreetly submitted an application for membership in the KSSE on behalf of Kurdish students in Istanbul.

More than just a student organization, the KSSE embodied the spirit of Kurdistan, extending its influence beyond its geographic borders. With branches in most European countries, it served as a de facto embassy for Kurds abroad and was the primary meeting place for Kurdish students in Europe. According to its constitution, the KSSE was open to all Kurds and Kurdistanis, regardless of their backgrounds, nationality, religion, or political affiliation. Nationalists, leftists, conservatives, religious individuals, and independents were all welcome to attend.

The KSSE served as a vital platform, bringing Kurdish students in Europe together each year to discuss the situation in Kurdistan, address personal challenges, and plan ways to support their oppressed Kurdish

brethren. The KSSE defied the arbitrary political boundaries imposed on Kurdistan by the post-World War I superpowers.



From left; Hawar Ziad, Jamal Alemdar, and Dara Atta at the 13th KSSE Congress in Berlin in 1969



Professor Kamran Bedirkhan explaining the Latin alphabet in Kurdish texts, during his visit to Stockholm 1967

Every year, Kurdish political parties and representatives from allied parties and organizations were invited as honored guests to share their greetings, support, and insights on the situation in Kurdistan. The KSSE also welcomed guests from European political parties, who extended their solidarity and offered perspectives on the Kurdish struggle. Many praised the congress proceedings for their democratic nature.

Beyond the serious discussions, the farewell events on the final evening were alive with Kurdish songs, music, folklore dances, and humorous anecdotes. These joyous moments offered solace, briefly bridging the physical distance from beloved Kurdistan.

The 13th Congress, held August 12-16, 1969, in West Berlin, marked a turning point. The student body was deeply divided, primarily between supporters of the Politburo and those aligned with Barzani. Initially, the Politburo faction dominated, preventing Dr. Ismet Sharif Vanly, the KSS president and Barzani's representative, from addressing the congress. Several Politburo members, including Hilmi Ali Sharif, Kamal Fuad, and Mohammed Amin Faraj, arrived from Baghdad using Iraqi diplomatic passports, concealing pistols provided by the Iraqi embassy in East Germany.

Amidst heated debates, the smaller group of Barzani supporters successfully exposed the true intentions of the Baghdad visitors. My report, *Impressions from a Visit to Liberated Kurdistan*, resonated with the majority of students, shedding light on the underlying conflict between the Politburo and Barzani.

The arrival of the Talabani group from Baghdad, backed by the Iraqi government, which was waging a brutal war against the Kurdish people, further strengthened support for Barzani. By the conclusion of the congress, a new pro-Barzani board for the KSSE was elected, and I was chosen as secretary general.

Membership of the KSSE in the International Union of Students (IUS)

The International Union of Students (IUS), representing students from communist bloc countries and their allies, offered scholarships to its member students. Despite numerous applications from the Kurdish Students' Society of Europe (KSSE) for membership, the IUS leadership repeatedly refused, citing the absence of an independent Kurdish state. As a result, Kurdish

students were expected to join national student unions, a solution that was both impractical and undesirable. Securing scholarships for our students became a key priority for me, as many faced severe economic hardship, which hindered them from starting or continuing their studies.

Mahdi al-Hafidh, an Iraqi Arab and a prominent member of the IUS Supreme Board, was instrumental in facilitating a meeting with the IUS leadership. I was subsequently invited to address the annual IUS General Secretariat Meeting in Prague, where I highlighted the challenges faced by the KSSE and its members.

Before an audience of approximately 30 board members from various countries, I made a compelling case for the rights of Kurdish students to join the IUS, emphasizing how oppressive governments in Kurdistan were denying them scholarship opportunities. In the end, I succeeded in securing IUS membership for the KSSE.

Shortly thereafter, Mahdi Al-Hafidh informed me that 32 scholarships designated for African students had gone unclaimed. The IUS board offered these scholarships to the KSSE on the condition that the necessary documents be submitted within a week.

To seize this opportunity, I quickly gathered the necessary paperwork for 32 Kurdish students. Given the tight deadline, I primarily mobilized those in Prague, where the IUS headquarters were located, to ensure everything was submitted on time.

I embarked on a series of trips to tackle the challenges faced by Kurdish students. My first stop was Bucharest, where the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party invited me to discuss scholarship issues impacting our students at Romanian universities. Initially, Iraqi communist students had been receiving these scholarships on behalf of Kurdish students and misusing them. After extensive negotiations, I successfully persuaded the authorities to allocate the scholarships directly to our students, marking a significant achievement.

My next endeavor took me to Moscow, followed by visits to several other countries, including Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, the United Kingdom, and Germany. The goal of these trips was to assess the situation of our students and work towards resolving their various challenges.

The 14th Congress of the KSSE in Stockholm, 1970



During the 14th Congress in 1970, with Elon Ahlbäck, in Stockholm

In a departure from traditional practices, I sought independence by collecting funds from various student organizations and churches in Sweden rather than relying solely on funding from the Kurdish revolution. This innovative approach allowed us to cover airfare and accommodation costs for students traveling from various European cities to attend the Congress in Stockholm in 1970, marking a historic first for the KSSE.

The congress drew prominent figures from the Kurdish, Arab, and Swedish communities. Notably, Iraqi Ambassador Abdul Wahab Babjan attended the event following the peace treaty signed between the Iraqi government and the Kurdish leadership on March 11, 1970. Among the Kurdish personalities present were Abdurrahman Qassemou, head of the KDP-Iran, Habib Muhammed Karim, Secretary General of the KDP-Iraq, other party leaders, members of political parties from across Kurdistan, and representatives from the Swedish-Kurdish Committee, as well as supporters from the broader community of friends of the Kurds.

At the conclusion of the congress, a new board was elected for the KSSE. I chose not to run for a position due to my extensive responsibilities with the KDP European branch, various committees, and my academic pursuits at KTH.

While I had anticipated appreciation and support for my fundraising efforts to hold the Congress, some students, primarily motivated by narrow political interests, in particular those aligned with the Talabani group, began questioning the suitability of the funds collected. These individuals, aiming to take leadership of the KSSE, sought to undermine my initiative by casting doubts on its legitimacy.

During discussions on the matter, Dr. Abdurrahman Qassemou addressed the students, saying, "Jamal has, for the first time in the history of the KSSE, organized a congress where our flights and accommodation are covered by the funds he raised through his own initiative. Rather than expressing gratitude to encourage him, some are making baseless accusations without providing any evidence. I challenge those individuals to raise even half of what Jamal has contributed to cover the costs of next year's congress."

Amusing Moments at KSSE Meetings

At every KSSE congress, the final session is devoted to inviting students to present their suggestions to the newly elected board for inclusion in the final resolution.

Language barriers have often created unexpected moments of humor and tension. Some Feyli Kurds from Baghdad have only limited knowledge of the Sorani or Kurmanji dialects and therefore speak Arabic. This, however, frustrates Kurds from Iran and Turkey, who do not understand Arabic and feel excluded from the discussion.

On one memorable occasion, a Kurd from Iranian Kurdistan raised his hand to make a proposal to the board. He suggested that the governments of Iran and Turkey should establish Arabic schools in their Kurdish regions so that Kurds could learn Arabic. That way, when they attended Kurdish congresses, they would be able to understand what their fellow Kurds were saying.

The hall erupted in laughter at the irony of the proposal, perfectly capturing the linguistic paradox that had long troubled these gatherings.

Spies Among Us

During the annual meeting of the KDP European Branch in Berlin, tensions arose among several students who were accusing one another of being agents of the Turkish or Iraqi governments.

One student, Hemresh Resho, came to me and submitted his resignation from the KDP. He explained that he was deeply frustrated and hurt by repeated accusations that he was an agent of the Turkish secret service. He even mentioned the name of one person who was particularly active in spreading these claims.

Knowing Hemresh to be a sincere Kurdish patriot and a hardworking, devoted member, I asked him to wait until the annual congress. I promised him that the issue would be addressed and resolved properly.

Before the official sessions of the congress began, I stood before the assembly in my role as head of the KDP European Branch and asked that all discussions be temporarily halted. "I must inform you," I said, "that we seem to have an agent among us." The students looked at one another in confusion and silence.

I continued, "Some individuals have accused Hemresh Resho of being an agent. I now ask Mr. Jumah, who has made this claim, to present his evidence before this congress so that appropriate action can be taken. If he cannot do so, then we must consider the possibility that he himself is attempting to conceal his true identity by making such dangerous accusations."

Jumah was visibly shocked. After a long pause, he replied, "How can I provide evidence for something like this? If that is the case, then I could just as easily accuse you of being an agent." I answered firmly, "That is exactly the problem. Accusing fellow Kurds so casually of treason is extremely serious. Such accusations, if taken lightly, can lead to devastating consequences. In many circumstances, they could even result in capital punishment."

Jumah had nothing more to say. He apologized publicly to Hemresh and to the congress. At that moment, we reached a collective decision: anyone who in the future accuses another member of being an agent without clear and proven evidence will be expelled from the KDP. The entire hall erupted in applause.

As the meeting was about to conclude, another student, Shakhawan Namiq, raised his hand and said with a smile, “Friends, when I listen to all this talk about so many agents among us, I cannot help but wonder—am I so foolish that after living in Europe for more than ten years, no one has ever approached me to offer me such a job?” Laughter and applause filled the room, bringing the congress to a warm and memorable close.

The Demise of the KSSE: A Pivotal Moment in Kurdish History

Following the collapse of the Kurdish revolution, the 17th Congress of the KSSE, held in Berlin in August 1975, marked a pivotal moment in the history of the Kurdish student movement. The event became a somber gathering of students seeking solace and hope in the face of adversity.

A significant division emerged within the KSSE during this period. Jalal Talabani, a prominent Kurdish leader at the time, proposed the formation of a new student organization, the Association of Kurdish Students Abroad (AKSA), to accommodate students loyal to his political faction. This move was met with resistance from those who advocated for a united KSSE, arguing that such a division would weaken the Kurdish student movement at a critical juncture.

Despite pleas to maintain unity, Talabani and his supporters pressed ahead with the formation of AKSA. This decision created a schism within the KSSE, ultimately leading to the organization’s demise. The once vibrant and unified student movement fragmented into opposing factions, each pursuing its own agenda.

The disintegration of the KSSE was a major setback for the Kurdish cause. The organization had been a vital platform for Kurdish students to connect, exchange ideas, and mobilize for their rights. Its dissolution left a void in the Kurdish student movement, stripping it of a crucial source of intellectual and political energy.

Years later, when I met him in London, Talabani expressed regret for his decision to divide and ultimately dismantle the KSSE. He explained that this choice had been influenced by Iranian Kurdish leaders who urged him to pursue a separate path. However, by then, the damage had already been done. The KSSE, once a symbol of Kurdish unity and hope, had been irrevocably fractured.

The collapse of the KSSE offers valuable lessons for the Kurdish movement. It underscores the importance of unity, compromise, and the avoidance of factionalism. The Kurdish people's struggle for self-determination requires a united front capable of overcoming both internal divisions and external pressures.

While the KSSE no longer exists, its legacy lives on. The spirit of resistance, critical thinking, and social justice that defined the organization continues to inspire Kurdish students and activists around the world. As the Kurdish people strive for a better future, they must draw on the lessons of the past and work together to build a stronger and more united movement.

An Offer Declined at an Uncomfortable Lunch

During this turbulent period, I worked tirelessly alongside my friends to keep the spirits of the Kurdish students high. We organized seminars and meetings with members of the Kurdish community, many of whom felt a profound sense of betrayal.

Jalal Talabani, a prominent figure in the Kurdish movement, embarked on a tour of European cities to meet with Kurdish students. His goal was to convince them to join his newly formed political party, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). He distributed pamphlets titled "Patriotic Union of Kurdistan: Why?" to outline his vision and rally support.

During this time, Talabani invited me, Dr. Firiad Hiawizi, Dr. Shafiq Qazzaz, and Hawar Ziad to lunch at a Lebanese restaurant called Al Umara, located on Edgware Road in West London.

He proposed that I become the representative of his new party in Europe. As an incentive, he offered to buy me a house in London and provide a generous salary. Talabani insisted that the Barzani leadership and the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) were no longer active. He claimed the Shah had detained them and that the Kurdish people had lost faith in them due to their perceived abandonment and lack of resistance. He also reminded me that the Barzani leadership had neglected me and disregarded my contributions during the revolution.

While I appreciated his recognition, I explained that I never expected the KDP leadership to repay me for my efforts. I had acted out of a sense of duty to my people and a strong moral obligation. I ultimately declined Talabani's offer, expressing my gratitude.

He tried to persuade me, but I advised him to be patient until the memory of his movement's collaboration with the Iraqi army and intelligence in the killing of Kurds faded from public memory. Instead of appointing me as his representative, I urged him to focus on reuniting the Kurdish people under the banner of the KDP, of which he was a founding member. I believed that his return to the party would rekindle hope among the disillusioned Kurdish people and transform this setback into a victory, helping them move forward from the dark past of his movement.

Talabani became enraged by my suggestion. He questioned how I could insult him, considering he had always viewed me as a younger brother. In a fit of rage, he stormed out of the restaurant without paying the bill, even though we were his guests.

په کینیڈا بنسټیز کوروسناج

سرکری گنسی

الاتحاد الوطني الكردستاني

الأمين العام

5 OCTOBER 1998



Patriotic Union of Kurdistan
Secretary General

LETTER OF AUTHORIZATION

THIS IS TO CONFIRM THAT **MR. JAMAL ALAMDAR**, OF LOMBARDA HOLDINGS LIMITED IS FULLY AUTHORIZED TO INITIATE, NEGOTIATE AND REPRESENT OUR ORGANIZATION, PATRIOTIC UNION OF KURDISTAN (PUK), IN ALL FIELDS OF BUSINESS, INCLUDING TRADING, CONTRACTING, PROJECT DEVELOPMENT, AND FINANCE.

THIS AUTHORIZATION COVERS PRIVATE INDIVIDUALS AND CORPORATIONS, GOVERNMENT AND NON-GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS, AND INTERNATIONAL AND REGIONAL ORGANIZATIONS OUTSIDE OUR REGION OF IRAQI KURDISTAN.

THIS AUTHORIZATION IS VALID FOR AN UNLIMITED PERIOD, UNLESS OTHERWISE EXPRESSLY REVOKED.

FOR & ON BEHALF OF

PATRIOTIC UNION OF KURDISTAN

JALAL TALABANI
SECRETARY GENERAL

Authorization from the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), granting Jamal Alemdar full powers to represent the party in trade and development negotiations.
Issued in London, October 5, 1998. The offer was rejected

The Genesis of the March 11, 1970 Agreement: A Memoir of Diplomacy

In 1971, a high-level Iraqi delegation arrived in Stockholm, carrying with it the weight of Iraq's turbulent internal politics. The delegation reflected the country's complex political spectrum: Tariq Aziz, the influential editor of *Al-Thawra* and a leading figure in the Ba'ath Party; Amer Abdullah, a member of the Communist Party's Politburo; and Aziz Sharif, a respected statesman and leader of the Peace Movement.

They were received by Iraq's ambassador to Sweden, Abdulwahab Babajan, a Kurd from Sulaimani and brother-in-law of the foreign minister. I had been appointed by the leadership of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) to represent the Kurdish people at a conference on Vietnam alongside this delegation from Baghdad.

A Revelation at the Embassy

While we were gathered at the embassy preparing our speeches for the Vietnam conference, Aziz Sharif—who had known Mustafa Barzani since their shared years of exile in the Soviet Union—offered a private account of how the historic March 11 Agreement had truly come into being.

“By late November 1969,” Sharif began, “the Iraqi Army was facing catastrophe. The losses inflicted by Barzani's Peshmerga were staggering. Entire units had surrendered. Large quantities of heavy weaponry had been destroyed or captured. It had become painfully clear that the war was unwinnable.”

Confronted with this military reality, Saddam Hussein entrusted a sensitive mission to a small delegation: Aziz Sharif, the diplomat Murta-dha al-Hadithi—who would later fall victim to Saddam's purges, and Interior Minister General Sa'adoon Ghaidan. Their mandate was to locate Barzani and explore the possibility of peace.

They traveled to the rugged frontier of Kurdistan. Under the vigilant watch of the Peshmerga, they were escorted to a remote cave near the border. Shortly thereafter, Barzani appeared—a figure of commanding authority, yet marked by a quiet warmth and traditional hospitality.

Sharif opened the discussion with an appeal to fraternity, “Until when shall brothers spill one another’s blood? We come on behalf of the president and vice president to urge you to end this war and seek a lasting peace.”

Barzani’s reply was measured, yet firm—grounded in the harsh realities of the conflict, “Before asking us to lay down our arms, demand first that your leadership cease bombing our villages and killing our women and children. We are not the aggressors. If the aerial bombardments and artillery fire stop, peace will find its way to us.”

The Diplomatic Misstep

The conversation appeared to be moving cautiously towards common ground when General Sa’adoon Ghaidan intervened with what he believed to be a gesture of goodwill.

“Mr. Barzani,” he said, “we are prepared to hand over Jalal Talabani and his group to you as proof of our sincerity.”

The atmosphere changed instantly. Barzani’s expression hardened. “Those men are refugees under your protection,” he replied sharply. “If your government cannot honor its obligation to protect those who seek refuge with it, how could I ever trust you to honor an agreement with me?” With those words, the fragile progress unraveled.

Collapse and Renewal

The meeting ended in disappointment. A heavy silence accompanied the delegation on their return to Baghdad. The magnitude of the blunder was unmistakable.

While others directed their anger at Ghaidan’s political naïveté, Aziz Sharif remained composed. He reminded them that Barzani was not a conventional politician to be swayed by tactical maneuvers. He was a man of principle, guided by a strict moral code.

Back in Baghdad’s corridors of power, General Ghaidan reportedly never again dared to mention Talabani’s name—a lasting testament to how close his ill-considered “offer” had come to derailing the path to peace.

Sharif concluded his account by explaining that they were forced to begin anew. Eventually, another meeting with Barzani was arranged—this time without General Ghaidan’s participation. Negotiations resumed on firmer ground. On March 11, 1970 the agreement was signed.

Prior to the 8th KDP Congress: Where Vengeance Was Rejected

The story returns to August 1970, when the Eighth Congress of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) convened in the remote village of Nawpirdan, chosen for its natural protection against possible air attacks. I attended the Congress as a representative of the KDP's European branch, carrying a newly issued Iraqi passport.

Upon arrival in Baghdad, we were warmly received by the leaders of the KDP Baghdad branch. Our temporary lodging was the Sargon Hotel, overlooking the Tigris River. It was there that I met Fakhir Mergasori, a renowned Peshmerga commander who was also staying at the hotel.

During our conversation, Fakhir confided in me that Jalal Talabani had visited him the day before and entrusted him with a private letter addressed to Mullah Mustafa Barzani. Driven by curiosity and against protocol, Fakhir admitted that he had read the letter. To his relief, its contents were respectful and conciliatory: Talabani praised Barzani and expressed his wish to rejoin the Peshmerga in the struggle against the enemies of the Kurdish people.

I assumed that Talabani had learned of the recent encounter between Barzani and Saadoon Ghaidan—specifically, Ghaidan's proposal to hand Talabani and his group over as a goodwill gesture, and Barzani's dignified refusal of such an offer.

Encouraging Fakhir to deliver the letter, I urged him not to delay. Shortly after the Congress concluded, Barzani convened a meeting of the newly elected Central Committee members. There, he disclosed the contents of Talabani's letter and informed the gathering of Talabani's request for pardon, asking for their opinions.

A heavy silence fell over the room. At last, Ali Sinjari raised his hand and proposed that Talabani and his group be pardoned temporarily, only to be tried later and executed for their alleged treacherous acts. Barzani immediately rebuked him, condemning such duplicity. His position was firm and unambiguous: they must either be forgiven completely or face justice elsewhere—there would be no deception.

The members understood Barzani's moral stance and unanimously agreed to grant Talabani and his companions full pardon. Yet Barzani concluded the meeting with a pointed warning. He declared that he

The Kurdish Office in London

A Landmark in Kurdish Diplomacy

In early 1971, I received a letter that would change the course of my life. It bore the official seal of the Political Bureau of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP). It was signed by Dr. Mahmood Osman, then head of Foreign Affairs for both the KDP and the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC) of the Kurdish revolution. This pivotal document appointed me to establish and lead the Kurdish Office in London, making me the official representative of the Kurdish struggle for autonomy.

Following this directive, I reached out to Dr. Osman for further clarification. He explained that the establishment of this office was a historic milestone for the Kurdish people. For the first time, through the KDP, they had a formal diplomatic presence abroad. This significant step not only brought the Kurdish struggle to the forefront of international attention but also signaled growing recognition of their aspirations for self-determination.

After the March 11 Agreement, the British government expressed interest in establishing an official Kurdish office in London. Recognized by the Foreign Office, this office would serve as a diplomatic bridge between the Kurdish revolution and the UK government. In essence, it would function as an embassy for the Kurdish movement, fostering relationships and facilitating the exchange of information for mutual benefit.

Understanding the urgency of this situation—knowing the British government's stance could shift at any moment—I accepted the task without hesitation and began preparations immediately. To make the move to London possible, I made the difficult decision to abandon my PhD studies despite being only three months away from submitting my final thesis.

London Calling

Although the British government did not officially recognize our office as a Kurdish embassy—given the absence of an independent Kurdish state—it effectively treated it as one. We were granted weekly meetings with a high-ranking Foreign Office representative, allowing us to exchange information and address our diplomatic needs.

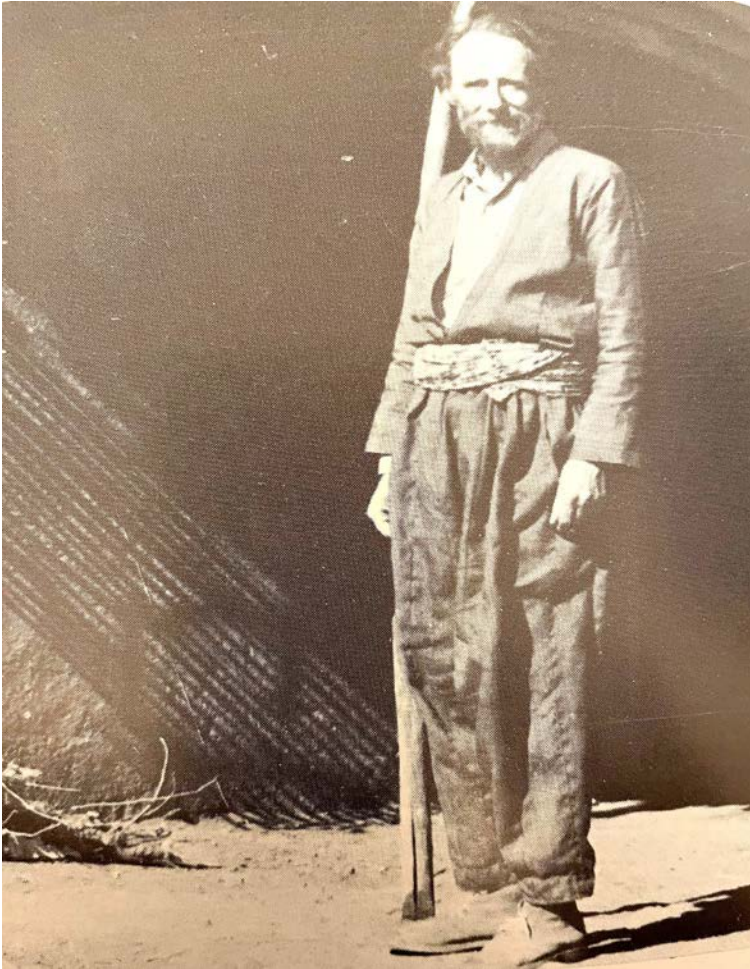
Our early efforts were highly successful, garnering support from influential figures across British society. Among them were members of parliament from various political parties, including Liberal Party leader Lord Russell Johnston, Winston Churchill Jr. and Julian Amery from the Conservative Party, and Jeremy Corbyn of the Labour Party. We also secured the backing of members of the House of Lords, such as Lord Kilbracken, and former ministers, including Sir Roy Jenkins, a former Home Secretary.

The British Kurdish Friendship Society (BKFS)

The Essential Platform for our Mission

Our influence extended to Nobel Laureates and renowned journalists, including Edward Mortimer of *The Times*, David Hirst and Robert Fisk of *The Guardian*, and Gwynne Roberts of the BBC. Bishops, archbishops, and other religious figures also lent their support. All of them became sponsors of the newly established British-Kurdish Friendship Society (BKFS). Kenneth Lee, chairman of the Quakers and a close friend of Richard Hauser, played a key role in the formation of the BKFS and was elected its first president.

The establishment of BKFS benefited greatly from the generous support and guidance of numerous friends and acquaintances. Among them, Professor Sir Richard Hauser and his wife Hephzibah Menuhin were particularly instrumental in connecting me with key figures in Britain and beyond. The BKFS made invaluable contributions to our work in the Kurdish Office.



Lord Kilbracken, member of the British Kurdish Friendship Society BKFS, in Kurdish attire

The First Diplomatic Recognition for the Kurds

The Kurdish Office, a small but dedicated team, was driven by a core group of four: me, serving as chairman, Hawar Kaka Ziad, vice chairman, Majeed Jafar, accountant, and Erwin Harbottle, the secretary. We were fortunate to have the invaluable support of dedicated volunteers, including General Michael Harbottle, Richard Hauser, and Hephzibah Menuhin.

Our mission was threefold:

Advocacy and Education: To raise awareness of the Kurdish people's plight under oppressive regimes, educate Europeans about Kurdish culture and history, and shed light on the harsh realities of the political situation in Kurdistan.

Humanitarian Aid: To deliver critical medical supplies, financial support, and food to the communities devastated by conflict in the liberated areas of Kurdistan.

Direct Witness: To organize visits to Kurdistan for journalists, politicians, and concerned individuals, allowing them to witness the injustices firsthand and share their findings with the European public.

Our efforts went far beyond mere advocacy. We produced numerous publications, including 16 issues of *Peshmerga Magazine*, in English, informative booklets, and the *Know the Kurds* series, and other publications and pamphlets, like *Kurdistan Review*, and more. These publications put a spotlight on critical issues, such as the destruction of Kurdish villages, the tragic disappearance of 8,000 Barzani Kurds during the Halabja massacre, and the horrific Anfal campaign, which claimed the lives of over 182,000 Kurds, primarily women and children.

Recognizing the importance of reaching a broader audience, we established branches of the Kurdish Office in several key European cities—Paris, Amsterdam, Vienna, and Berlin. These branches coordinated efforts to assist Kurdish refugees arriving in Europe, offering medical support to those in need, and promoting pan-Kurdistan unity by transcending narrow political divisions. This inclusive approach earned significant support from the Kurdish community throughout Europe. However, our endeavors were met with relentless criticism from the faction led by Jalal Talabani and Ibrahim Ahmed, who consistently spread falsehoods to undermine our work. Despite these attacks, we remained unwavering in our commitment to our mission.



Professor Richard Hauser and Dr. Deutsch

In fact, their opposition only fueled our determination, driving us to intensify our fundraising efforts for refugees and expand our network of journalists and aid missions to Kurdistan. We also organized meetings in the parliament, inviting prominent figures to address British MPs and members of the House of Lords. These meetings received sponsorship from various British political parties and other organizations.

As time passed, the Kurdish community began to see the tangible results of our efforts. While the Talabani faction focused on baseless criticism, the Kurdish Office remained dedicated to alleviating the suffering of the people. This stark contrast in approaches ultimately led the community to turn against the detractors, urging them to cease their destructive tactics and contribute meaningfully to the Kurdish cause.

One day, Ibrahim Ahmed, co-leader of the Talabani group, called me unexpectedly and posed a direct question, “Jamal, my son, are you truly a Kurd?” Taken aback, I asked what he meant. He explained that his group had relentlessly attacked our work—and me personally—for some time, yet I had remained silent. He argued that such inaction was uncharacteristic of the Kurdish spirit and warned that the community would soon turn against them unless I responded in kind.

I responded by stating that I neither had the time nor the inclination to engage in such petty, meaningless battles. He commended my mature approach, acknowledging the effectiveness of our work and the growing support for our office.

Sami Abdul Rahman: A Complex Legacy

Muhammed Mahmood Abdul Rahman, better known as Sami Abdul Rahman, was born in Mosul in 1933 and tragically lost his life in a suicide bombing in February 2004.

In the 1950s, Sami pursued a degree in electrical engineering at Manchester University. He became an active member of the Communist Iraqi Student Association, eventually rising through the ranks of the Iraqi Communist Party, becoming its leader in the UK.

During his early years in the UK, the Kurdish Students Society in Europe (KSSE) in London approached Sami a few times to join their cause. However, he declined, explaining that while he was born a Kurd, his cultural loyalties were more aligned with Arabic culture.

In February 1963, Sami joined the Kurdish Revolution, fleeing the Ba'athist regime's communist purge following the overthrow of General Qasem.

He quickly rose to leadership positions within the Kurdish Revolution, largely due to the support of Dr. Mahmood Osman. However, when the Ba'ath regime seized power in February 1963, Sami was arrested in Baghdad. He narrowly evaded execution thanks to Architect Mustafa Jaf, who claimed Sami as a KDP follower and secured his release under the amnesty granted to KDP members following the peace agreement between the Ba'athists and the Kurdish leadership.

Upon his release, Sami fled to Nawpirdan, the headquarters of the Kurdish resistance, where he joined the Revolution. He began working for Kurdistan Radio, writing articles and delivering Arabic commentaries. His eloquence and dedication earned him the support of key leaders, such as Masoud Barzani and Dr. Mahmood Osman, accelerating his rise through the ranks.

After the 1970 agreement with Baghdad, he was appointed Minister of Northern Affairs of Iraq, responsible for the development of the Kurdish region.

Sami relocated to Iran following the 1975 Algiers Accord, only to be arrested by the Khomeini regime. During his imprisonment, he underwent a religious transformation, adopting prayer and growing a beard to appease his captors.

Before the collapse of the revolution, Sami visited the Kurdish Office in London. In meetings with various figures supporting the Kurdish cause, he consistently opened his remarks by praising the Shah of Iran. Despite my warnings that this would cause considerable embarrassment, given the Shah's poor reputation among the European public, he refused to change his approach.

For example, during a 1973 visit to Hans Jänitchek, the Secretary General of the Socialist International, Sami's excessive praise for the Shah undermined the Kurdistan Democratic Party's (KDP) application for membership in the organization. This ultimately allowed Jalal Talabani to secure Socialist International membership for the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) instead.

In London, Sami expressed a strong desire to take on a leadership role within the Kurdish Office. Given his standing in the KDP, I initially welcomed his ambition and introduced him to key figures and organizations as a Kurdish leader, a role he readily embraced. However, once he gained a foothold, he began sowing division, pitting newly arrived Kurdish refugees against long-standing KDP members. He dismissed the established members as "reactionaries" from a bygone era, while portraying himself and his faction as "progressive" and "socialist." He urged his followers to adopt communist ideology, treating the works of Marx and Lenin as their primary doctrine.

Sami was intelligent, resourceful, and hardworking, but he lacked the wisdom to channel his talents for the greater good of the Kurdish cause. Instead of dedicating himself to the movement, he prioritized personal ambition, seeking to seize control of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) by toppling Barzani.

In his relentless pursuit of power, he resorted to every means possible. To strengthen his anti-Israel stance, he falsely accused other Kurdish leaders and me of visiting Israel, despite having traveled there himself on multiple occasions. His hypocrisy was undeniable; the letters he sent from Tel Aviv bore Israeli stamps and hotel letterheads, leaving a clear trail of his duplicity. Some urged me to publish these letters to expose Sami's true nature to his new followers, but I chose not to do so.

Sami propagated the idea that the Barzani leadership was an outdated tribal system, unfit for the future of the revolution. He disparagingly

referred to them as the “Barzani Establishment,” further deepening the divide and weakening the party’s unity. Yet, in a display of hypocrisy, he continued to accept financial support from them, using it to establish his own breakaway faction.

Despite these challenges and my reliance on Barzani’s backing, I remained dedicated to my mission: resolving refugee issues and helping them to resettle in Europe. However, Sami persistently sought to undermine me and my colleagues at every turn.

One day, Suraya Khan, a distinguished Kurdish woman and the wife of Mr. Omar Mustafa (known as Omar Dabbaba), a key figure in Talabani’s group, sought my help. She was also the daughter of Koye’s esteemed liberal religious leader, Mela-y Gewre. Having fled Kurdistan with her two young children while her husband remained behind, she found herself stranded on a London street. I welcomed her, provided shelter, enrolled her children in school, and ensured they received financial support from local authorities.

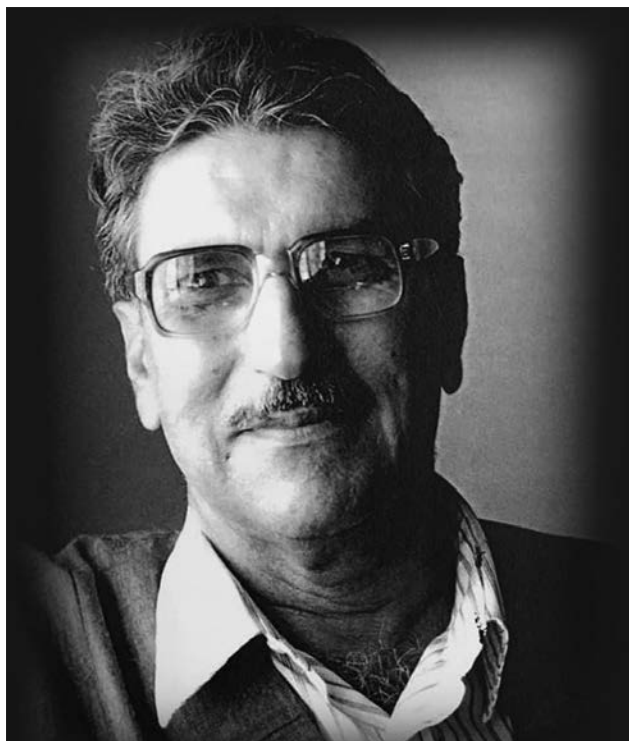
Sami, displeased with my actions, criticized me for supporting Suraya Khan and her children, citing her husband’s affiliation with Talabani and his anti-KDP sentiments. I explained that I could not abandon a Kurdish woman and her children simply because of her husband’s political affiliation. They were Kurds, and that alone was enough for any true Kurd to assist them.

Sami seized the opportunity to drive a wedge between Barzani and me. He contacted Mullah Mustafa, who was in the United States for medical treatment, and falsely claimed that I was aiding Kurdish “traitors” in London.

Mullah Mustafa called me, expressing his concern. I clarified that I had assisted a respectable Kurdish woman and her children, who had arrived in London as refugees and were abandoned by her husband’s group (PUK). I assured him that my actions were always in the best interest of the Kurdish people, especially in aiding a vulnerable Kurdish woman separated from her husband. Mullah Mustafa acknowledged my explanation, admitting that he had been misinformed.

In such circumstances, patience was my only option, waiting for a resolution from the Barzani leadership.

Masoud continued to voice his admiration for Sami and his political ideas. Meanwhile, Sami, never one to abandon his schemes, skillfully manipulated the situation—using Masoud and Barzani’s names to bolster his own position while undermining his rivals.



Sami Abdurrahman (1932-2004)

The Gradual Decline of the Kurdish Office

Following the Algiers Accord of March 6, 1975, and the subsequent collapse of the Kurdish armed struggle, the Kurdish Office shifted its primary focus to aiding refugees fleeing Kurdistan. We invested considerable effort in helping them resettle in various European countries, primarily the UK, the Netherlands, and Sweden. At the same time, we organized gatherings with the Kurdish community in London to bolster morale and analyze the factors contributing to the struggle’s downfall. These meetings underscored the continued importance of political action.

The Kurdish Office's extensive network proved invaluable in facilitating the resettlement of refugees across Europe and the United States. However, the arrival of certain Kurdish leaders in London unexpectedly revealed their true character. Individuals whom we had long admired and unquestioningly respected, such as Sami Abdul Rahman and others, displayed traits that contradicted our prior perceptions.

A Kurdish Odyssey

The end of the Kurdish armed struggle in March 1975 dramatically altered the course of my life. Returning from Kurdistan in February, just a month earlier, I faced a difficult decision. The Kurdish Office in London, where I worked, was ordered to close, and its funding was abruptly terminated. I had two options: implement strict austerity measures to stretch our remaining resources and continue assisting the growing influx of Kurdish refugees or dissolve the office entirely. I chose the former, prioritizing aid for the dispersed refugees across Europe.

Cooperating with my close friend, Dr. Shafiq Qazzaz, our representative in Tehran, we dedicated ourselves to this humanitarian effort. However, the political climate within the Kurdish diaspora was rapidly shifting. The arrival of Sami Abdurrahman in London introduced significant discord. He actively sought to undermine the Barzani leadership, branding its loyalists as reactionary opponents and scapegoats for the failure of the revolution. Paradoxically, while simultaneously courting Masoud Barzani for financial support for his own movement, Sami was strategically manipulating vulnerable Kurdish newcomers, using them as political pawns in a new movement grounded in Marxist-Leninist ideology. This created a stark division within the refugee community, pitting those aligned with the Barzani leadership against Sami's newly formed Marxist-Leninist faction.

A profound sense of betrayal washed over me as Masoud Barzani, despite my staunch commitment to the revolution and complaints about Sami's behavior, offered no acknowledgement of the impending dangers. As I remained steadfast in my efforts to aid Kurdish refugees, a growing chasm emerged between the new leadership and me. The betrayal was a bitter pill to swallow. Former comrades, once united in the fight for Kurdistan's freedom, now seemed distant and indifferent to my plight.

Financial strain, compounded by the loneliness of isolation, tested my resilience to its limits. In the end, I had to make a painful but necessary

choice: to step away from the life I had devoted myself to and start again elsewhere. The departure was heavy with regret and uncertainty, yet even then a thin thread of hope remained—an insistence, quiet but stubborn, that I would rebuild and chart a new horizon.

The abrupt end of my struggle for Kurdistan—and the collapse of everything I had worked for—left a lasting mark. Moving from a life driven by idealism into the cold realities of business was a brutal awakening. But with a wife and four children to support, I had no choice but to carve out a new path.

What hurt the most, perhaps, was the leadership's apparent indifference. After years of service, no one asked how we were managing or whether we had what we needed. I would never have asked for charity, but a simple gesture of concern would have meant something. Instead, the first message I received was pressure to vacate the house where my family and I were living.

The first years after this were a relentless struggle. Uncertainty weighed heavily, made worse by devastating news from my homeland under Saddam Hussein's brutal regime—and by what felt like the Shah's betrayal. Kurdistan suddenly seemed impossibly far away. And yet, I poured what energy I had into building a new life. With stubborn determination, I stepped into the unfamiliar world of business.

It was not an easy transition. Setbacks were constant, and each one tested my resolve, sleepless nights, moments of doubt, and the persistent fear of failure. But slowly, through perseverance and a refusal to give in, I began to lay the foundations of a new future.

Business became more than survival. It offered a way to regain direction and dignity, to recover a sense of agency. With every small success, the wounds of the past began to heal. The challenges of commerce could be harsh, but they were honest in a way politics often was not, and they stood in stark contrast to the betrayals and disappointments I had experienced in the political arena.

In time, I established myself as an entrepreneur. The past, however, never left me. The Kurdish cause remained a constant undercurrent: the dream of a free Kurdistan was not extinguished—only pushed into the background by the demands of starting over. I continued to support it from outside party politics, offering help and counsel when I felt it was needed.

Looking back, the shift from activism to business was not a rejection of my past, but a redirection of my energies. The qualities that had sustained me in struggle—resilience, patience, and a refusal to be defeated—proved just as necessary in the marketplace.

I also came to a blunt conclusion: the business world is not so different from the political one. In fact, it is a subject every politician should understand, if only to lead with greater realism. And I learned another lesson, too: it is risky to engage in partisan politics without economic independence. When your livelihood depends on party structures, it becomes easier for others to pressure you into compromising your principles and integrity.

Resigning from the KDP

Through it all, Masoud remained silent. Left with no other recourse, I drafted my resignation letter detailing every reason behind this difficult decision. I sent a copy to Mustafa Barzani in Washington and then waited for Masoud's arrival in London. I was determined to submit my resignation to him in person formally.

Upon Masoud's arrival, I met him at his hotel, prepared to hand him my resignation. He refused to accept it, instead urging me to join a meeting with Sami the following day, where I could submit it to him directly.

The next day, I found myself in a room with Sami, Masoud, Dr. Shafiq Qazzaz, and Dr. Firiad Hiwaizi. As I presented my resignation to Sami, he could barely conceal his delight. However, he began to lavish praise on me for my diligent work. I cut him off, making it clear that I saw through his empty flattery.

Masoud became incensed, demanding that I show respect to the KDP secretary general. I shot back that Sami was not my secretary general, but perhaps his, and then left the meeting.

As I walked towards my car, Masoud pursued me on the street, requesting that I drive him to the airport the following day. I was reluctant, but his persistence left me with little choice but to agree.

The next morning, in the hotel lobby, Sami, Noori Shawais, and a few newly arrived refugees had gathered to say goodbye. When I arrived, Masoud informed them that he would be riding with me to the airport, and we would all meet there.

Sensing that Masoud had news from his father, I asked Dr. Firiad Hiwaizi to join us in the car. I wanted a reliable witness, wary that others might later twist or fabricate the details of our conversation.

On the way to the airport, Masoud relayed his father's concern about the events in London and my resignation from the KDP. He assured me that my contributions to the Kurdish cause and the revolution would not be forgotten and requested that I withdraw my resignation. He even offered to double my salary as a gesture of appreciation.

I expressed my gratitude to Barzani for his generosity and fatherly concern, but stood firm, declining to withdraw my resignation under the current circumstances. I also declined the salary offer, explaining that I had a profession to return to, one that could support my family and me. Instead, I suggested that the money be given to the families of martyrs who needed it more.

At the airport, the group was already there to see Masoud off. Sami approached Masoud and whispered something in his ear. A short while later, Masoud came to me, relaying Sami's concerns.

Sami feared that I might launch a campaign against him and his faction in Europe and wanted my assurance that I would not do so. I assured Masoud that I had no such intentions. I did not see Sami or his group as enemies. The real enemies were the governments occupying Kurdistan.

Post-Resignation Fallout

A few days after submitting my resignation and seeing Masoud off to the United States, Sami and Noori Shawais convened a gathering of KDP members in London. It was the first meeting I had missed in many years.

I learned later that before the proceedings began, Hadi Shukir, a seasoned member, posed a question, "Why isn't Jamal Alemdar here?" Noori Shawais replied cryptically, "It is no longer permissible to utter Jamal's name at party meetings." Undeterred, Hadi pressed on, demanding the truth. Sami, fixing his gaze on the room, declared, "It's time to seal Jamal's dossier forever; this topic must not be discussed."

A murmur of curiosity rippled through the gathering, growing louder until Noori Shawais, unable to bear the mounting inquiries, bellowed, "We have expelled Jamal from the party, and Masoud Barzani made that clear to him at the airport. Is that understood?"

His words hung heavily in the air, but Dr. Firiad Hiwaizi, who had been privy to my conversation with Masoud as I drove him to the airport, could no longer tolerate the blatant falsehoods. He stood up and refuted the claim, recounting how Masoud, speaking on behalf of Mullah Mustafa Barzani, had pleaded with me to retract my resignation—an offer I had firmly rejected.

Dr. Hiwaizi then delivered his final, damning words, “How can a man of honor remain in a gathering where the leaders are purveyors of deception and lies?” With that, he walked out, followed by a stream of others. The KDP was unraveling, and before long, all party activities came to an abrupt halt.

Even after my resignation, Sami did not cease his scheming. He now sought to pin the blame for the party’s collapse on me.

The Story of a House

When I first moved to London, at the request of the party leadership, I rented a house in the suburbs while establishing the Kurdish Office. Later, they advised me to purchase a property, emphasizing its long-term benefits. It would provide a stable home for my family while also serving as a valuable investment, sparing us from the burden of a high monthly rent. At their suggestion, the house was registered in my name.

Following my resignation, Sami, now leading the newly formed KDP, wasted no time in demanding that I transfer the property to him. At the same time, Idris Barzani sent me a letter urging me not to hand the house over to Sami. Instead, he asked that I transfer it to his brother-in-law, Serdar Hama Agha, citing his financial difficulties.



The house in West Acton, where my daughter Shirin has fond childhood memories

Jalal Talabani also entered the fray, claiming the house was crucial for funding his upcoming revolution. Sherko Abid, a member of a leftist student organization, also expressed interest in the property. But I stood firm, declaring that the house belonged to the Kurdish revolution. I would hold onto it as a trust, safeguarding it until the new revolution began.

The struggle over the house quickly became the focal point for the new Kurdish revolutionaries, overshadowing any concern for my wellbeing or that of my family, who still lived there. Ironically, not a single person, not even from the Barzani leadership, bothered to inquire about my situation—financial or otherwise—after my departure from the KDP.

In the end, I had no choice but to send my family to Sweden and start a company in London, partnering with an Italian construction firm. At the time, surging oil prices were drawing investors from the Middle East—particularly the Gulf—who were eager to acquire properties, especially those in need of renovation. Contracts and projects began to flow in, and gradually, my financial situation began to improve.

Amid these developments, Mas‘ud Barzani—who was working tirelessly to revive the Kurdish movement—reached out to me. He acknowledged my long-standing commitment to the Kurdish cause and suggested that, once I was financially secure, I sell the house and send the proceeds to the KDP to help ease the financial strain facing the new generation of revolutionaries.

In time, I managed to save enough to stand on firmer ground. Shortly thereafter, Mas‘ud Barzani contacted me again, expressing concern that the house issue remained unresolved and his wish to bring the matter to a close. To that end, he dispatched a delegation to settle it. The group included Muhsin Dizayee, Hushyar Zebari, and Pirot Ahmed, with Dr. Feriad Hiwaizi also in attendance. The delegation proposed that I officially repurchase the house by paying an assessed value, determined by a state-appointed agent. The funds would then be handed over to them to finance the Kurdish revolution. Only after this transaction was completed did the turmoil surrounding the house finally subside, leaving it a silent testament to the stormy and complicated nature of Kurdish politics.

Smear Campaigns and Failed Conspiracies

Sami spared no effort to undermine my colleagues, seeking to create a rift between the Barzani leadership and us. In an interview with *Al-Qabas*, a Kuwaiti newspaper, Sami spread the false claim that I and three colleagues had been expelled from the KDP for alleged links to the Iraqi regime. He hoped that we would react by joining the Talabani group, which would allow him to eliminate us once and for all. Fortunately, he failed in this endeavor, too.

When his plans failed, Sami resorted to dredging up old files. His latest conspiracy is as follows: He delved into old archives and unearthed a specific file from 1974, a time when Dr. Shafiq Qazzaz and I were traveling from Kurdistan to New York. Our destination was the United Nations,

where we intended to present the case of the Dalia and Sorya massacres perpetrated by the Iraqi army. Along the way, our itinerary included visits to several countries. We planned to visit the Finnish Prime Minister, Kalevi Sorsa, in Helsinki, the Swedish-Kurdish Committee in Stockholm, the Icelandic-Kurdish Committee in Reykjavik, and finally, the British Kurdish Friendship Society in London.

At Heathrow Airport in London, my briefcase vanished inexplicably from the baggage claim area. Dr. Shafiq and I reported the incident to the airport police, and despite an extensive search, our efforts proved fruitless. The missing briefcase contained USD 10,000, provided by the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) to fund that year's Kurdish Students Society in Europe (KSSE) congress.

At first, I suggested to Dr. Shafiq that I would prefer to reimburse the money by deducting it from my salary and avoid informing the KDP leadership about the incident. However, he insisted that we seek guidance from our leadership. Since we were both involved, he believed they would trust us.

After informing the KDP leadership of the incident and my suggestion to repay the money by deducting it from my salary, their response was reassuring. A letter, signed by Idris Barzani and Habib Mohammed Karim, the Secretary General of the KDP, expressed their trust in both Dr. Shafiq and me. They emphasized that the missing amount would not significantly impact the party's financial stability and decided that no repayment was necessary, considering it an unfortunate occurrence. With that, the leadership declared the case closed.

But Sami, ever the inquisitive one, wasn't satisfied. He launched his own investigation into the matter, commissioning three individuals from his inner circle to look into it. Their objective was to search for any potential fraud, and they worked tirelessly to uncover any evidence that might fuel Sami's desire to accuse me. They interviewed Dr. Shafiq, visited Heathrow Airport, and examined the police reports.

Curiously, Sami never publicly revealed the outcome of the investigation. It is speculated that the findings did not align with his expectations, but he continued to allude to the incident, casting slights whenever the opportunity arose.

Months later, while visiting Dilshad Miran, one of the investigators, I came across a copy of the report. To Sami's disappointment, the investigators had found no evidence of fraud.

Sami was expelled from the party following an unsuccessful bid to gain support within the KDP congress. Undeterred, he ventured down a different path, founding a new political entity called the "Party Gel" (People's Party). However, this endeavor failed to protect him from his numerous enemies, and in the end, he was forced to return to the fold of the KDP.

The Final Chapter of Sami Abdurrahman

In February 2004, a devastating act of terrorism struck Erbil, claiming the lives of many prominent Kurdish figures, including Sami and his son Salah, who had just arrived from the United States to visit his parents to celebrate the Eid holiday.

Sami, a man of firm political convictions, was among those killed in a suicide bombing. His life had been shaped by an steadfast commitment to his beliefs. I last saw him in September 2002, during a visit to the office of then-Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani. At the time, Sami was serving as deputy prime minister.

In an attempt to encourage reconciliation, Nechirvan suggested that I meet Sami in his office. I declined. Undeterred, Nechirvan later brought Sami to see me in person. True to his nature, Sami greeted me warmly. He expressed sincere regret over past grievances and asked, quite openly, for my forgiveness. Looking back, it is clear how political struggles place immense strain on personal relationships, testing trust and loyalty alike.

Despite the adversity I faced—and despite Sami's repeated attempts to undermine my position—the unity and integrity of the Barzani leadership remained intact. Sami's eventual return to the Kurdistan Democratic Party and his apology to those he had wronged underscore the complexity of human relationships in political life, where rivalry, regret, and reconciliation often exist side by side.

While our paths were marked by conflict and challenges, my commitment to reconciliation and forgiveness ultimately paved the way for a resolution, albeit a bittersweet one, given Sami's tragic demise. This chapter in

our history serves as a poignant reminder of the tenacity of leadership, the importance of integrity, and the enduring power of forgiveness.

It was a valuable lesson for me, one that illuminated the kind of politics practiced within Kurdish leadership and the difficult yet inevitable conclusion we ultimately faced.

During the London Office Days

Standing Up to the BBC: A Small but Significant Victory

In 1973, I worked hard to establish a wide range of contacts. These included journalists, members of the British Parliament from all three major parties, various organizations, and religious leaders such as bishops and archbishops. I found that almost all were sympathetic to the Kurdish cause and willing to support us whenever we asked.

However, there was one notable exception—the BBC Arabic Service. At that time, its broadcasts consistently echoed the views of the Iraqi regime concerning the Kurds. The BBC Arabic Service referred to the Kurdish freedom fighters, the Peshmerga, as “Mutamarrideen al-Akrad”—meaning “Kurdish rebels.”

Disturbed by this portrayal, I tried several times to speak with those responsible, but my requests were not taken seriously. I explained that referring to the Peshmerga as the “Kurdish armed forces” or simply as “Peshmerga” would be fairer and would more accurately reflect the true nature of our struggle. Nevertheless, they continued to use the same term.

Although the word “rebels” in English may sound relatively mild, its Arabic translation, “Mutamarrideen,” carries a far harsher connotation. In Arabic, it implies armed groups acting against law and order—often associated with criminal or outlawed gangs. The term deeply misrepresented the Kurdish movement for freedom and dignity.

Eventually, I decided to take my complaint directly to the head of the BBC, Mr. McDowell. When I entered his office, three members of the Arabic Service team were already present to take part in the meeting.

During the discussion, Mr. Niyazi Mustafa tried to justify their use of Mutamarrideen, claiming that it was simply the Arabic equivalent of rebels. I responded that, while the English term might not sound particularly negative, in Arabic it carries severe implications—far removed from

the honorable struggle of the Peshmerga. The term, I argued, portrayed us as lawless insurgents rather than as a legitimate national force fighting for our people's rights.

I made it clear that unless the terminology was changed, I would publicly expose the BBC Arabic Service's anti-Kurdish stance. "All we ask," I said, "is to be called by our rightful name—just as you refer to the IRA, the PLO, or the Viet Cong by their own designations. The BBC is a respected and influential source of news for the Arab world; therefore, accuracy and fairness are essential."

After a lengthy discussion, Mr. McDowell acknowledged that the Arabic Service team's attitude towards the Kurdish struggle had indeed been biased. He agreed that the term Peshmerga or the Kurdish armed forces should be used in future broadcasts.

I left the BBC headquarters that day with a deep sense of victory—not only over a linguistic misunderstanding, but over a deliberate bias that had long distorted the image of the Kurdish struggle. It was a small but significant triumph against those within the BBC Arabic Service who had misused their platform to undermine our cause.

From Politics and Idealism to the Reality of Business

When I left the world of politics, I thought I had already learned everything there was to know about leadership, decision-making, and human nature. I was wrong.

Stepping into business felt like entering a new continent—familiar in appearance, yet governed by entirely different laws. The instincts that had once guided me in politics had to be reshaped, and I had to learn, once again, how to listen, adapt, and rebuild trust in a world driven not by ideology, but by opportunity.

What began as a professional shift soon turned into a personal journey. Business became my new classroom, and every meeting, negotiation, and failure taught me something deeper about people, about value, and about myself.

Here are some of the lessons that marked my path.

Lessons I Learned in Business

When I left politics and entered the world of business, I discovered new horizons and ways of thinking I had never encountered before. Each day brought lessons I wished I had learned much earlier in my life.

Contrary to common belief, business is not merely a way to make money. I discovered that it is a way of life—a practice built on trust, self-confidence and credibility. Money is simply the consequence of doing things right; it is never the goal itself.

I quickly learned that in business, you do not get what you deserve—you get what you negotiate. Every decision has a price, and wisdom lies in knowing whether that price is worth paying.

The Reality of Negotiation

A real business deal must end in a win-win situation. If one side walks away feeling cheated or humiliated, that is not business—it is exploitation. And exploitation has a short lifespan.

During negotiations, I found great value in silence. Allowing my counterpart to speak freely often revealed more than any direct question could. By

listening carefully, I could sense their hopes, fears, and weak points—insights that later helped me make stronger, fairer decisions.

In business, I learned not to take anything at face value. Never believe everything you hear, and only half believe what you see. Always look for proof, for tangible evidence that earns your confidence. Trust should be built, not assumed.

I also discovered that telling the truth does not mean revealing the “whole” truth. Discretion, timing, and context are part of wisdom. Honesty must be accompanied by strategy.

Businessman versus Salesman

Over time, I came to see a clear difference between a businessman and a salesman. A salesman looks for a quick deal—to sell fast, earn his commission, and disappear. A true businessman seeks something greater: to build trust, to cultivate relationships, and to create future opportunities.

I made it a rule never to appear pessimistic or defeated, no matter the circumstances. No one wants to associate with failure. Confidence—even when quietly held—attracts opportunity. We have two ears and one mouth for a reason: to listen twice as much as we speak. Listening is the art that reveals who stands before you.

I also learned that arrogance is a sign of emptiness. Those who constantly show off their wealth or success are like drums—loud and hollow. True confidence speaks softly.

Saying “no” is another skill every businessman must master. The challenge is to refuse without closing the door forever—to leave space for tomorrow.

Experience: The True Currency of Business

We often assume that money makes the businessman. In truth, it is experience that shapes him. I often think of an old saying: “A man with money and a man with experience enter business together. After five years, the man with experience has the money, and the man with money has the experience.” I have seen this happen countless times.

Throughout my journey, I came to understand that honesty and a good reputation are the most valuable assets a person can have. Deception

may bring temporary gain, but never lasting success. In time, truth always surfaces.

Books can teach business principles, but real mastery is an art that only life can teach—an art that demands courage, intuition, and the ability to read people.

Taking risks is part of the path. But not all risks are equal. I learned to take calculated risks—to measure the fall before the leap. The biggest risk of all is to take none. Even a wrong decision, made with conviction, is better than endless hesitation, which breeds weakness and doubt.

Testing Trust and Other Reflections

One of the most unusual lessons I learned was to test trust in small ways. Before entering a big partnership, I would sometimes give my potential partner a small opportunity to cheat. It may sound cynical, but it is not—it is a safeguard. If they took the bait, I was spared a much greater loss later.

These lessons were not learned from books or classrooms, but from experience—from successes and failures, from people who kept their word and those who did not. Over time, I realized that business is not only about profit or strategy. It is, at its core, a reflection of who we are—our character, our discipline, and our ability to build trust in a world that constantly tests it.

The Kurdish Nation in the UN

If this is the United Nations, where are the Kurds?

In 1973, a horrific attack was carried out by the Iraqi army against two Kurdish Christian villages, Dakka and Sorya, in the Mosul region. Women and children were herded into a cave, which was then sealed with a massive rock and set ablaze, burning them alive. The brutality of the massacre sent shockwaves through the Kurdish leadership.

On the orders of Mustafa Barzani, Dr. Shafiq Qazzaz and I were dispatched to the headquarters of the United (UN) in New York to seek a way to bring this crime before the General Assembly, so that the world might learn the truth.

Before our arrival, we asked friends to organize a press conference. There, we presented documents and photographs that bore witness to the suffering of the victims from the two villages.

The following morning, however, we were stopped by security guards at the entrance to the UN building. Our names had been submitted by the Iraqi delegation, but we were denied entry.

As we stood there insisting and arguing with the guards, a luxury limousine pulled up to the main entrance. The ambassador of Qatar stepped out and was greeted with a red-carpet reception. I raised my voice and said, “Do you realize that this man represents fewer than two hundred thousand people, while we represent more than thirty-five million?” The guard apologized and said he understood our point, but he was bound to follow orders.

At that moment, a journalist in the crowd approached us and invited us to follow him to his office at *The New York Times*. He arranged press credentials for us and escorted us into the UN through the press entrance, assuring us that once inside, no one would be able to expel us.

We soon learned that to address the General Assembly, we needed the formal sponsorship and signature of a member state, since we did not represent an independent country.

We began arranging meeting after meeting with diplomats, seeking that signature. Nearly all of them expressed sympathy and respect for the Kurdish people and their history, but declined politely. They explained that they could only support our request if another state had already agreed to sponsor it—which we could not secure.

We approached more than thirty state representatives. Not a single one agreed to endorse our appeal.

Just as we were about to abandon hope, the Lebanese representative invited me to lunch inside the UN building. Before I could explain my mission, he told me he was already aware of the suffering of the Kurdish people and respected their long struggle. Then he spoke with disarming frankness, dispensing with diplomatic language.

“By asking me to sign your appeal,” he said, “do you realize how many enemies I would make? Iraq would accuse me of threatening its sovereignty. Turkey, Iran, and Syria would turn against me. The Soviet Union would oppose me because of its allies Iraq and Syria. The Western bloc would object because of Turkey and Iran. Spain would protest because of the Basque issue, China because of Tibet, and the United Kingdom

because of Ireland. I would gain countless enemies. My question to you is: what will you give me in return if I sign?”

I answered honestly, “At the moment, we have nothing to offer.”

He replied, “Politicians are like shopkeepers. When you ask for something, you must pay for it. Otherwise, all you will receive are polite words and empty promises. What we write about human rights and the right of peoples to self-determination is suitable for books and speeches—not for real life.”



Ghassan Al Tuweini (1926-2012), United Nations representative for the Lebanon

He continued, “If you come to me begging, I might give you the smallest coin in my pocket. But if you come to me holding a gun, I will give you my wallet, my watch, and all my valuables—and I will thank you for sparing my life. Unfortunately, this is the reality of politics.”

I thanked him for his honesty and for the lunch. When I later conveyed his words to Barzani, he appreciated Ghassan Tueni’s frankness and regarded it as a profound lesson in the true nature of international politics.

Memorable Kurdish Friends

Dr. Feriad Hiwaizi: Integrity and Compassion

Dr. Feriad Hiwaizi was born in 1943 in Koye into a well-respected and distinguished family. From an early age, he stood out from those around him for his exceptional diligence and commitment to his studies. His hard work and intellect earned him admission to the College of Medicine in Baghdad, an institution that accepted only the most outstanding students.

I first met Dr. Feriad in London in 1973, when he arrived as medical supervisor to Noori Shawais, then Iraq's Minister of Labor. In time, Dr. Feriad chose to settle permanently in London with his family—his wife, who was also a doctor, and their two sons, Surud and Omed. Over the years, our relationship grew into a close friendship, grounded in shared perspectives on both personal life and politics. Dr. Feriad struck me as a man of rare balance and depth. A highly accomplished physician, he approaches his profession with discipline and distinction. Yet he also possesses a childlike openness—honest, gentle, and unpretentious. Deeply rooted in his family traditions and proud of his Kurdish heritage, he embodies a thoughtful synthesis of Western values and the enduring dignity of his cultural origins. Those who know him admire him greatly; yet, as often happens, his success and integrity have also made him the target of envy and resentment. His noble character shines through in his dealings with people, though he is easily disappointed by betrayal.

A Misunderstanding and a Test of Character

One day, his wife called to tell me that her husband was deeply upset. A few members of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) in London had accused him of collaborating with Saddam's regime, claiming they had seen him leaving the Iraqi embassy just as they were demonstrating outside.

In reality, Dr. Feriad had gone to the embassy for a far more mundane and urgent reason: to renew a passport for a relative who faced imminent expulsion and the loss of his job. Despite this, members of the KDP group persisted in spreading damaging rumors. I tried to reason with them, pointing out that a genuine collaborator would hardly visit the embassy so openly. "Perhaps," I added, "you should look for such people closer to home—within your own leadership."

An Incident at Idris Barzani's Memorial

Some time later, I was invited to attend the fortieth-day memorial of Idris Barzani, a gathering attended by people from all political groups—even those we once considered “Jash” (traitors). Knowing of the close relationship between Dr. Feriad and Idris, and remembering how he had provided medical care and support to Idris's family while they were in London, I encouraged him to join me.

At first, Dr. Feriad hesitated, fearing hostility from certain individuals. Eventually, he agreed. However, upon our arrival, one of the organizers approached me at the entrance and said I was welcome to enter, but Dr. Feriad was not. Shocked and appalled by such behavior, I asked him to wait outside while I spoke to Mohsen Dizayi and the head of the KDP branch in London. They refused to intervene. In protest, I told them I would not attend the ceremony either.

This incident disturbed me deeply. I realized that such petty and destructive politics, used to undermine genuine Kurdish patriots, could only harm our cause. Determined to find a solution, I decided to act. I invited Dr. Mahmood Osman, Mohsen Dizayi, and Hoshyar Zebari—all members of the KDP leadership—to a meeting in my office. I asked Dr. Feriad to join us an hour later. During the meeting, I asked them directly, “Do you consider Dr. Feriad Hiwaizi a traitor?”

They all responded, “Of course not.” On the contrary, they praised him, admitting they were unaware of what had happened in London. I urged them to stop those responsible for spreading lies.

When Dr. Feriad arrived, they apologized and promised to resolve the issue permanently. It was a moment of vindication for a man whose only fault was his honesty.

Throughout his life, Dr. Feriad has always been there for others in times of need. I recall that just weeks before the collapse of the Kurdish revolution, Idris Barzani sent an injured Peshmerga commander, Haji Ab-bosh, to London for treatment. Dr. Feriad arranged for him to be admitted to a good hospital and even worked tirelessly to reduce the cost of his care.



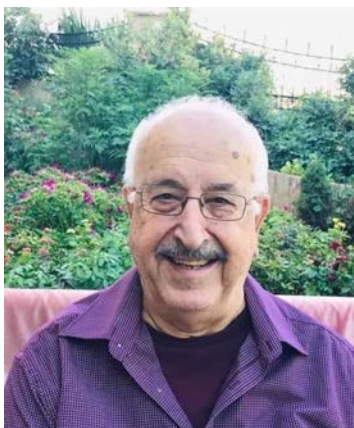
From left: Jamal Alemdar, Jane Ziad, Hawar Ziad, and Dr. Feriad Hiwaizi

To ease Abbosh's stay, Dr. Feriad would personally take his laundry home to wash and bring him Kurdish meals when he missed the taste of homecooking. Yet, after the revolution's collapse, Abbosh betrayed this kindness—contacting the Iraqi embassy and giving them our names as “dangerous opponents of the government.”

Dr. Feriad Hiwaizi remains a man of honor, intellect, and compassion—a rare combination in any era. He represents the best of Kurdish tradition blended with the virtues of modern humanity. His story reminds us that integrity often comes at a cost, but it is a price only the truly noble are willing to pay.

Dr. Shafiq Qazzaz: Tribute to a Kurdish Luminary

A distinguished Kurdish intellectual, writer, and activist, Dr. Shafiq Qazzaz, was born in Sulaimani on September 24, 1934, and passed away on October 22, 2020. I had the privilege of getting to know Dr. Qazzaz after my arrival in Sweden in 1965. It was there I learned of his pivotal role in advancing the Kurdish cause in the United States, particularly through his publication, *The Kurdish Journal*, which garnered wide distribution across both the U.S. and Europe.



Shafiq Qazzaz (1934-2020)

We met on several occasions at various meetings and congresses. His outstandingly positive outlook had the unique ability to brighten any gathering he attended. Dr. Qazzaz dedicated his life to serving the Kurdish cause, joining the revolution in Kurdistan and holding numerous posts, including being the representative of the Kurdish revolution in Tehran until its collapse in 1975.

During the winding down of the armed struggle, we collaborated successfully on settling Kurdish refugees who wished to leave Iran—the country that, as he noted, had betrayed the revolution. Later, he moved with his family to London, where he joined me at the Kurdish Office and contributed significantly to our activities until the closure of the office. When I embarked on my business venture after resigning from the KDP, Dr. Qazzaz also resigned to join me in my new endeavor. Ultimately, Dr. Qazzaz returned to Kurdistan, taking on the role of Minister of Humanitarian Aid in the new cabinet.

A Farewell of Unyielding Dignity

It was always a profound pleasure to listen to Dr. Qazzaz's insights on nearly any subject, where his intellect and wisdom consistently dominated the conversation. He hailed from a very distinguished family in Sulaimani; he was a cousin of the renowned Said Qazzaz, who served as the Interior Minister of Iraq during the monarchy and was married to Shafiq's sister, Zakia Khan.

Dr. Shafiq once recounted the final, tragic days of Said Qazzaz and his execution by the military regime that overthrew the monarchy on July 14, 1958. On that fateful day, upon hearing the radio broadcast of the coup, Said Qazzaz initially felt a sense of relief, recognizing the new leader as Abdul Karim Qasim, who had been part of his escort in the Interior Ministry. He knew Qasim to be an honest and trustworthy individual. Before leaving Iraq, he contacted the new leader, inquiring if his safety could be guaranteed should he remain in the country. Qasim, friendly on the phone, urged him to stay, assuring him that the new regime would benefit from his experience and that he would be protected from any harm.

However, Said Qazzaz was immediately arrested upon surrendering himself and subjected to a theatrical military court, broadcast live on television. The judge, notorious for his abusive nature, insulted Said Qazzaz, who powerfully retorted, addressing Colonel Fadhil Al Mahdawi, “I know you will sentence me to death, but when I climb onto the gallows, I will see people like you, standing beneath my feet who do not deserve to live.”

A Defiant Final Statement Before Execution

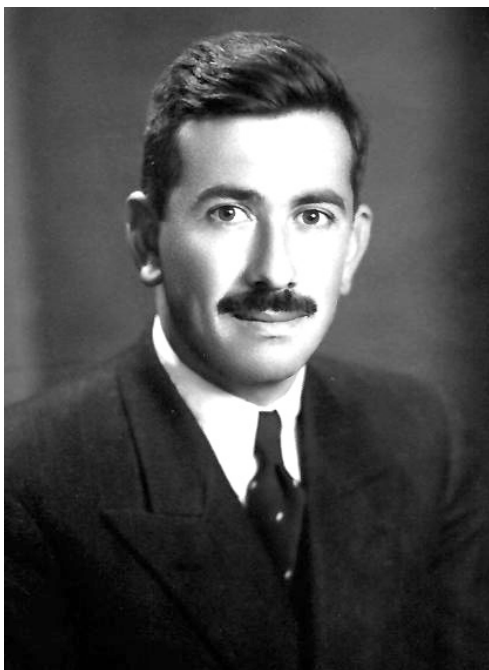
The day before Said Qazzaz’s execution, the authorities informed his family that two people would be allowed to visit him in his cell. Dr. Shafiq, then a college student, and his sister, Zakia Khan—Said Qazzaz’s wife—went to see him. Upon seeing the traces of torture on his face, Zakia Khan was overcome with emotion, weeping silently, unable to utter a single word.

Said Qazzaz, with remarkable composure, calmly spoke to his wife, urging her to be strong. “Remember,” he told her, “your husband is not dying for any dishonest deed or crime, but for an honorable duty he carried out to serve his people.” His final words were poignant, “Convey this message to my daughter, Peri, so she should always be proud of her father.”

This powerful anecdote, recounted by Dr. Shafiq Qazzaz, illuminates his immense courage and integrity in his final moments, a legacy undoubtedly cherished by his family and the Kurdish people.

Baba Ali Sheikh Mahmood

Baba Ali, the second son of Sheikh Mahmood, was born in Sulaimani in 1912 and passed away in London in 1996. His educational journey took him from Sulaimani to Egypt and later to the United States. During the monarchic period in Iraq in the 1950s, he was elected as a member of the Iraqi parliament and later served in various cabinet minister roles, including minister of communications and minister of economy. In the early 1970s, as political tensions escalated, Baba Ali left Iraq early and settled in exile in London, where he remained for the rest of his life.



Baba Ali Shaikh Mahmood (1912-1996)

It was during my time in London that I had the privilege of getting to know Baba Ali. Spending time with him was always a genuine pleasure. He possessed a remarkable blend of intelligence, integrity, and charm, coupled with a keen sense of humor and insightful perspectives on people and events. Occasionally, he would stop by my office in Victoria,

and those moments remain among my fondest memories of our time together.

Baba Ali's refined manners, humility, and quiet strength set him apart as a true gentleman. His profound intellect, gentle presence, and kindness made a lasting impression on all who knew him.

One particular incident underscored Baba Ali's keen political judgment, especially regarding internal Kurdish dynamics. When Jalal Talabani requested a meeting with him, alongside Ibrahim Ahmed, Baba Ali firmly declined. His response was succinct but telling, "You don't know them well; otherwise, you wouldn't ask."



Right: Baba Ali Sheikh Mahmood with Mustafa Barzani in Sulaimani 1959

Baba Ali and Mustafa Barzani: Peace over Power

When I once asked Baba Ali for his views on Mullah Mustafa Barzani, he shared a fascinating and little-known historical detail: before the outbreak of the September 11, 1961 Revolution, it had been agreed that Baba Ali and Mullah Mustafa would jointly lead the revolution. Mullah Mustafa would oversee the military front while Baba Ali would handle the political aspect.

Baba Ali recounted a notable diplomatic account with the Shah of Iran, in which he requested the removal of the death sentence that had been imposed on Mullah Mustafa Barzani since the fall of the Mahabad Republic in 1946. The Shah, however, was reluctant to do so, implying that he might one day find it useful to enforce.

When reflecting on why he eventually stepped back from collaboration with Mullah Mustafa Barzani, Baba Ali explained that he had come to recognize Barzani's capability and determination to lead the revolution alone. To avoid potential friction in the future, Baba Ali made the graceful decision to withdraw, choosing peace over power.

A touching story further demonstrates Bab Ali's compassion and moral clarity. A Kurdish woman, from Sulaimani, phoned me one day while Bab Ali was with me in the office. She was distraught, saying that her

husband had left her and their two children after a quarrel. She pleaded with me to help convince him to return home, and she mentioned the name of the hotel where her husband was staying.

I brought the matter to Bab Ali's attention and asked him to help me by joining me to visit the husband, particularly because the couple happened to be from the same city as him. Baba Ali kindly agreed. When we met with the husband and asked why he refused to go back, the man replied bluntly that he no longer loved his wife. Baba Ali, with his signature fatherly demeanor, said, "You must be wise enough to understand the difference between marriage and romance. You are now a husband and father, and you must honor that role. If you seek romance, that is a separate matter. But do not confuse the two; otherwise, you may lose both." His wise words prompted the husband to reconsider, expressing his willingness to return home to his wife and children.

As we left, Baba Ali leaned towards me with a glint of humor in his eyes and whispered, "Don't ever tell Reshadet Khan (Baba Ali's wife) what I said today." This incident showcased not only Baba Ali's wisdom but also his genuine concern for the wellbeing of others.

Towfiq Wahbi

Towfiq Wahbi (1891–1984) was one of the most distinguished Kurdish figures of his time. Born in Sulaimani and later settling in London, he led



Towfiq Wahbi (1911-1984)

an exceptionally varied life as a journalist, writer, linguist, colonel in the Ottoman army, and the holder of several ministerial posts in Iraq.

I had the pleasure of meeting him in London in 1972, during a visit to his home, where I also met his wife, Asia Khan, a leading voice in Iraq's early women's movement. In his final years, particularly after the loss of his wife in 1980, Mr. Wahbi endured a harsh existence. He often lamented the lack of support from his two sons during his old age.

During a visit to Mullah Mustafa Barzani in Kurdistan, I described the unfortunate circumstances Towfiq Wahbi was facing, emphasizing that he deserved better. I suggested that the Kurdish revolution should offer him assistance by providing a salary and employing a nurse to care for him. Barzani immediately approved.



King Faisal II of Iraq visiting the HQ of Iraq's Women's Union in 1954, on his right, the president of the Union, Asia Towfiq Wahbi (1901-1980)

Upon my return to London, I conveyed Barzani's offer to Mr. Wahbi. He was deeply moved, stating with tears in his eyes, "Thanks to the Kurds, now I can die comfortably. I am no longer alone and have support." After finding out about the salary and the nurse, he said, "Those are from Barzani, but I want something from you personally: two bottles of whisky every week." I diplomatically agreed to his request.

One day, when I arrived at his home to deliver the bottles, I found him entertaining a mullah from Sulaimani, dressed in full religious attire. Trying to be discreet, I attempted to hide the whisky behind my back.

But before I could take another step, Mr. Wahbi called out in his booming voice, “Jamal, did you bring the whisky?”

“Let’s discuss that later,” I murmured, hoping he would wait. But he had no intention of doing so. Without hesitation, he took the bottle, opened it, and began pouring himself a glass, much to the Mullah’s evident bewilderment.

The mullah finally asked, “Sir, are you not afraid that, in the afterlife, God will question you about what you are drinking?”

Mr. Wahbi shot back, “Before God asks me a single question, I have ten questions to ask Him. Do you really think my little whisky is a greater offense than the injustice He allows across the world?”

Unable to bear the exchange, the mullah quickly rose and left the house.

Another Colorful Anecdote

I recall another of Towfiq Wahbi’s stories from his time as minister of education in Baghdad during the monarchy. Some Kurdish students were demonstrating against him, shouting, “Down with Towfiq Wahbi!” using the Kurdish expression, “Burokhe Towfiq Wahbi.”

Being a Kurdish language expert, Mr. Wahbi went out to face the demonstrators. The students fell silent, eager to hear what he had to say. Mr. Wahbi addressed them, “My sons, you do not know Kurdish. The word ‘Burokhe’ is used for the falling of buildings. For me, you should use the word ‘Birme.’” The students, embarrassed, dispersed with laughter.

Another anecdote illustrates how he used to hide his alcohol consumption from his wife. When she was away from their home in Baghdad, Mr. Wahbi would take the liberty of drinking. One day, his son rushed in to warn him that students were demonstrating in front of the house. Mr. Wahbi responded dismissively, “That is not serious.” A short while later, his son returned to say the students were now throwing stones at the house. His response remained the same, “It is not important,” and he continued drinking. After a few more moments, his son came to tell him that his mother had arrived. “Now *that* is important!” Mr. Wahbi exclaimed, quickly hiding his glass under the table.

Awni Yousef's Captivity in Kurdistan

Awni Yousef, a respected Kurdish lawyer and politician, was born in Erbil in 1908 and passed away in 1988. He was a man of considerable stature in Iraqi and Kurdish political life—a former Iraqi cabinet minister deeply connected to the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP). I grew up hearing stories of his steadfast patriotism and his fierce defense of the Kurdish cause and Kurdish activists in court. Yet, paradoxically, Mustafa Barzani sometimes viewed him with suspicion, perhaps wary of his independent political standing and influence.

In 1972, during a general amnesty declared by Barzani following a period of political tension, Awni Yousef was visiting the picturesque summer resort of Shaqlawa, north of Erbil, when he was unexpectedly detained by a group of Peshmerga who were unaware of the amnesty order. Despite the public declaration, confusion in the mountainous region led to his arrest. He was subsequently taken to Barzani's headquarters in Nawpirdan.



Awni Yousef (1908-1989)

Colonel Sulaiman Sindi, the regional commander who oversaw the area, entrusted me with a delicate and confidential task: to visit Awni Yousef regularly, ensure his wellbeing, and quietly work towards resolving the misunderstanding so that his release could be secured. For reasons of discretion, the Peshmerga guarding his tent referred to him only by a pseudonym—"Sheikh Hanesh," the name of a well-known Arab tribal leader from the Ninewa district.

When I first met him, Awni Yousef was visibly relieved, recognizing our family connection. I reassured him that his detention was the result of a misunderstanding and that steps were being taken to correct the error.

The following day, however, I found him deeply distressed. He told me that the Peshmerga had been addressing him as "Sheikh Hanesh," a name he interpreted as a deliberate insult. To him, it felt like an attempt

to strip him of his identity. He then showed me an envelope containing medication he needed for a cold, clearly labeled: “To Sheikh Hanesh.” The sight of it had deepened his sense of humiliation.

Sensing his distress, I quickly took the envelope and improvised an explanation—that it belonged to another detainee, the real Sheikh Hanesh, who was being held in a tent across the river. The pseudonym, I suggested, was merely a matter of security and not directed at him personally. He accepted my explanation and gradually calmed down. Later, I ensured that he received properly addressed medication so that his condition could be treated without further indignity.

Beyond attending to his healthcare, I spent many hours in conversation with Awni Yousef, captivated by the richness of his experiences and the depth of his political insight. He spoke of Baghdad, of cabinet deliberations, of courtroom battles in defense of Kurdish activists, and of the complex relationship between Kurdish leaders and the Iraqi state. Those conversations not only eased his anxiety but also left a lasting impression on me.

In time, arrangements were made for his safe return to Erbil, bringing an end to his unintended and unsettling captivity. The episode, born of confusion rather than malice, revealed both the fragility of political trust in those turbulent years and the quiet dignity with which Awni Yousef endured adversity.

A Diplomatic Dinner Disrupted

Contrasting Responses to a Kuwaiti Ambassador’s Indiscretion

Prior to Saddam Hussein’s 1990 invasion of Kuwait, the Iraqi leader enjoyed considerable support from Kuwait and other Gulf states. The subsequent Gulf War and revelations of Saddam’s atrocities against Kuwait dramatically altered this stance, culminating in a symbolic gesture: an invitation from the Kuwaiti ambassador in London to the Free Iraqi Council (FIC) for a dinner at his residence.

A twelve-member delegation from the council accepted the ambassador’s invitation, expecting an evening of diplomatic engagement. Instead, the event took an unexpected and uncomfortable turn. The ambassador arrived fifteen minutes late and opened the meeting with an apology, explaining that

his wife had strongly objected to hosting Iraqis. According to him, she believed that all Iraqis were like Saddam Hussein and could not be trusted.

The remark, made in front of the entire delegation, created immediate tension. While the head of the delegation remained silent, I felt compelled to respond, speaking as a Kurd. I reminded the ambassador that many Arab representatives had openly supported Saddam Hussein in the past. I specifically mentioned their denial and condemnation of Kurdish attempts to inform the British government about the chemical attack on Halabja. His wife's sweeping accusation, I said, was particularly offensive given that those seated before him had opposed Saddam consistently and at great personal risk. I made it clear that such a statement was unacceptable and incompatible with basic diplomatic conduct or ethical standards. Accompanied by Dr. Firiad Hiwaizi, another Kurdish delegate, I stood up and left the dinner.

Our departure highlighted the stark contrast within the FIC: while two of us chose to take a principled stand against the ambassador's wife's insult, the rest elected to stay and continue the evening as planned.

More Memorable Personalities

Jarjis Fethullah

Following my resignation from the KDP, I received a call from Mullah Mustafa Barzani while he was in Washington. He urged me to reconsider, stating that he agreed with the contents of my resignation letter (which I had shared with him in advance). However, he believed that the timing was unfortunate, as those seeking to harm the KDP could exploit it. I remained firm in my decision to resign. I told him that as long as the circumstances remained unchanged, Sami should continue leading the KDP as he saw fit—but without my involvement.



In Kurdistan in 2001 with Jerjis Fethullah (1920-2006)

Yet Mullah Mustafa and Masoud Barzani did not give up. They enlisted the help of Muhsin Dizayi and Ali Abdullah, members of the Kurdish leadership, to facilitate further meetings with me in an effort to persuade me and my colleagues to reconsider our resignations.

After one such meeting in London, I paid a visit to Sabir Barzani, Mullah Mustafa's son, and Jerjis Fethullah, a member of the KDP's Central Committee. They inquired about the outcome of my discussions with Ali Abdullah and Muhsin Dizayi. I explained that I had rejected their request to reverse my resignation.

Sabir, a gentle and amiable individual with a keen sense of humor, remarked, "How could you refuse the request of Ali Abdullah, such an important figure in the KDP? He has been a loyal member of the KDP since its inception in August 1946, never wavering or dissenting from the party line."

In response, Jerjis Fethullah, with his characteristic wit, chimed in, "That only proves his lack of intellect. After such a lengthy tenure, one would expect him to have developed his own thoughts and ideas that may not align entirely with those of the KDP."

Noori Shawais

Noori Shawais, born in 1922 in Sulaimani and passed away in the UK in 1983, was an intriguing figure from an earlier generation of Kurdish political activism. Throughout his life, he was actively involved in numerous Kurdish political movements.

I first met Noori Shawais in London in 1973, during my tenure as head of the Kurdish Office. That year marked a particularly dark chapter in Iraqi Kurdish history. The Ba'athist regime in Baghdad launched a brutal campaign to forcibly expel tens of thousands of Feyli Kurds—Iraqi citizens, of Shia Kurdish heritage—to the Iranian border.

This inhuman operation was justified on the false pretext that Feyli Kurds lacked Ottoman nationality documents, despite the fact that they and multiple generations of their families had been born, raised, and lived their entire lives in Iraq. Many were full Iraqi citizens.

In response, the Kurdish Office, in London, launched an extensive diplomatic campaign across the UK and other European countries. Our efforts drew significant international attention and caused considerable embarrassment to the Iraqi government. This took place during what was still considered the honeymoon period, following the March 11 Agreement.

Noori Shawais was visiting London for medical treatment. As a member of the KDP Politburo, he was a prominent figure, and I was present at Heathrow airport to receive him. Also in attendance was the Iraqi ambassador to the UK, as Noori was formally a minister in the Iraqi Government at the time.

Noori Shawais introduced me to the ambassador, and we were invited to return to central London in a limousine belonging to the Iraqi embassy. During the car ride, Noori Shawais began criticizing Kurdish activists in Europe, particularly those who had published articles or organized demonstrations against the Iraqi government.

He seemed especially eager to impress the ambassador, perhaps by presenting himself as a loyal intermediary. His comments took a specific aim at the Feyli Kurds, who had recently been forcibly expelled from Iraq, and those who were publicly advocating on their behalf.

Sensing the direction of his remarks, I replied that these Feyli Kurds were a part of his people. If he wanted to criticize anyone, it should be

directed at the Iraqi government, rather than attacking us, who were merely defending the rights of our people.

Noori Shawais expressed his dissatisfaction with my reply, stating that he could not accept such a response from me. He demanded that I instruct all my Kurdish friends in Europe to cease their campaign against the Iraqi Government. I expressed my regret but made it clear that I could not comply with his order. I asked the driver to stop the car, got out, and continued my journey by taxi.

While Noori Shawais took great pride in his role as a minister in the Iraqi government, Mullah Mustafa, however, often expressed frustration over the five Kurdish ministers serving in Baghdad. On one occasion, when I was with him, he lamented that none of them held any real authority within their ministries.

Barzani recounted that during a visit to Kurdistan, Noori had spoken candidly about the challenges he faced in dealing with the Ba'athists in Baghdad. "I told him," Barzani said, "If you're so unhappy with your work there, why not simply resign?" According to Barzani, from that day on, he never saw or heard from Noori Shawais again.

Noori Shawais, somehow, maintained a strong ideological admiration for the Soviet Union. He considered himself a leftist and progressive Kurdish politician. A telling memory came during the wedding of Dr. Hamid Hiwaizi in London on August 6, 1972. It was a large gathering, attended by numerous Kurdish political figures, including Sami Abdulrahman, Muhsin Dizayee, Noori himself, and many others.

Dr. Firiad Hiwaizi, arriving late to the wedding dinner, shared the news he had just heard on the car radio that Anwar Sadat of Egypt had expelled all the Soviet military advisors from Egypt. Noori Shawais immediately launched an attack on Sadat, labeling labeling him a traitor and an imperialist agent.

Dr. Firiad, ever pragmatic, attempted to temper the shock by suggesting that Sadat may have acted in the best interests of his country. But instead of calming the room, his comment only seemed to further infuriate Noori Shawais, who responded with escalating criticism of Sadat and what he saw as a betrayal of socialist solidarity.

Sensing the rising tension, I stepped in, trying to steer the conversation towards a more balanced perspective. I suggested that actions taken by

Sadat—or by the Soviet Union—should be viewed through the lens of each nation’s national interest rather than as ideological betrayal.

Noori Shawais promptly turned his frustration towards me, questioning how I could represent the KDP when I did not defend the Soviet Union. Taken aback, I argued that a Kurdish representative should evaluate events based on the interests of the Kurdish people, not on whether they favor the United States or the Soviet Union. Shaking with anger, Noori Shawais abruptly left the wedding without having dinner.

Professor Kamal Majeed: A Kurdish Advocate and Engineer

Professor Kamal Majeed was a prominent Kurdish figure in London, distinguished by his contributions to engineering and his prolific academic writings. His textbooks were widely used in university curricula. A dedicated Kurdish nationalist, he actively participated in London’s Kurdish community, advocating for Kurdish rights with a pronounced leftist perspective.

Prior to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, Professor Majeed joined a protest against Saddam Hussein’s regime outside the Iraqi embassy in London. During the demonstration, he delivered a forceful speech condemning the Iraqi government’s oppressive policies. Unbeknownst to the protestors, embassy staff photographed the participants, potentially endangering their relatives in Iraq.

Shortly after the protest, Professor Majeed visited my office, located near the embassy, to inform me of his intention to renew his Iraqi passport. He expressed concern for his safety, stating that if he did not return within two hours, the police should be notified. Despite my reservations, Professor Majeed insisted on exercising his legal rights.

Upon his return, Professor Majeed recounted his experience with a sardonic observation, “If any Iraqi yearns for Iraq, a brief visit to the Iraqi embassy will effectively extinguish that sentiment for at least three years.”

The ambassador, aware of Professor Majeed’s recent protest, hesitated to renew his passport. Professor Majeed countered, asserting his right to independent political views. Undeterred, he revealed that he had received an offer of British citizenship and gave the ambassador one week to issue a valid Iraqi passport. Otherwise, he would apply for British citizenship

and would hold the ambassador responsible. In a symbolic act of defiance, Professor Majeed tore up his expired passport and left the embassy. This act underscored his commitment to his identity in the face of bureaucratic obstruction.

We celebrated his safe return, mindful of the dangers faced by those who had previously disappeared. Ultimately, Professor Majeed received a new, valid passport by post, demonstrating his fortitude and determination.

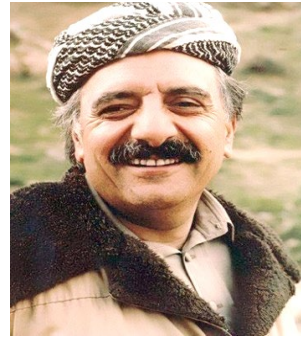
In a separate episode, I received an invitation to visit North Korea as a representative of the Kurdish movement. I declined, and Professor Kamal Majeed volunteered to go in my place. When he returned, he was deeply disillusioned by what he had experienced.

He described a rigid, tightly choreographed itinerary that consisted of long daily drives to sites glorifying Kim Il Sung's life and "revolutionary achievements." The entire trip felt, in his words, like a psychological campaign—an unrelenting showcase of the regime's ideology. Eventually, exhausted by the propaganda and lack of autonomy, he pretended to fall ill to shorten his stay.

The visit profoundly changed him. It forced a reckoning with his earlier, more sympathetic view of the North Korean system, exposing the chasm between theoretical admiration and the grim reality of life under totalitarian control.

Abdurrahman Qassemlou

Abdurrahman Qassemlou was a distinguished Kurdish politician, scholar, and man of letters, he was tragically assassinated in Vienna. His seminal work, *Kurdish Identity and Kurdistan*, endures as a cornerstone for understanding Kurdish national consciousness.



Dr. Abdurrahman Qassemlou (1930-1989)

That position proved costly after the Soviet Union invaded Czechoslovakia on August 20, 1968. Dubček was arrested, and Dr. Qassemlou—regarded as one of his supporters—lost his academic post.

Qassemlou was a captivating storyteller and a man of considerable charm. I vividly recall the day he informed me of his dismissal. The new regime, he explained, viewed him with suspicion because of his association with Dubček. He asked whether I might be able to help him secure employment in Sweden.

I arranged a meeting with Professor Gunnar Myrdal, the renowned economist and one of the architects of modern Sweden. Myrdal admired Mustafa Barzani and readily agreed to receive us, which undoubtedly made obtaining the appointment easier.

The moment we entered his office, Professor Myrdal's first question concerned Barzani. "How is the old man?" he asked, before adding, "Mustafa Barzani is a great leader. There are very few of his stature. Usually, leaders become known through their nations—but in Barzani's case, he put his nation on the map." Professor Myrdal eventually referred us to his assistant, Professor Bengt Karlsson, for further assistance.

To my surprise, Qassemlou was visibly disappointed after the meeting. He felt that I had devoted too much time to discussing Barzani with Myrdal and too little to advancing his own employment prospects.

During his stay in Stockholm, Qassemlou shared my modest student room. A few Kurdish students in the city criticized him, accusing him of speaking unfavorably about Barzani. I assured them that in private he had expressed quite the opposite view.

Nevertheless, they remained skeptical and insisted on organizing a public meeting at which Qassem lou would present his book. Their true intention, however, was to question him openly about Barzani and observe his response before an audience.

At the meeting, Qassem lou quickly sensed the carefully orchestrated attempt to put him on the spot. When directly asked for his opinion of Barzani, he defused the situation with composure and irony. "I see that you have arranged this gathering to place me in an awkward position," he said. "Therefore, I will not continue my speech." With that, he walked out of the hall.

Later, during a visit to Kurdistan, I learned from Idris Barzani that Qassem lou had, on several occasions, attempted to meet with Mullah Mustafa Barzani, but these requests were reportedly declined.

The end of Abdurrahman Qassem lou's life was tragic. In 1989, he was assassinated in Vienna by agents sent from Iran. The killers took refuge in the Iranian embassy and were later allowed to return to Iran, escaping justice.

Professor Ihsan Sherzad

Professor Ihsan Sherzad was a prominent Kurdish professor (1920-2015) who hailed from Erbil. He earned recognition for his work as an exceptional academic who taught at Baghdad's College of Engineering. His distinguished career led to his appointment as the minister of municipality in Iraq, representing the Barzani political list.



Professor Ihsan Sherzad (1920-2015)

My first encounter with him took place in liberated Kurdistan in 1970. At that time, he was part of an Iraqi delegation sent by the Baghdad regime to engage in talks with Mullah Mustafa Barzani. As part of the visit, Idris Barzani graciously hosted the delegation for lunch in the village of Dilman. I had the privilege of being invited to join the gathering.

Just as we were about to begin the meal, Idris, arriving late, apologized to the guests for the delay. Evidently frustrated, he mentioned that he had been held up due to a certain individual, who, despite receiving everything he wanted, continued to cause significant problems. With a tone of exasperation, Idris added that he did not know what to do with this person anymore.

Among the guards present in the room that day was Franso Hariri, a friend I had known since primary school. In a loud, half-joking voice, Franso called out to Idris, using a sharp Kurdish expression, suggesting that he “release” him on the troublesome individual—a phrase commonly associated with dogs.

Surprised by his language, I turned to Franso and asked if he understood the meaning of “release” in that context. He affirmed that he did, adding that he considered himself a “dog of the Barzani family.”

Idris, however, did not take this lightly. Visibly irritated, he rebuked him in front of everyone, “For God’s sake, don’t speak like that in front of our guests. Please don’t embarrass me. We don’t need dogs like you.”

Later, during lunch, I had the opportunity to speak with Ihsan Sherzad, who showed great interest when I mentioned that I had studied architecture in Stockholm.

We exchanged contact details, and soon afterwards, he initiated correspondence with me. In the months that followed, I also received letters from Sherzad’s partner, Rafaat Al Chaderchi, an internationally renowned architect, requesting publications and other resources on Swedish architecture. Whenever I came across relevant articles or news, I would share them with Sherzad and his colleagues, fostering a small but meaningful cultural exchange.

A Warning about Saddam Hussein

In one of his letters, Ihsan Sherzad mentioned his intention to attend a United Nations Conference on the Human Environment scheduled to take place in Stockholm in June 1972. He mentioned that he would be leading a delegation from his ministry and expressed a desire to have a private conversation with me. In response, I invited Ihsan and his wife to my home in Täby, just outside Stockholm. During that meeting, he handed me a confidential message to be delivered personally to Mullah Mustafa Barzani.

Ihsan spoke candidly about Saddam Hussein, who at the time held the position of vice president of Iraq. Despite his title, Ihsan described Saddam as the real center of power, referring to him as one of the most cunning and dangerous leaders he had encountered among Arab and Middle Eastern politicians. He warned that Saddam was not to be trusted and posed a significant threat to the Kurds and their cause. Therefore, he thought, something should be done to get rid of him.

Barzani's Assessment of Saddam

Taking Ihsan Sherzad's message seriously, I traveled to Kurdistan to relay the message to Idris Barzani in person. Idris listened attentively and said he would discuss it with his father.

Later, Idris conveyed their disagreement with Ihsan's assessment. They believed that Saddam's Arab nationalist ideology would not succeed in gaining Kurdish loyalty. If Saddam had been a communist or a religious figure, it would have been easier for him to sow division among the Kurds. But as an Arab nationalist, they believed Saddam's appeal was limited.

Voting by Opposition, Not Understanding

At one point, Ihsan invited me to join the Iraqi delegation to the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm. I accepted. It did not take long for me, however, to notice something deeply unsettling: none of the Iraqi delegates appeared to speak any English.

Puzzled, I asked the director general of the ministry—the second-ranking member of the delegation—how they managed to follow the debates or cast informed votes. His answer was disarmingly straightforward. Whenever their minister, Ihsan Sherzad, raised his hand, they raised theirs. If he was absent, they simply watched the Israeli delegation seated beside them and voted the opposite way—a convenience made possible by the alphabetical ordering of country names.

The explanation was delivered without irony or embarrassment. What was intended as a conference on humanity's shared environmental future had, in practice, been reduced to a ritual of automatic alignment and reflexive opposition—an inadvertent but stark illustration of how geopolitics could eclipse both understanding and purpose.

A Forgotten Kurdish Hero in World War II: Ramzi Younis Nafíí Agha (1920-1943)

In the early 1970s, while living in London, I often spent hours wandering through the city's great bookshops, especially Foyles, searching for unusual and forgotten works. On one such afternoon, a title caught my attention, *The Burning Orient*, written by Gottfried Müller, a German colonel who had served in Hitler's military intelligence for the Middle East.

As I began reading, I was astonished. The book told the story of a young Kurdish student from Erbil whose life had become entangled in the vast geopolitical struggle of the Second World War. The dedication read simply: "To Ramzi, the hero I will never forget."

The name struck me immediately. During my childhood in Erbil, there had been a man whom many people regarded as eccentric. He would walk through the streets speaking passionately about his dream of an independent Kurdistan and about his German friend, Colonel Müller. Some dismissed him as a dreamer. Few knew the full story.

Now, in Müller's memoir, that same Ramzi Younis Nafíí Agha emerged not as a fantasist, but as a determined young patriot whose life had been shaped—and ultimately destroyed—by war.

A Student in a World at War

Ramzi was born in 1920 into a respected family in Erbil. During the early years of the Second World War, he studied at Robert College in Istanbul. The war disrupted his education and strained his family's finances. Like many young men of his generation, he found himself caught between personal ambition and global upheaval.

At the same time, Germany faced severe oil shortages that threatened its military operations. Colonel Müller proposed a bold plan to Berlin: to attempt to drive the British out of Iraqi Kurdistan and to establish alliances with Kurdish tribes. In return, Germany would offer political support for the creation of an independent Kurdistan. The proposal was approved at the highest levels.

During his intelligence work connected to the Middle East, Colonel Müller spent time in Istanbul—a city that, during the war, had become a

crossroads of diplomats, agents, and political exiles. It was there that he met Ramzi.

Ramzi, then a student at Robert College, was known among fellow Kurds for his passionate discussions about independence and the future of his people. His political awareness, linguistic ability, and determination impressed Müller. What began as conversations about Kurdistan's uncertain future gradually evolved into something more strategic.

Müller saw in Ramzi not merely a student, but a potential intermediary—someone who understood Kurdish society from within and who possessed both education and conviction. Under the cover of offering scholarships to students whose education had been disrupted by the war, Müller arranged for Ramzi to travel to Germany. Once in Berlin, the true nature of the mission was revealed. Ramzi agreed to participate.

Training and Preparation

Ramzi underwent intensive training in parachuting and mountain warfare in Austria. He prepared not as an adventurer, but as someone who believed he was acting in service of his nation's future.

Eventually, Ramzi, Colonel Müller, and two German officers boarded an aircraft bound for Kurdistan.

They carried several heavy boxes containing radio transmitters, communication instruments, coded materials, food supplies, clothing, and other essential equipment. These were crucial to establishing contact with tribal leaders and maintaining communication with Berlin.

But from the beginning, the mission encountered obstacles. The plane's departure was delayed repeatedly—later believed to be the result of British intelligence interference within Berlin. When it finally took off, a catastrophic error occurred during the parachute drop. Instead of jumping at the planned altitude of 200 meters, they were released from approximately 2,000 meters.

The four men landed scattered across mountainous terrain—not in Iraqi Kurdistan, but in Iranian Kurdistan. Worse still, they lost their boxes, which were never recovered, despite desperate searching. Without their equipment, without communication devices, and in the wrong country, the mission was crippled before it had truly begun.

Through the Mountains

Disguised in Kurdish clothing, the four men regrouped. Only Ramzi spoke to local villagers; the others remained silent, posing as his assistants. On foot, they began a difficult journey towards Mosul. As they approached the city, Ramzi demonstrated remarkable courage. He entered Mosul alone to assess the situation while the others waited outside. When he returned, he brought troubling news: British and Iraqi authorities had been alerted to the possible arrival of German agents guided by a Kurd. Surveillance was heavy. Rewards were rumored.

Despite the danger, they pressed onward towards Erbil. Ramzi's father, an influential figure in the city, was already under police surveillance. His brother warned that returning home would be too dangerous. Instead, they were guided to a remote mountain village near the Iranian border, reachable only by foot or horseback—a rugged region often used by smugglers as a hideout. A sympathetic local caretaker quietly provided food and assistance while they remained concealed. For a brief moment, they believed they were safe.



Ramzi Younis Nafii Agha, front row, sitting on the left

Betrayal: Their Refuge Proved Temporary

One day, several Kurdish-speaking carpet smugglers arrived in the village. At first, they appeared harmless. Ramzi saw an opportunity to gather information and spoke with them openly.

But the promise of reward proved stronger than solidarity. The smugglers betrayed them.

Authorities surrounded the village. Müller and the German officers were captured and eventually handed over to British forces. Ramzi was separated from them and transferred first to Erbil and then to Baghdad. There, he was imprisoned and subjected to severe interrogation and torture.

When Müller later persuaded British authorities to allow him a brief visit, he was devastated by Ramzi's physical condition. Yet he remained struck by the young Kurd's composure and resolve under brutal treatment.

Aftermath and Memory

The German officers were transferred to British military headquarters in Cairo and, after the war, released and allowed to return to Berlin. Müller carefully documented the mission and its failure. Yet he delayed publication for nearly a decade, fearing that revealing details might endanger Ramzi if he were still alive. Only after learning of Ramzi's death did Müller publish *The Burning Orient* in German. It was later translated into English. By then, Ramzi Younis Nafí Agha was gone—dead at only twenty-three years of age.

Ramzi's story is not simple. He lived at a time when small nations, seeking independence, often had to navigate dangerous and morally complex alliances. He did not fight for Nazi ideology; he sought support for Kurdish self-determination in a world dominated by imperial powers. History rarely offers easy choices to stateless people.

In Erbil, he had once been remembered by some as an eccentric dreamer. Yet in the pages of a former German intelligence officer's memoir, he stands revealed as disciplined, brave, and unwavering in his belief that Kurdistan deserved freedom.

To me, he remains what Müller called him: A hero not to be forgotten.

Sheikh Tahsin Ezidi:

A Spiritual Luminary and Business Entrepreneur

Sheikh Tahsin Ezidi stands as a beacon of wisdom, holding the esteemed position of the highest spiritual leader, the “Mir of the Ezidis.” The Ezidi religion, often considered an offshoot of the Zarathustra faith, revolves around the holy book *Mashafi Resh* (the Black Book), the only sacred text composed in the Kurdish language.

For centuries, the Ezidis have faced accusations of being devil worshippers from some factions, an allegation staunchly denied by the community. While refraining from cursing Satan in their rituals, they offer a nuanced perspective, acknowledging Satan’s initial status as an angel who fell from grace for disobedience.

With around 350,000 Ezidis dispersed across Iraq, Turkey, Syria, Armenia, and Georgia, their unique diplomatic approach reflects a commitment to maintaining peace, grounded in the belief that avoiding confrontation with the devil is the path to harmony.



Shekh Tahsin Saïd Ezidi, the spiritual leader of the Ezidis (1933-2019)

Sheikh Tahsin, the Mir, was a pivotal figure—known not only for his religious authority, but also for his efforts to navigate the unfamiliar world of business. According to Yazidi tradition, a Mir is chosen through a sacred process overseen by the council of Pirs, and his role is understood as part of a larger spiritual order, tied to the rhythms of the heavens. I first met Sheikh Tahsin in Kurdistan in 1968, when he had already joined the Kurdish September Revolution of 1961. Because of his influence among his followers, he became a figure courted by both sides: Mullah Mustafa Barzani wanted to keep him within the revolution. At the same time, the Iraqi regime tried to lure him away with offers and privileges.

Years later, in London, our friendship deepened during the hardships of his life as a refugee. He would stop by my office from time to time, and during one visit, he asked for my advice—then shared something he rarely admitted.

“Jamal,” he said, “let me tell you a secret. When money runs short, I travel to Kurdish friends in other countries. They collect a little for me, and I return to London with a modest sum—but the cycle repeats. This time, I want to end it. I want to invest and secure a stable income, so I don’t have to rely on others. What would you advise?”

I suggested a practical solution: buy a small apartment building in central London with several units. He could live in one flat and rent out the rest. That way, he would have a steady monthly income, while the value of the property would likely rise over time, giving him a profit if he sold it later.

Partnership Must Rest on Trust

The idea immediately appealed to him. “Excellent, Jamal!” he exclaimed. “But I have one condition: you must be my partner. Business intimidates me, and I need your support.”

I explained that my finances were limited, but he insisted. In the end, I told him I might be able to manage a 10% share, and—after repeated appeals—I agreed.

A short silence followed. Then Sheikh Tahsin, looking unsettled, said he was worried about finding a suitable property quickly. I reassured him that I knew several real-estate agents and could ask them to alert us to opportunities, for a modest fee.

Even then, I sensed hesitation. When I asked what was troubling him, he finally said, “How can I be sure you won’t make an arrangement with the agent and quietly raise the price behind my back?”

Suppressing my discomfort, I answered, “Sheikh, think about what you’re saying. A partnership rests on trust. You asked me to be your partner, and I agreed. If you believe I’m capable of deceiving you, then you should not enter into business with me. And I should not enter into business with you. In that case, I would rather withdraw.”

My blunt response left him stunned. After a moment, he conceded, “Forgive my naivety, Jamal. I see now how foolish my doubts were.”

He paused, then added, “One should never go into business without understanding the ethics it requires. A true partner accepts the shared journey—whether it brings success or hardship.”

Caught Between Loyalty and Dilemma

The first chapter of this intriguing tale unfolded in 1977 when Sheikh Tahsin, initially an opposition leader, faced a pivotal decision. His failure to secure a business led him to an unexpected invitation from Saddam Hussein to return to Iraq, an offer that was too compelling to resist, it seemed. From the heart of the Iraqi capital, Sheikh Tahsin pledged allegiance to Saddam Hussein’s regime.

Fast forward to 1978, and the plot thickens. A call from Sheikh Tahsin in London beckoned a meeting, prompting a cautious response. Recognizing the gravity of the situation, I invited Dr. Shafiq Qazzaz to join our deliberations. The Sheikh, claiming to be a personal emissary of Saddam Hussein, unveiled a proposition: a call for Kurds like us to return to Baghdad. The mission: establish a Kurdish political party that would supplant and replace an existing organization led by Hashem Aqrabi, widely rejected by the Kurdish populace.

Saddam dangled a tempting carrot—US\$ 10 million as an initial payment to fortify our financial standing.

Rejecting this Machiavellian proposal, we perceived it as a furtive attempt to tarnish our reputation and undermine the Kurdish revolution. In the aftermath of our refusal, we sought Sheikh Tahsin’s perspective. To our relief, he concurred, denouncing Saddam as a brutal dictator and the true adversary of the Kurdish people. A pivotal question lingered—why did he, living comfortably in London, choose to align with Saddam? Emotionally

charged, Sheikh Tahsin justified his decision, citing responsibility for a beleaguered community. His return, he claimed, alleviated the plight of the Ezidi community in Iraq.

Pressing further, we inquired about his role as a messenger for Saddam. Sheikh Tahsin revealed a stark truth—it was the sole means to travel outside Iraq, a precarious bargain for the greater good.

A few years ago, Sheikh Tahsin departed this world, leaving behind a legacy of complexity. A man of virtue, humility, and unsuspecting naivety, he was almost worshipped by his people. In the end, Sheikh Tahsin's story serves as a testament to the intricate web of decisions made in the name of duty, loyalty, and the pursuit of a greater good.

Sheikh Fadhlullah Al Ha'iri

Born in Karbala, Iraq, in 1938, Sheikh Al Ha'iri was a man of notable influence, combining a successful career in the Gulf's oil industry with a distinguished role as a spiritual leader. A graduate of Cardiff University in petroleum engineering, he later turned towards spirituality, embracing Sufism and studying the Al-Qaderi order under an English Muslim sheikh.

After amassing considerable wealth, Sheikh Al Ha'iri settled in South Africa about two decades ago. His Al Zahra Centre in West London became a vibrant hub for a diverse following—from Pakistani expatriates to members of the deposed Iranian royal family. Many were drawn to his charisma and to the center's programs of Sufi rituals, spiritual guidance, and lectures on Islam.

Sheikh Al Ha'iri practiced polygamy, sharing his life with three wives—English, Danish, and American—and their nine children in a farmhouse outside London. The residence was thoughtfully arranged, providing each wife with her own private quarters, while also serving as a sanctuary for followers who came to pray or meditate.

In a moment of candor, Sheikh Al Ha'iri reflected on the challenges of managing a polygamous household. With a touch of humor, he remarked that balancing the affections of three wives was, in some ways, easier than meeting the constant expectations of one. He admitted that maintaining harmony required diplomacy—and, on occasion, a few harmless white lies—to preserve peace within the family.

During a visit to Sheikh Al Ha'iri's farm, I observed a Dhikr session in the prayer room, where rhythmic chanting and devotional songs filled the air. I chose to stand quietly at the edge of the gathering, watching with respect but without joining in.

At one point, a participant asked why I was not taking part and questioned whether I was truly Muslim. I explained that while I do identify as Muslim, I do not practice formal prayer—an answer that do not sit well with him.

After the session, Sheikh Al Ha'iri spoke to the group, addressing the moment directly. He said, "Jamal is a dear friend whose good deeds and generosity I know well. His honesty in admitting that he does not pray, rather than pretending to, has only increased my respect for him. What matters most is integrity and compassion—not outward displays of piety." His words revealed the depth of Sheikh Al Ha'iri's understanding: that true faith lies in sincerity and moral action, not in ritual alone.

Dr. Ferhan Baqir: A Quiet Lesson in Prayer

Dr. Ferhan Baqir, a remarkable Iraqi physician born in 1926, lived a life marked by wisdom and quiet dignity. A pioneer lecturer at Baghdad's Medical College, he later served as private physician at the presidential palace before eventually settling in the United States. His influence extended far beyond Iraq's borders. In London, countless doctors considered themselves fortunate to have learned from him, cherishing every opportunity to visit whenever he was in town.

In the early seventies, Dr. Feriad Hiwaizi, one of Dr. Baqir's former students, invited us to a gathering at his home in Ealing, bringing together a small circle of his old pupils. During our conversation, one of the guests unexpectedly asked to perform prayers in the very living room where we sat.

A hush fell over the room as we waited. I could not help but notice Dr. Baqir's subtle unease. He seemed perturbed by the interruption, and



Professor Dr. Ferhan Baqir
(1926-2020)

perhaps, by the choice of such a public space for what felt like a deeply personal spiritual act.

After the prayers concluded, the student raised his hands in supplication, a heartfelt plea for forgiveness for any perceived failings. He portrayed himself as a humble servant, acutely aware of his own imperfections.

Later, in a quiet moment, Dr. Baqir turned to the young man. “Tell me,” he asked gently, “have you committed any transgression recently?” The student, somewhat taken aback, insisted he had not. Dr. Baqir, with a twinkle in his eye, replied, “Your fervent plea for forgiveness suggests otherwise. If I were in God’s place, I’d be suspicious.”

Dr. Baqir’s observation offered a glimpse into the diverse ways people connect with the divine. Some approach God out of fear or a desire for reward, believing that such actions guarantee divine favor. Others, however, seek a connection rooted in love and gratitude, a path that often leads to a deeper, more profound spiritual fulfillment. He seemed to suggest that true connection with the divine comes from the heart, and not from fear or performative intent.

Free Iraqi Council (FIC)

The chaotic aftermath of the Gulf War, following Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait and his subsequent defeat, gave rise to a fractured Iraqi opposition.

Various groups, such as the Iraqi National Congress and Al Wifaq, vied for influence, each with its own leadership and agenda. Amid this political struggle, one glaring void remained: the absence of a unified Kurdish voice capable of effectively championing the rights and aspirations of the Kurdish people.

Amid this shifting political landscape, the Free Iraqi Council (FIC) emerged in early 1991, positioning itself as a unifying platform for Iraq's diverse voices. Saad Saleh Jabr, son of the former Prime Minister Saleh Jabr, approached me with his vision for the FIC: an inclusive organization that would bring together Shiites, Sunnis, Liberals, Independents, and, most importantly, Kurds.

Recognizing the potential of this initiative and the urgent need for Kurdish representation, I, along with Dr. Shafiq Qazzaz, Dr. Feriad Hiwaizi, and other trusted Kurdish figures, considered joining the FIC. However, we agreed that safeguarding Kurdish interests would require establishing specific conditions before committing: The Kurdish section within the FIC had to maintain full independence in shaping policies related to Kurdish rights and aspirations.



Saad Saleh Jabr (1900-2015), president of the FIC

Federalism: Our Condition for Joining the FIC

Additionally, the Kurds would firmly advocate for a federal system in Iraq, ensuring the establishment of a Kurdish federal region. To support this, a detailed framework outlining the principles of this federal system was to be submitted to the FIC.

With these conditions accepted, we moved forward with our participation in the FIC. Our primary objective was to establish a Kurdish federal state within the framework of a new, democratic Iraq, as enshrined in the council's constitution.

It soon became clear that Saudi Arabia had played a pivotal role in inspiring the formation of the council. The Saudi government supported Saad's initiative, actively encouraging the establishment of a council that would unite all segments of the Iraqi population—a vision that aligned with Saudi Arabia's broader strategy for a post-Saddam era.



King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia
(1924-2015)

Visiting Saudi Arabia

The Free Iraqi Council (FIC) was subsequently invited to Saudi Arabia, where we met with high-ranking officials, including Crown Prince Abdullah (later King Abdullah) and Prince Turki Al Faisal, the head of Intelligence.

In a key meeting with the crown prince, he expressed firm support for the FIC, urging the council to consider Saudi Arabia a second home. He acknowledged the atrocities committed by Saddam Hussein's regime, particularly during the invasion of Kuwait.

However, the meeting took an unexpected turn when Dr. Fakhri Shehab, an esteemed Oxford University economist and member of the FIC, delivered a sharp critique of Saudi Arabia's past support for Saddam Hussein. He argued that this support had directly contradicted the interests of the Iraqi people.

In a surprising moment of candor, Crown Prince Abdullah admitted that the kingdom had misjudged its past support of Saddam Hussein and expressed regret for not backing the Iraqi opposition earlier. This acknowledgment helped foster a sense of trust and understanding between the FIC and the Saudi leadership.

Beyond formal meetings, the FIC received a warm welcome into Saudi Arabian society. Sheikh Abdullah Al Tweijri, head of the National Guard and a close advisor to the crown prince, hosted a traditional desert dinner at which Bedouin poets recited verses honoring the leaders and their guests.

The council members also participated in Umrah in Mecca, a deeply spiritual experience that strengthened the bonds within the FIC and reinforced their shared sense of purpose.

A significant moment occurred during a meeting with Prince Turki Al Faisal, the head of Saudi Intelligence. He declared the FIC members as “the authentic representatives of the Iraqi people,” emphasizing their legitimacy.

The meeting with Prince Turki became even more memorable when he shared an unexpected anecdote. He disclosed that he had recently rejected an offer from Fakhri Karim, a prominent member of the Iraqi Communist Party, who had proposed to expose Saudi Arabian Communist Party members in exchange for a substantial sum of money. Prince Turki firmly refused, emphasizing his commitment to ethical standards and his decision to steer clear of such “dirty games.” This incident underscored the stark contrast between the Saudi Intelligence’s guiding principles and the opportunistic tactics of some factions within the Iraqi political landscape.

Dr. Fakhri Shehab: A Legacy of Economic Mastery and Diplomatic Acumen

Dr. Fakhri Shehab (1921-2022) a distinguished economist from Iraq’s Diyala province, left an indelible mark on the economic and political landscapes of both Iraq and Kuwait. His pioneering role in establishing the Kuwaiti dinar and founding the Central Bank of Kuwait after the country’s independence cemented his reputation as a visionary thinker and nation-builder.



Dr Fakhri Shehab (1921-2022)

Recognized by Forbes magazine as one of the world's top ten economists, Dr. Shehab also served as a lecturer in economics at Oxford University. His influence extended far beyond academia and finance, encompassing diplomacy, policy, and strategic guidance at the highest levels.

My introduction to Dr. Shehab came through a mutual acquaintance, Mr. Hector from Sri Lanka. Initially hesitant to meet yet another Iraqi businessman, his attitude changed the moment he learned of my Kurdish background, a detail that immediately piqued his interest. "The Kurds," he once said, "are the only people in the Middle East who still carry a sense of ethics and dignity. Perhaps it comes from the beauty and harshness of the mountains they call home."

Our first meeting revealed his sharp intellect and playful humor. When introduced to a Turkish businessman, Dr. Shehab quipped, "Are there businessmen in Turkey? I thought they were all generals." Fortunately, his good-natured wit was well received, setting the tone for a cordial and lively friendship.

One day, Dr. Shehab invited me to meet Al Sharif Ali, the sole survivor of the July 14, 1958, massacre of the Iraqi royal family.

Al Sharif Ali and Dr. Shehab's Counsel

Al Sharif Ali sought Dr. Shehab's support for a political movement aimed at restoring the Iraqi monarchy under his leadership. After carefully assessing the prevailing political climate, Dr. Shehab strongly advised against the idea, prioritizing Al Sharif Ali's safety and wellbeing.

He reasoned, "Have you ever seen an Iraqi leader die a natural death? They are either assassinated or forced into exile. You live comfortably in London, supported by the Jordanian royal family. My advice is to abandon this plan."

Al Sharif Ali appeared persuaded by Dr. Shehab's counsel, though he offered no direct reply.

Portugal: Advising on Post-Revolution Investment

After Portugal transitioned to democracy in 1974, the Kuwait Investment Board sought Dr. Shehab's expertise in evaluating new investment opportunities. He invited me to accompany him on a fact-finding mission to Portugal.

In Lisbon, Dr. Shehab met with the Portuguese Minister of Tourism to present a strategy for revitalizing the country's tourism sector. He strongly advised against imitating Spain's low-cost tourism model, arguing instead for a premium approach akin to the French Riviera.

"Portugal is much smaller than Spain," he explained. "It cannot afford cheap tourism."

During a walk through Lisbon's historic district, observing the aged facades of its buildings, I remarked that with greater financial resources, Portugal could restore its old town and enhance its appeal as a global landmark.

Dr. Shehab responded with his characteristic passion, questioning my assumption of Portugal's poverty. I suggested that the nation required time to recover from its past dictatorship.

Dr. Shehab countered, "These people possess a form of wealth that far surpasses that of much of the Arab world. Consider their assets: the vast Atlantic Ocean, a temperate climate, public spaces freely enjoyed by citizens, everyday security and stability, access to uncensored information, and the freedom to criticize their government. By contrast, while we may command greater monetary reserves, our lived reality is starkly different. We endure

extreme climates, environmental degradation, and authoritarian rule that suppresses dissent. So I ask you—who is truly rich?” Dr. Shehab’s definition of wealth is based on quality of life, rather than how much money you have.

Dr. Shehab’s Temperament and Wit

Dr. Shehab possessed a fiery temperament, often softened by a sharp sense of humor. This was evident during an episode involving a legal bill he considered unreasonably high. On our way to his lawyer’s office, he fretted about finding parking in the crowded London neighborhood. Yet, upon arrival, a space opened up right in front of the building. With a mischievous smile, he turned to me and asked, “Do you have divine connections?”

Inside the office, Dr. Shehab firmly contested the fee charged for a simple legal letter. The lawyer patiently explained that considerable research and preparation had gone into drafting it, but Dr. Shehab remained unconvinced. He argued his case passionately, eventually negotiating a reduced fee—and, in a flash of temper, declared that he would end his twenty-year relationship with the firm. In the end, he made only a partial payment before leaving.

As we left, he was visibly agitated. Observing my amusement, he questioned the validity of his actions. I suggested that while his financial gain was minimal, he had compromised a long-standing relationship and disrupted his own composure. I emphasized that maintaining composure was worth more than the small amount he gained.

Reflecting on the incident, I suggested that such confrontations were not worth the emotional cost. He paused, then remarked, “In another era, you might have been a prophet.” It was his way of acknowledging the wisdom of restraint—even for a man of brilliant intellect and strong convictions like himself.

A Visit to Iran

The Free Iraqi Council (FIC) embarked on an important visit to Iran at the invitation of the Iranian government. This visit was a key part of Iran’s strategy to support various Iraqi opposition groups, with the FIC receiving special attention due to its broad representation of diverse Iraqi factions.

The Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs hosted the FIC delegation at the Hotel Istiqlal (formerly the Hilton), covering all expenses. One of the most memorable moments of the visit was a meeting with Ali Akbar Velayati, who served as Iran's minister of foreign affairs and later became a senior advisor to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei. The meeting was held in an opulent palace dating from the Shah's era, offering a striking glimpse into Iran's layered history. During the discussion, Velayati recounted his opposition to the Shah's regime and offered insights into the palace's historical and cultural significance.

The delegation also met with Sheikh ul-Islam, the deputy minister of foreign affairs. During their conversation, Sheikh ul-Islam recounted the 444-day Iranian hostage crisis of 1979-1981, sharing details about the anxieties and diplomatic maneuvering that unfolded. He emphasized how, while initially a source of significant concern for the Iranian government, the crisis ultimately contributed to the downfall of President Carter and the eventual release of the hostages under President Reagan.

During the meeting, Mr. Jabr introduced me as the representative of the Kurdish desk at the FIC. He then began criticizing Turkey, describing it as "primitive and savage" in reference to my imprisonment and torture during my studies there. Sheikh ul-Islam swiftly intervened, reminding Mr. Jabr that Supreme Leader Khamenei himself is of Turkic origin. Mr. Jabr hastily added that Khamenei does not subscribe to Atatürk's Turkish ideology, with its narrow nationalism and fascist elements, thereby sparing himself further embarrassment.

Visiting Baqir al-Hakim: An Unexpected Detour in Tehran

During my time in Tehran, I accompanied Mr. Saad Saleh Jabr on a visit to Baqir al-Hakim, leader of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), a prominent Shiite political organization. Residing in Tehran as a refugee, al-Hakim's modest home was heavily guarded by Iranian security forces. Mr. Jabr, eager to understand the treatment of Iraqi refugees by the Iranian authorities, sought to engage with al-Hakim directly.



Ayatollah Mohammad Baqir al-Hakim (1939-2003)

Al-Hakim's account highlights the complex and often contradictory nature of international relations, as well as the challenges of Shiite refugee displacement. He expressed deep disappointment with the Iranian government's treatment of Iraqi refugees, contrasting sharply with their expectations of finding respect and dignity under an Islamic Shiite regime. He recounted a particularly disheartening incident: when an Iraqi minister or high official under Saddam Hussein's regime visited Tehran, Iranian authorities severely restricted his movements, confining him to his residence and confiscating his vehicles. This, al-Hakim explained, was clear evidence of the Iranian government's dishonesty regarding the principles they claimed to uphold.

During our stay in Tehran, we encountered an unexpected and significant challenge upon checking out of our hotel: a telephone bill exceeding \$30,000. Members of our delegation had made numerous international calls, assuming that, as guests of the Iranian Foreign Ministry, all expenses, including telecommunications, would be covered.

Despite our insistence on our official guest status and the ministry's assurance that they would bear all costs, the hotel staff maintained they had received no such instructions. They were unable to contact the ministry at that early hour. This created a tense situation. Mr. Jabr expressed significant anxiety, as the delegation lacked the funds to settle the exorbitant bill and risked missing the flight.

Based on prior experiences, I suspected this might be a tactic employed by certain ministry officials and hotel personnel, exploiting the early morning departure time to pressure guests into covering the costs themselves. I believed that once the guest paid the bill, the funds would be illicitly shared between the ministry and the hotel.

To resolve this impasse, I decided to remain in Tehran while the rest of the delegation proceeded to the airport. I subsequently met with the deputy minister of foreign affairs, explained the situation, and presented evidence of the ministry's responsibility for the expenses. After clarifying this misunderstanding, we successfully ensured that the bill was charged to the ministry's account, resolving the matter.

The Beirut Conference of the Iraqi Opposition

A Strategic Diplomatic Maneuver

In March 1992, Saudi Arabia and Syria organized a pivotal conference in Beirut, Lebanon, to bring together Iraqi opposition groups. It was held at the Bristol Hotel. This initiative, heavily funded by Saudi Arabia, aimed to form a unified front against the Iraqi regime.

For the Saudis, the Free Iraqi Council (FIC) was more than just another opposition group; it represented a distinct segment of the Iraqi population and was a key player in this endeavor. However, the FIC faced a formidable challenge: large delegations from other groups threatened to overshadow their influence.

Recognizing this disparity, I sought to leverage its unique position. Acknowledging the crucial role of Saudi Arabia in supporting the conference, the FIC strategically negotiated for veto power over all decisions. This power dynamic shifted the balance, ensuring that the FIC's voice would be heard and its interests considered.

With this strategic advantage secured, the FIC actively participated in the conference proceedings. Despite facing internal divisions and challenges, the conference marked a significant moment in the history of the Iraqi opposition. It demonstrated the FIC's ability to navigate complex political landscapes and secure a place for its vision.

Meeting Abdul Halim Khaddam

The day before our departure to Beirut from Damascus, we received an unexpected invitation from Mr. Abdul Halim Khaddam, the vice president of Syria. This meeting was of paramount importance, as Mr. Khaddam had been tasked with organizing the upcoming conference in Beirut.

Our delegation for the meeting included President Saad S. Jabr, vice president Sadiq Al Atiyya, Abdul Wahab Al Amin, Dr. Shafiq Qazzaz, and me, representing the Kurdish desk at the FIC, as well as others.

What was intended to be a cordial introduction of our group's views to our Syrian host quickly took a sharp turn. Before we could begin, Mr. Khaddam, with an astonishing lack of pleasantries, abruptly launched into a verbal attack against the FIC. He specifically targeted the embrace of federalism within our constitution, stating that Syria would never accept such

a notion due to its concerns over Iraq's potential division. Mr. Khaddam's directness caught us all off guard, leaving Mr. Jabr clearly surprised by this unanticipated confrontation.

In response, Mr. Jabr promptly delegated the response to me, representing the Kurdish desk. Turning his attention to me, Mr. Khaddam reiterated his firm opposition to a federal future for Iraq, emphasizing Syria's stance against the division of Iraq.

The exchange was candid, and Mr. Khaddam's agitation grew palpable. He reached a breaking point, demanding, "Do you mean to separate the Kurds from Iraq? Are you seeking more than the Kurdish parties strive for? This is a red line for Syria."

I countered with a question, "Do you desire an independent state for the Palestinians?" Mr. Khaddam answered unequivocally, "Yes, of course."

I seized this opportunity to highlight the disparities between the Kurdish and Palestinian situations. I explained that while Palestinians sought to establish their 23rd Arab state, the Kurds lacked even a single piece of land to call their own. I expressed disappointment that an Arab nation like Syria was reluctant to support Kurdish rights, especially considering the Kurds' long-standing contribution to Arab culture. Instead, we found support from countries like Sweden and other Western nations.

Khaddam, visibly taken aback by my direct and unvarnished response, abruptly ended the meeting, citing another engagement. He asked us to leave his office.

As we exited Mr. Khaddam's office, we unexpectedly ran into Jalal Talabani and Izzeddin Berwary of the KDP, who were waiting to meet with him.

The following morning, during breakfast at the Al Sham Palace Hotel, Talabani expressed his displeasure with my earlier encounter with Mr. Khaddam. He regarded Mr. Khaddam as a friend of the Kurds and criticized my direct approach. I countered that such an exchange should not unsettle true friends.

Later, I learned that Mr. Khaddam had asked Talabani and Berwary to intercede on his behalf. However, they firmly declined, stating they had no influence over me as I was neither a member of the KDP nor the PUK.

Before departing for Beirut, Jalal Talabani held a press conference in the hotel lobby. A journalist inquired. "Does the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan

(PUK) support federalism as a governing system for Iraq after Saddam?” Talabani firmly responded, “Absolutely not, we Kurds firmly oppose federalism, as it undermines the unity of Iraq.” Only a small group of Kurds, like Jamal Alemdar and his associates, advocate for this so-called federalism.

While still in Damascus, Dr. Mahmood Osman invited Dr. Shafiq Qazaz and me to his residence. Dr. Kamal Khoshnaw, the PUK representative in Syria, was also present. Dr. Kamal launched a scathing attack on Jalal Talabani, accusing him of being a puppet of the Syrian intelligence. I interjected, seeking clarification, “If you believe Jalal Talabani is such a man, why do you continue to work with him?” He replied, “If you could secure a job for me in London, I would abandon my current position in Syria without hesitation. I’m dependent on the salary I receive from Talabani.”

Syrian Strategy and the Beirut Conference

In a deft demonstration of Syrian diplomacy, the Beirut Conference emerged as a pivotal moment in the intricate landscape of the Iraqi opposition. By choosing Lebanon—rather than Syria—as the host, Syria provided itself with plausible deniability, allowing it to distance itself from direct involvement. Lebanon—ostensibly an independent state, but effectively under Syrian control—had extended the invitation to the Iraqi opposition. Additionally, the conference proved financially beneficial for the Syrian government, as Saudi payments were calculated at the official U.S. dollar exchange rate. At the same time, the Syrians covered the conference expenses at a much lower black-market rate.

The first day of the conference was marked by speeches from dignitaries representing Syria, Lebanon, and other nations. The afternoon saw the assembly split into several committees. I had the privilege of participating in the Final Communiqué Committee, chaired by Dr. Al Ansari, a member of the National Leadership of the Syrian Ba’ath Party. Al Ansari remained in constant contact with Abdul Halim Khaddam’s office in Damascus, providing updates and receiving guidance.

Our committee comprised representatives from diverse factions: Sadiq Al Atiyya and me, from the FIC, Dr. Roj Noori Shawais of the KDP, Sami Abdulrahman of the newly formed People’s Party, Abdul Wahab Al Safi of the Iraqi Communist Party, and two clergymen, including Al Mudaerresi from the Islamic Al Da’wa Party, among others.

Drafting the Final Communiqué

Dr. Al Ansari began the deliberations by presenting a preliminary draft of the final communiqué, stressing that it was subject to committee member approval. The opening section underscored the importance of the conference and stated, “We hereby declare that Iraq is a part of the Arab Nation.”

At the conference, I challenged the assertion that Iraq was solely an integral part of the Arab Nation. I argued that Iraq’s diverse population included multiple nationalities, notably the Kurdish Nation and other ethnic groups. This perspective, seemingly novel to the attendees, sparked a visible reaction.

Al Ansari, aware of the FIC’s veto power, attempted to sway my position. However, I remained firm. I proposed amending the statement to: “The Arab part of Iraq is a part of the Arab Nation, and the Kurdish part of Iraq is a part of the Kurdish Nation.” This suggestion faced opposition, but I stood my ground. Recognizing my resolute position, Al Ansari requested a recess to consult with Damascus.

Upon his return, Al Ansari surprised many by recommending the removal of the contested article from the communiqué. Sami Abdurrahman then proposed an alternative: “We strive for Arab Unity.” I again dissented, explaining that this statement failed to acknowledge Iraq’s evolving demographics, particularly the significant Kurdish population. I made it clear that I could not endorse this article. Faced with another impasse, Al Ansari had no choice but to remove Sami’s proposed article as well.

As Al Ansari presented additional articles, most were generally approved. However, the topic of Kurdish autonomy sparked intense debate. The proposed article stated: “We strive to implement a (Real) Autonomy for the Kurds in Iraq.” As agreement seemed imminent, I spoke up, rejecting the article. I argued that autonomy, previously offered by Saddam, had led to disastrous consequences. Considering the Kurds’ active engagement in armed struggle, I proposed replacing ‘autonomy’ with ‘federalism,’ the minimum right the Kurdish people deserved.

My words sparked an intense reaction. Sami questioned the feasibility of demanding federalism, fearing it implied separation from Iraq. Abdul Wahab Al-Safi, the communist representative, argued that federalism had never been part of the discussion. As Al Ansari faced mounting pressure to

finalize the communiqué, I exercised the FIC's veto power. Al Ansari left for further consultation, returning with a definitive No from Khaddam.

My goal was to have 'federalism' explicitly acknowledged in the communiqué, ensuring at least this fundamental right for the Kurdish people. During this critical moment, Sadiq Al Atiyya, the vice president of the FIC, requested a private discussion. Concurrently, Jalal Talabani, Muhsin Dzayi, and Fakhri Karim urged Saad Jabr to persuade me to reconsider my stance. Mr. Jabr, addressing me, remarked, "Jamal, observe your Kurdish leaders insinuating that I was being urged to compromise Kurdish rights."

Muhsin Dzayi questioned my pursuit of federalism, viewing it as an unattainable dream that could jeopardize the success of the conference. I clarified that my primary objective was to ensure that Kurdish rights were formally acknowledged, even if it risked causing the conference to collapse.

Power Dynamics and Veto Authority

Due to mounting pressure, Mr. Jabr implored me to seek a middle-ground solution to facilitate a successful conclusion to the conference. Ultimately, I agreed, stipulating that the final communiqué include a statement acknowledging the FIC's reservations and its advocacy for federalism for the Kurds, a matter to be addressed at the next conference. This communiqué was accepted.

We reconvened in the main hall to listen to the final communiqué. Ibrahim Ahmed took the microphone and, speaking in Arabic, declared, "I have heard that some Kurdish attendees of this conference are advocating for the division of Iraq. I, as a Kurd, announce from this platform that I am ready to forfeit all my rights to preserve the unity of Iraq."

Before concluding this account, it is important to note that while I persistently pushed to include the term "federalism" in the conference documents, many Kurdish participants privately urged me to stand firm. Yet, when the time came to vote, those same individuals voted against the very position they had encouraged me to defend. For obvious reasons, Kurdish parties have since avoided mentioning the Beirut Conference in their official publications.

The conference underscored the complex dynamics within the Iraqi opposition and the intricate web of regional politics. It revealed both the potential for solidarity and the deep-seated challenges that lie ahead. While

the final communiqué did not achieve all our goals, it marked a significant step in documenting the Kurdish demand for federalism and laid the groundwork for future discussions.

The Beirut Conference remains a testament to the resilience and determination of those fighting for Kurdish rights. It is a chapter in history that, despite attempts to erase it from publications, will continue to inspire future generations to pursue justice and equality for all of Iraq's diverse communities.

Mustafa Barzani: A Legacy Forged in the Mountains

Born in 1903 in Barzan, a picturesque village nestled within the Shirin mountains of Iraqi Kurdistan, Mustafa Barzani was destined for a life of profound political activism. His path was irrevocably shaped by the early tragedy of his father, Sheikh Abdul Salam Barzani, a prominent Kurdish leader executed by the Ottoman Empire for his tireless pursuit of Kurdish self-determination. This profound loss instilled in young Barzani a deep-seated commitment to the Kurdish cause.

Barzani's childhood unfolded amidst the hardships and political turmoil that relentlessly plagued the Kurdish people, who were often manipulated as pawns in the geopolitical machinations of greater regional powers. These formative experiences cultivated in him remarkable resilience and an unshakeable determination to secure a future of self-governance for his people.

From Uprising to Exile: Barzani's Early Struggle

By the 1930s, Barzani had emerged as a formidable military leader, swiftly earning the respect and loyalty of the Kurdish people through his inherent charisma and strategic acumen. In 1943, he ignited an uprising against the Iraqi government, marking the commencement of a long and arduous struggle for Kurdish rights.

A pivotal moment in Barzani's life arrived in 1946 with the establishment of the short-lived Mahabad Republic in Iranian Kurdistan. As the commander of the Republic's army, Barzani played a pivotal role in this historic endeavor, marking the first attempt to establish an independent Kurdish state. However, the Mahabad Republic's fate was sealed when the Soviet Union, in a calculated and unfulfilled maneuver, withdrew its support in exchange for a promised stake in Iran's oil industry.

Following the collapse of the Mahabad Republic, Barzani and his devoted followers were forced into exile in the Soviet Union. Despite enduring hardship and oppression, Barzani continued his tireless advocacy for Kurdish rights, drawing essential international attention to their plight.

A Personal Reflection: Glimpses of a Legendary Leader

This memoir does not aspire to be a historical account of Barzani's life or a meticulous chronology of his achievements. Instead, it offers a deeply personal perspective, shaped by my own encounters with him and the intimate stories shared by those who knew him best. Together, these narratives provide a glimpse into the remarkable character and demeanor of a truly legendary leader.

I had the distinct privilege of meeting Barzani on a few occasions. These encounters, though brief, ignited within me a profound desire to learn more about his extraordinary life. I sought out those who stood by him during his challenging years of exile and those who fought alongside him in the Mahabad Republic in 1946.

I listened intently to their accounts of his arduous journey through Turkey and his subsequent exile in the Soviet Union and Iran. The betrayal he endured under the Algiers Accord of 1975 further underscored the immense complexities of his life. Finally, I learned of his last years in the United States, where he sought medical treatment.

My interactions with Barzani were limited to two distinct periods: after his return from the Soviet Union, during his time in Kurdistan leading the September Revolution, and a meeting with him in the United States in 1978. These encounters offered invaluable insights into a life defined by both extraordinary triumphs and immense hardships.

The Roots of Barzan: A Community Built on Shared Values

Mullah Mustafa Barzani was the son of Sheikh Muhammed, who was the son of Abdul Salam, who in turn was the son of Sheikh Abdullah. The family's lineage can be traced back to Sheikh Tajeddin Barzani, all followers of the renowned Kurdish religious leader Mawlana Khaled Shahrezori Naqishbandi. Sheikh Abdul Salam succeeded his father, Sheikh Tajeddin, who was later executed by the Ottomans in 1914. Sheikh Ahmed Barzani, Mullah Mustafa's elder brother, then succeeded Sheikh Abdul Salam.



Mullah Mustafa Barzani (1901-1997)

The Barzan tribes are renowned for their unique traditions, most notably their practice of sharing everything among the community. Not even the leaders were permitted to own a single square meter of land or property; land was cultivated collectively, and its produce distributed among all inhabitants. Thus, the profound attachment of the Barzanis to their leaders was not based on material ownership but on a powerful spiritual bond.

This fostered a community that embraced high morality and honesty as the path to success and happiness, holding immense respect for their leaders. Betrayal of these values led to severe punishment. Barzanis are also known for their liberal views on marriage, which could only take place with the mutual consent of both parties.

Mullah Mustafa Barzani grew up in this environment of sincerity and honor, enduring immense hardships from childhood. He was imprisoned with his mother as early as 1905, when Barzani was merely five years old.

An Awakening in Barzan: The Unforgettable Encounter

My first encounter with Barzan village occurred during a summer vacation at the age of thirteen. My father, who had been appointed police chief of Zebar in 1953, lived in Ble, the main town of the Zebar region. This remote area, accessible only on foot or horseback, captivated me with its rustic charm. Ble, a hub for government officials, was also where I met the intriguing Mr. Hadi Chawushly, the governor of the region.

Thanks to the tireless efforts of Mr. Said Qazzaz, a prominent Kurdish figure and Iraq's minister of the interior, intermittent humanitarian aid was provided to the beleaguered people of Barzan.

My journey to Barzan began with an unexpected encounter. Arriving with a crucial aid shipment alongside my father, Hadi Chawushley, and our police escorts, we encountered an older woman carrying branches on her back just before entering the village. My father asked her, in Kurdish, about the way to the police station in the village. "Are you truly Kurdish?" she asked, her gaze steady and penetrating. My father, taken aback by her direct question, felt a pang of embarrassment in his uniform as he acknowledged his Kurdish heritage. "It's merely a job," he explained, "a way to make a living."

The woman, still unconvinced, led us towards the building. As we walked, we asked, “When will you visit Mullah Mustafa Barzani?” She gestured towards the majestic Shirin Mountain towering behind the village. “My son,” she said, “Mullah Mustafa is gone, but Shirin Mountain remains.”

My father, deeply moved, recognized the indomitable spirit of the Kurdish people. “How,” he wondered, “could such staunch belief and determination ever be defeated?”

That powerful encounter sparked a profound sense of national consciousness within me. I began to delve into the life and legacy of Mullah Mustafa Barzani, engaging in discussions with my father and others. A pivotal moment occurred during my high school years in Kirkuk, when I met Ali Askeri, a man with a wealth of knowledge about Barzani’s life. Our conversation only deepened my fascination with Barzani, cementing his place in my understanding of Kurdish identity.

Barzani did not fit the mold of a typical modern intellectual leader. His education was primarily rooted in religious teachings due to the lack of formal schools in Barzan during his youth. Nevertheless, his life experiences shaped his wisdom and character, allowing him to forge a unique and commanding presence.

Barzani’s values, convictions, sense of justice, truth, courage, and perseverance—set a standard rarely matched by contemporary politicians. Despite his natural leadership abilities, he remained unassuming and patient with his followers, often dedicating hours to listening to their concerns, a trait I had the privilege of witnessing.

Return from Exile: The Kurdish Struggle Continues

After the 1958 Iraqi Revolution, Mustafa Barzani returned to Iraq with the hope that the new regime would be more sympathetic to Kurdish aspirations. However, relations with Abdul Karim Qasim’s government quickly deteriorated, leading to the 1961 Kurdish uprising. This period was marked by intense conflict and immense suffering for the Kurdish people.

In 1970, an agreement was reached between the Iraqi government and the Kurds, promising autonomy for the Kurdish region. Unfortunately, this agreement was never fully implemented, which reignited conflict. The 1974-1975 uprising, covertly supported by Iran, Israel, and the

United States, ultimately failed when Iran withdrew its backing, dealing a devastating blow to the Kurdish movement. This forced Barzani into exile in Iran.

Barzani spent his final years in exile in the United States, feeling profoundly betrayed by the U.S. government under President Richard Nixon and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger.

Despite facing numerous setbacks, Barzani's vision for a free and independent Kurdish state continues to inspire Kurds worldwide. He remains a significant figure in modern Kurdish history. His leadership laid the groundwork for subsequent Kurdish movements, inspiring generations of Kurdish politicians and fighters. His son, Masoud Barzani, along with other members of the Barzani family, continues to play prominent roles in Kurdish politics today.

Barzani passed away from lung cancer in Washington, D.C., in 1979. He was initially buried in the Kurdish region of Iran, but his remains were later moved to his hometown of Barzan, where he remains a revered symbol of the Kurdish struggle

The Enduring Legacy of Mullah Mustafa Barzani: A Leader Rooted in Values

Mullah Mustafa Barzani, the revered Kurdish leader, politician, military commander, and Peshmerga, has been the subject of countless chronicles. While some accounts elevate him to near-mythical status and others offer critical assessments, a crucial yet often overlooked aspect of his legacy is the profound influence of his character, personal values and principles.

Barzani's life is a testament to the Kurdish people's enduring struggle for recognition and independence. He provided unwavering leadership during some of the most challenging periods in Kurdish history, serving as both a beacon of hope and a rallying force for future generations. Though the dream of an independent Kurdish state remains unfulfilled, Barzani's contributions to the Kurdish cause are undeniable. His legacy continues to inspire and shape Kurdish aspirations for self-determination, leaving a lasting impact on the region's political landscape.

From an early age, Barzani displayed exceptional physical and mental fortitude. He possessed a visionary mind, often anticipating events before they unfolded. His ambitions centered on leading his people towards economic independence and ensuring their wellbeing, while steadfastly

rejecting luxury and excess. He held no interest in public praise or accolades, maintaining a proud and commanding presence even when battling debilitating illness.

The Mahabad Republic, established in 1946 with Soviet backing, faced a devastating betrayal. The Iranian government, led by the Shah and Prime Minister Qiwam al-Saltana, struck a deal with Stalin: Soviet withdrawal of support for the Kurdish Republic in exchange for a stake in the Iranian Oil Company. Once the Shah successfully suppressed the fledgling republic, he reneged on the agreement, claiming it required parliamentary approval. The Iranian Parliament, predictably, voted against the deal, delivering a major diplomatic victory for Qiwam al-Saltana, a significant blow to Stalin, and a devastating setback for the Kurdish Mahabad Republic. This betrayal forced Barzani and his 500 Peshmerga to embark on their legendary exile, undertaking a perilous journey through Turkey to the Soviet Union.

Below is the story of Barzani's march through Turkey, closely monitored and under constant pressure and threat from multiple armies, until he reached the Soviet Union narrated by Aziz Shemzini, a Kurdish Iraqi officer who joined Barzani in his approximately 354-kilometer march over 52 days.

Barzani's Long March: As Recounted by Aziz Shemzini

Despite my persistent efforts to persuade Barzani to recount his daring escape from Mahabad to the Soviet Union in 1946, following the collapse of the Mahabad Republic, he consistently deflected the conversation, steering it towards other topics.

Mr. Aziz Shemzini was among the Iraqi Army officers who accompanied Barzani on his legendary journey from Mahabad in Iranian Kurdistan to the Soviet Union. During our conversations, I delved into Shemzini's vivid recollections of the journey and the years spent alongside Barzani in the Soviet Union. Shemzini recalled the events as follows:

With the Soviet Union withdrawing its support for the fledgling Mahabad Republic, Barzani found himself in a precarious position. He made the resolute decision to depart, facing the daunting task of escaping to the Soviet Union despite the inherent risks. His departure not only presented challenges in crossing the Turkish border to reach Soviet territory but also raised concerns about the potential threats his followers might face.

Undeterred, Barzani reached out to Turkish officers, informing them of his intention to transit through Turkish territory with his armed group en route to the Soviet Union. He pledged not to engage in military conflict against the Turkish army unless provoked, emphasizing that any confrontation would force him to call upon Kurdish tribes in Turkey to rise against the Turkish government—an outcome he warned would not be in Turkey's best interests. The Turkish authorities acknowledged the message and granted Barzani and his troops safe passage through Turkish territory without interference.

This account was later confirmed by a retired Turkish general during my studies in Turkey in 1960. He had been serving in the region at the time and explained how Barzani's troops were monitored as they passed through Turkish territory until they crossed the border into the Soviet Union.

The route leading to the Soviet border was meticulously planned and closely monitored by the Turkish authorities. Upon reaching the Aras River, Barzani—the only one in his group who could swim, a skill he had acquired during his childhood imprisonment with his mother in Eskişehir under the Ottoman regime—successfully crossed.

After contacting Soviet border authorities to request entry, Barzani and his troops had to wait for permission from Moscow. When it finally arrived, it came with conditions: Barzani and his followers were required to establish a Kurdish communist party that included three Soviet citizens in its leadership. Barzani requested that a congress be held so decisions could be made by democratic vote. The Soviet candidates failed to secure sufficient support, which displeased the authorities. They accused Barzani of insincerity and demanded a repeat vote. The result remained unchanged.

Barzani explained that he could not compel his followers, but the Soviets remained unconvinced. As a result, all of Barzani's followers were exiled to several villages in Siberia.

Shemzini continued, "Two Soviet officials escorted me to a military airport, where I saw Barzani and two of his followers being led to another aircraft. During the flight, I asked our escort about our destination. They claimed we were on our way to Moscow. As a military officer, I knew this was untrue, as our flight path was taking us in the opposite direction. A few hours later, they informed us that we needed to land to refuel. It soon

became clear that we had landed in a small Siberian village. They explained that I would be staying there until further notice.”

Shemzini went on, “I was greeted by a military general and two nurses who spoke broken English. When I asked why I had been brought there, they claimed to have no information and insisted it was an order from Moscow. It quickly became apparent to me that many others—mainly anti-Stalin politicians, writers, professors, and intellectuals—had been exiled to these villages, where they lived for years working in factories, workshops, and agricultural fields.”

He explained that the village had two factories: one producing butter and another extracting cottonseed oil. When the general asked him to choose where he wished to work to earn a living, he firmly refused until they explained the reason for his exile. Their response was simple: no work meant no salary, and without a salary, he would have no means of survival.

In response, Shemzini began a hunger strike. The general and the nurses begged him to change his mind, insisting they did not know why he had been exiled. He asked whether they knew who the Kurds were. When they answered yes, he told them that when a Kurd says “no,” it means “no,” and he continued his hunger strike.

After three days, he lost consciousness and was fed intravenously. Each time he regained consciousness, he noticed the staff sitting anxiously by his bedside, aware that any harm to him would lead to their punishment. Eventually, he agreed to end the hunger strike but continued to refuse work.

A compromise was reached: Shemzini would go to the factory and remain there during working hours without performing any labor, and in return he would receive half a salary. With that meager income, he could barely afford tea and bread. He chose the butter factory and followed this routine for four years, during which he lost forty kilograms but gained extensive knowledge of the industry.

Each week, a postal van delivered letters to the exiles and workers in the village where Shemzini was exiled. Shemzini often asked the postman if he had come across anyone known as Kurds in villages he visited, but the answer was always no.



Sayyed Aziz Shemzini
(1920-1999)

After nearly four years of waiting for the postman every week, Shemzini was surprised one day to see him approaching with a broad smile. The postman excitedly shared that he had met three men in a nearby village: two of whom were working to support the third. Shemzini was sure these were members of his own people, possibly including Barzani. It was clear to him that the two were working to support Barzani and would not allow him to work.

Shemzini immediately requested the postman to deliver a letter to Barzani. He also asked the postman to bring back a reply and offered him his golden watch as a reward. The postman graciously declined the watch, assuring Shemzini he would do his best to deliver the letter and bring back a response.

Shemzini eagerly awaited the postman's return the following day. When he finally arrived, he handed Shemzini a small slip of paper with a note written in Kurdish. It read: "We're fine. Don't worry. Everything will be all right. Keep your spirits up. I am confident we will be reunited soon." Signed, Mustafa.

This note dramatically altered Shemzini's outlook. Beaming with joy, he announced that he would start working, surprising his fellow factory workers. Curious about his change of heart, they asked what had happened, with a big smile. Shemzini declared, "I have found my people; I am back to life!"

Moved by his enthusiasm, the general allowed him to split his time between both factories, effectively doubling his salary. Life began to improve for Shemzini, and for the first time in years, he saw a glimmer of hope. However, that glimpse of prosperity was short-lived. One day, the general informed Shemzini that he was to prepare for a flight to Tashkent. The new leaders in Moscow, following Stalin's demise, had decided to lift the exile.

In Tashkent, Shemzini was reunited with Barzani, who appeared to be in good health, almost untouched by the years of hardship. He learned that many of the Peshmergas had married locals and even started families. The children had been placed in schools throughout the city. Barzani himself was studying economics at Tashkent University, and as he later told me during one of our meetings, he regularly engaged in heated debates with his professor about communism. They remained in this chapter of their lives

until 1959, when they were officially invited to return to Iraq by Abdul Karim Qasim.

The story of Barzani and his followers is one of extraordinary resilience, determination, and strategic foresight. Faced with limited options and significant challenges, Barzani sought refuge in the Soviet Union, navigating the political complexities and demands placed upon him. As detailed by Mr. Aziz Shemzini, his time in Siberian exile underscores the harsh realities and personal sacrifices endured by those involved in the Kurdish independence.

A Tale of Betrayal and Sorrow

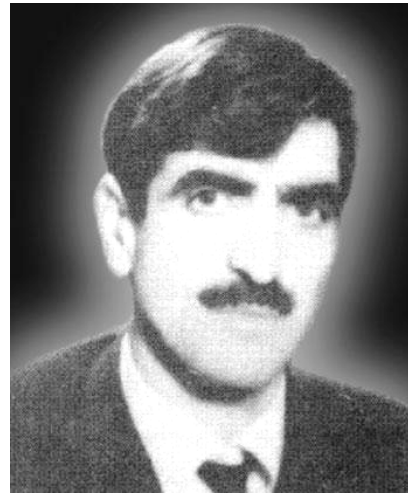
In the early 1970s, a formidable force of around three thousand Peshmerga fighters from Turkey joined their Iraqi Kurdish counterparts, fighting shoulder to shoulder on Iraqi soil. A key figure in this cross-border solidarity was Dr. Said Kirmizitoprak, affectionately known as Dr. Shwan. He had established himself along the Iraqi Kurdistan borders, fostering communication with Kurdish communities on the Turkish side and distributing brochures and information about the Iraqi Kurdish revolution. Over time, Dr. Shwan assumed responsibility for the border area under the command of Peshmerga leader Isa Swar in the Badinan sector of Iraqi Kurdistan. As I understood it, Barzani came to place great trust in Dr. Shwan, giving him the authority to resolve the border-related issues with the Turkish Army.

While I was in Sweden, I received a letter from Dr. Shwan urging me to hasten to Kurdistan to meet him, as he has important matters to discuss. A few weeks later, I arrived at KDP headquarters in Nawpirdan and expressed my desire to travel to Badinan to meet Dr. Shwan, only to be informed that he had been incarcerated. The head of intelligence at Barzani's headquarters then shared with me the grim circumstances behind his arrest. He disclosed the following: in the wake of the military coup in Turkey in 1971, Said Elci, head of the Kurdistan Democratic Party-Turkey, and Derweshi Saado, a member of the party's leadership, sought refuge in Iraqi Kurdistan. To minimize the risk of being arrested together, they decided to cross the border separately. Said Elci, counting on his party comrade Dr. Shwan, chose to enter through the Badinan crossing. Meanwhile, Saado made his way towards Galala, near Barzani's headquarters.

The head of intelligence continued: when Saado arrived and inquired about Said Elci's whereabouts, no one could provide an answer, which immediately aroused suspicion. Deeply concerned, Barzani issued an immediate order for the arrest of Dr. Shwan's close friends, Cheko and Brusk. Their confessions sent shockwaves through the community, revealing that Dr. Shwan had allegedly orchestrated Said Elci's execution.



Said Kirmizitoprak (1935-1971)



Said Elci (1925-1971)

Dr. Shwan's motive, revealed without using coercion, stemmed from a political rift within the KDP-Turkey leadership. He deemed Elci a threat to the party's future. In a haunting final plea, Said Elci expressed a wish to die by a Turkish bullet rather than a Kurdish one, a heartbreaking reflection of the depth of betrayal within the ranks. Deeply affected by this tragedy, Barzani, ever the principled leader, sought justice. Dr. Shwan was swiftly arrested, and Barzani decreed that he be tried not by his own forces, but by the members of Elci's own KDP faction. The trial ended with Dr. Shwan being sentenced to death—a somber close to a painful chapter in Kurdish history, one of betrayal and loss.

Sait Kirmizitoprak (Dr. Şivan)

Sait Kirmizitoprak, widely known as Dr. Şivan, was born in 1935 in the village of Civraka in the Qişle (Nazmiye) district of Dersim province. He belonged to a generation shaped by repression, silence, and unresolved identity. Yet from an early age, he chose a path that combined professional achievement with political conviction.

Educated in state-run schools, he completed his studies and became a medical doctor. But medicine alone did not define him. He fused his profession with a deep commitment to socialist ideals and to the Kurdish cause. His political engagement eventually led to his arrest in the well-known “Case of the 49s,” a turning point for many Kurdish intellectuals of that era. In his earlier years, he had also been active within the Republican People’s Party (CHP), reflecting the evolving political landscape of the time.

A Prolific Writer and Political Thinker

Dr. Şivan was not merely a physician or an activist; he was a prolific and disciplined writer. His articles appeared in prominent magazines and newspapers such as *Akış*, *Forum*, *Vatan*, *Yön*, *Dicle–Fırat*, *Sosyal Adalet*, and *Milliyet*. Through these platforms, he contributed to debates that were both national and distinctly Kurdish.

His written works extended beyond journalism. Among his major books were:

- *Ezen ve Ezilen Milletler Sorunu* (The Problem of the Dominant and Subjugated Nations)
- *Memo Qol*
- *Kürt Millet Hareketleri ve Irak’ta Kurdistan İhtilali* (The Movements of the Kurdish Nation and the Kurdistan Revolution in Iraq)
- *Zimanê Kurdî* (co-authored with Kamuran Bedirxan)
- *Ferheng Kurdî û Türkî*, his Turkish translation and expansion of J. Blau’s Kurdish–English–French dictionary
- *Cahş û Cahşîti*

These works reveal the breadth of his intellectual engagement: political theory, national struggle, language preservation, and cultural identity. He understood that liberation required not only armed resistance, but also intellectual clarity and linguistic survival.

His Political Conviction

At the core of Dr. Şivan's thoughts was a firm belief that the most urgent conflict within Turkey was the systematic denial of the Kurdish nation's existence. For him, this denial was not a peripheral issue—it was the central political contradiction of the Republic.

He articulated three clear principles for resolving the Kurdish question:

- First, official recognition—the abandonment of state denial and the acknowledgment of the Kurdish nation as a legitimate political and cultural entity.
- Second, the securing of national democratic rights for the Kurdish people.
- Third, the recognition of the Kurdish people's right to self-determination.

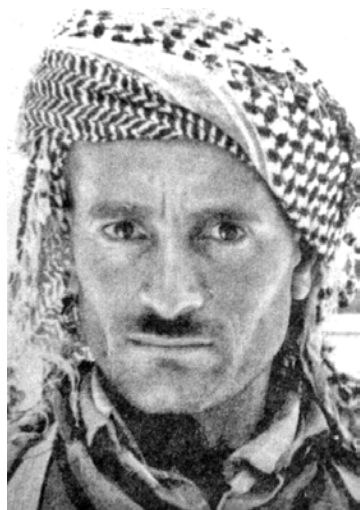
Unlike many who sought gradual reform, Dr. Şivan was convinced that peaceful appeals alone would not suffice. He believed that armed struggle was necessary if Kurds in Turkey were to achieve liberation and secure their national rights. For him, this was not an abstract ideological position, but a conclusion drawn from lived experience.

Dr. Şivan represented a particular strand of Kurdish political thought—one that combined intellectual rigor, socialist analysis, cultural preservation, and revolutionary resolve. Whether one agreed with all of his conclusions or not, his influence on Kurdish political consciousness in Turkey was undeniable.

Barzani and the Kurdish Revolution in Iran

The interplay between Barzani and the Shah of Iran unfolded as a carefully calibrated maneuver shaped by the unforgiving geography and the shifting tides of successive regimes in Iraq. Amid this delicate geopolitical dance, a defining episode occurred in 1967, when an Iranian Kurdish delegation, led by Mela Aware and Suleyman Ma'ini, sought Barzani's support for a Kurdish revolution against the Shah's regime.

Known for his strategic foresight, Barzani once again responded with cautious deliberation. He proposed a conditional alliance, stating that full support would be granted only if the Iranian Kurds could demonstrate their resilience and sustain their movement for six months. The delegation, brimming with confidence and citing widespread Kurdish backing in Iran, pledged that they could endure for years. Still, Barzani remained firm; the six-month trial would be a prerequisite for any deeper commitment.



Suleyman Ma'ini (1933-1968)



Mela Aware (1933-1968)

As events unfolded, Barzani began to suspect that the revolution in Iranian Kurdistan might be a part of an Iraqi ploy designed to strain his relations with the Shah. His instincts proved right. News soon reached him that the uprising across the borders had faltered almost immediately, with many fighters crossing into Iraqi Kurdistan for refuge. Some engaged in

skirmishes with the Iranian Army from the safety of the Iraqi side, seemingly to draw Barzani forces into direct conflict with the Iranian forces.

Faced with this emerging crisis, the commander of the Peshmergas, Hama Mirkhan, turned to Barzani for guidance. In his characteristic tone of restraint and strategic clarity, Barzani issued clear instructions, "Allow those who are not under observation by the Iranian Army to enter Kurdistan. But anyone engaging in hostilities from our side, don't defend them and let them be captured."

Amid the mosaic of conflicting accounts that surround this episode, Barzani's decision to observe the unfolding events cautiously and prioritize the security of Iraqi Kurdistan reflects his deep commitment to strategic prudence and the delicate balancing act of regional politics.

Barzani's Return to Iraq

When a British journalist once asked Barzani: Why did you choose the Soviet Union for exile? He responded with quiet contemplation and characteristic brevity. "Did Mr. Churchill (though it was not his era) invite me to Britain, and I refused?" This statement eloquently encapsulated the predicament he found himself in with all other doors closed and few alternatives available, Barzani felt he had no choice but to seek refuge in the Soviet Union.

In 1959, Barzani returned to Iraq by sea, accompanied by 500 Peshmerga and their families, arriving at the port of Basra. They were greeted by a large, enthusiastic crowd representing various segments of Iraqi society, a reception largely orchestrated by the Iraqi Communist Party. The party, expecting to welcome a comrade aligned with their ideology, was soon disappointed to discover that, despite his decade-long stay in the Soviet Union, he remained deeply skeptical and critical of communism.

General Qasim's initial warm welcome, which included offering Nouri Sa'eed's residence in Baghdad to Barzani, soon cooled. Qasim, feeling the pressure of Barzani's rising influence, became increasingly unnerved as delegations from all over Iraq flocked to the capital, showering Barzani with admiration. Sensing Qasim's discomfort, Barzani wisely retreated into the shadows of Baghdad, evading any attempts at capture, despite Qasim's tight control. Barzani managed to escape to Kurdistan, where he ignited the September 11, 1961 Revolution.

So how did Barzani manage to slip past Qasim's grasp? He had cultivated clandestine ties with several tribal chiefs in Kurdistan, ostensibly loyal to Qasim. Among them was Sheikh Hussein Boskeni, who could move freely in and out of Baghdad. Disguised as one of Sheikh Hussein's guards, Barzani quietly took the rear seat of the car, slipping unnoticed out of the capital and avoiding Qasim's checkpoints.

Barzani's journey—shaped by exile, reunion, and the relentless pursuit of his cause—remains a powerful testament to the enduring spirit of the Kurdish people and their quest for self-determination. This story reflects the broader struggle for identity and justice, highlighting the transformative power of leadership and unity in the face of adversity.

Barzani's Dagger

At a large public ceremony, Masoud Barzani presented the medals of his father, Mustafa Barzani, to a number of Kurds who, as it was said, had "served Barzani's path." Among them were a few familiar names who certainly deserved recognition, but also several individuals whose contributions were unknown to the public.



This sparked considerable discussion among people, many questioning why some were honored while others, who had clearly devoted years to the Kurdish cause, were overlooked.

Naturally, some asked me why I had not been awarded a medal. My response was simple, "I would rather be asked why I wasn't given a medal than why I was."

From time to time, I added with a smile that I had already received something far more meaningful from him—the dagger of Mustafa Barzani himself—a gesture I consider the highest form of acknowledgment.

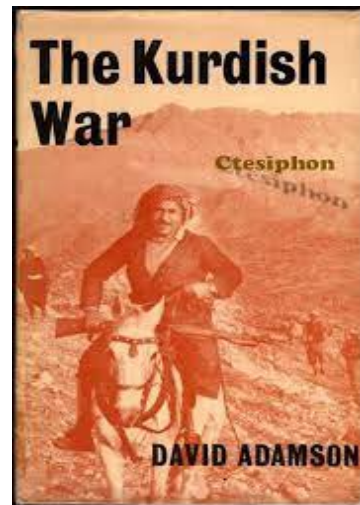
The most valuable gift I have ever received—Barzani's own dagger.

Interesting Moments with A Great Leader: Barzani Interviews

Barzani was the subject of a notable interview with David Adamson, a distinguished British journalist from *The Sunday Telegraph* of London. Our first meeting with the journalist took place in Istanbul in February 1963. I was deeply involved in the intricate preparations for his journey, which involved being smuggled by Kurdish tribesmen across the Turkish border to Barzani's headquarters in liberated Kurdistan.

Following the visit, numerous articles appeared in *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Sunday Telegraph*, and a book titled *The Kurdish War*. Adamsson reflected on his encounters with many Kurdish figures in Istanbul, including Musa Anter and Shukri Baban. To shield us from the grasp of the Turkish authorities, he used pseudonyms and various aliases. My code name in the book was Ismael.

During an encounter in London in the 1970s, Adamsson mentioned to me that he had had the opportunity to interview Mullah Mustafa Barzani and had posed a critical question: why pursue autonomy within Iraq rather than full independence, given the widespread Kurdish yearning for a sovereign state?



David Adamson (1928-2018) and his book, *The Kurdish War*

Barzani answered candidly, acknowledging the deep-rooted Kurdish aspiration for independence. Nonetheless, he offered a pragmatic assessment of the immense challenges that came with such an undertaking. Emphasizing the prohibitive cost and logistical hurdles, he stated that with such a limited budget, striving for independence would be akin to trying to bargain for a thousand-dollar item with only a hundred dollars in your pocket.

Barzani's direct and transparent assessment was highly impressive, Adamson said that he effectively conveyed the stark realities facing the Kurdish movement, highlighting the significant disparity between their aspirations for independence and the severe constraints the Kurdish people faced.

The Farther from Israel's Border, the Braver you Become

In a separate interview following the signing of the March 11 Agreement with the Iraqi Ba'athist government, Barzani spoke with an Iraqi Arab journalist. The conversation took place at a time when the Egyptian president Anwar Al Sadat was facing fierce criticism for signing a peace treaty with Israel. Seizing the opportunity, the journalist queried Barzani on his stance regarding the controversial treaty, a move the Iraqi government had condemned as an act of treason.

In response, Barzani offered a striking analogy. He compared the situation to two close friends who were both heavy smokers. One regularly bought packs of cigarettes, while the other never bothered; instead, he relied entirely on his friend to share. One day, the habitual buyer decided to quit smoking for health reasons. The other, still dependent, accused him of betrayal, ignoring the fact that his friend's decision was driven by genuine concern for his own wellbeing.

Barzani artfully extended this analogy to Egypt's pursuit of peace, emphasizing the country's urgent need to escape the constant threat along its borders with Israel. He underscored how Iraq, shielded by geographical distance, could afford to condemn Egypt's decision as treason, while Egypt itself faced far more immediate and existential dangers. The metaphor offered a poignant illustration of the geographical choices, highlighting how a nation's unique circumstances shape the pursuit of peace.

Barzani Strove to Save the Kurds from Poverty

Mullah Mustafa Barzani, renowned for his physical endurance, found both solace and fascination in the rugged mountains of Kurdistan. His daily treks were more than routine; they were deliberate exploration, as he searched for unusual stones, captivated by their unique shapes, colors, and textures.



Mustafa Barzani in Western attire



Mustafa Barzani in traditional Kurdish attire



Sheikh Muhammed Hersin, Barzani's secretary

Barzani's Pursuit of Economic Prosperity Through Gemstones

During one of my visits, Barzani presented me with a small collection of stones. "I believe some of these may be valuable," he declared, "and could provide a much-needed source of income for the Kurdish people." He urged me to take the stones to a laboratory in Europe for analysis, hoping to uncover hidden gems.

Unfortunately, the initial analysis proved disappointing. However, on a subsequent visit, I returned with a carefully curated selection of diverse gemstones, each accompanied by detailed descriptions and notes on their origins. The stones were presented in an elegant wooden box, a testament to their value and potential. Barzani received the gift with great appreciation, proudly displaying it to visitors as a symbol of both the region's natural beauty and a gesture of friendship from me.

Barzani was undeniably a product of his time and environment, deeply loyal to his clan, family, and traditional values. In the presence of visitors, his bodyguards maintained strict discipline, ever ready to execute orders. Yet, in private, away from the formalities of outsiders, they transformed into companions and equals. Like playful children, they laughed, tossed scarves, chased one another, filling the air with joyful shouts.

Acknowledging Barzani's Standing

In the chronicles of most nations, leaders typically rise after their countries have taken shape. But in the exceptional case of Mullah Mustafa Barzani, he became a figure greater than the land itself, more widely known as Kurdistan. I witnessed this firsthand, especially during the early days of the Kurdish revolution. While travelling through Europe, I often encountered confusion when I mentioned I was from Kurdistan. Yet the moment I mentioned Barzani's name, people nodded in recognition.

Jalal Talabani shared a memorable anecdote from the late sixties, during a period of conflict with Barzani's forces. While travelling through Europe with his wife, they stopped at an airport restaurant. Curious, the waiter asked where they were from. When Talabani replied, "Kurdistan," the waiter responded, "Ah, you mean from Barzani's land?" Talabani turned to his wife and remarked, "No matter what we do or where we go, we can never escape the shadow of this man."

Barzani's powerful presence and natural charisma left a lasting impression on all who encountered him. He commanded the room even among the most esteemed guests, often without uttering a word. His demeanor, both humble and easygoing, was a testament to a life shaped by experience. Barzani's arduous journeys shaped him into a man of dignity and honor. He often spoke of the inevitability of death, a conviction that underpinned the fearless courage for which he was widely admired.

One of Barzani's Peshmerga guards recounted a remarkable moment that captured this fearlessness. Near the village of Dilman, Barzani was deep in prayer by a mountain spring when a Russian fighter jet from the Iraqi Air Force launched a sudden airstrike. The jet, unleashing several rounds of ammunition, targeted the exact spot where Barzani knelt in meditation. Dust and debris filled the air and those nearby feared the worst. But as the dust settled, they could see that Barzani remained unshaken and was still in prayer. The guard concluded, "His faith shields him when no armor could."

On another occasion, while I was visiting Barzani with a group of European guests, a warning siren sounded, signaling the approach of a fighter jet poised to bomb the area. As the visitors hurried to take cover, Barzani calmly stepped outside to watch the jet pass overhead. When he returned, visibly unfazed, the guests asked him if he was not afraid of

being killed in such an attack. He responded, “Of course I’m concerned, but for a man in my position, it is my duty to show my people how useless these fighters are and to inspire courage in their hearts whenever they are under aerial assault.”

Barzani’s roots were deeply entwined with the village of Barzan, where he spent much of his youth. Immersed in the local way of life, he came to understand the hearts and minds of his people. He lived modestly in a humble home, welcoming all who came, whether they were leaders or peasants. Receiving each visitor with patience and attentiveness, he listened to their grievances for hours with a quiet empathy that few could match.

During another of my visits, this time with Kurdish students from Europe, a local villager approached Barzani to seek his advice on a housing issue, asking whether he should move to a different house. Barzani listened attentively, giving the man his full attention. Then he turned to us, asking if we could determine the villager’s true intention. When we failed to do so, Barzani smiled and explained that the man was not truly seeking advice about relocation; what he really needed was financial assistance.

Barzani: A Man of His Word

Yet another anecdote exemplifies Barzani's staunch commitment to justice and human dignity. In 1967, a Christian woman from Mosul repeatedly appealed to Barzani for help in saving her brother, Jerjis Fethullah, a renowned lawyer and author who was facing the death penalty in an Iraqi prison. His conviction stemmed from his alleged involvement in Abdul Wahab Al Shawaf's failed coup attempt and his ties to the Iraqi Communist Party. While Barzani acknowledged the limitations of his power in such legal and political matters, he assured her that he would intervene if the opportunity arose.

Months later, the opportunity came. Following a major defeat of the Iraqi army at the hands of the Peshmerga, President Abdulrahman Arif visited Barzani to initiate peace talks. In a gesture of goodwill, Arif offered to grant Barzani two personal requests.

Seizing the moment, Barzani requested the release of two prominent political prisoners, Jerjis Fethullah, a Christian, and Dr. Mohammed Kubba, a Shiite Arab. The request took President Arif by surprise, as neither of the men was a Kurd. Yet Barzani's appeal transcended ethnic boundaries and political lines, underscoring his commitment to justice and the broader interests of Iraq as a whole.

After his release, Jerjis Fethullah remained loyal to the Kurdish cause. He chose to stay in Kurdistan, devoting himself to the Kurdish revolution. He compiled extensive documentation, authored numerous books on Kurdish culture and history, and translated many works about the Kurds written by Western authors.

Dr. Mohammed Kubba, now a prominent Shiite leader residing in the UK, continues to demonstrate his solidarity by offering free medical consultations to Kurdish patients visiting his clinic.

Barzani and Hejar Mukriyani (Mam Hejar)

The enduring friendship between Barzani and renowned Kurdish poet Mam Hejar (1920-1991) stands as testament to a bond built on shared experiences, mutual respect and similar sense of humor. Mam Hejar, whose real name was Abdurrahman Sherefkendi, was a prominent figure during Barzani's Mahabad days. A cherished companion, he enriched

Barzani gatherings with his sharp wit, captivating stories, and the recitation of celebrated poetry, as well as his groundbreaking translation of the Qur'an into Kurdish.

On one occasion, Barzani received a visit from General Fuad Arif, a prominent Kurdish figure, known for his adept navigation of Iraq's turbulent political landscape, accompanied by his son, a student at an East German university.



Hejar Mukriyani also known as Mam Hejar, renowned poet of Kurdistan and a close companion of Mullah Mustafa Barzani

While Barzani and the general held a private meeting, he asked me to take the son on a tour of the village. The son, a young man of quiet demeanor and unconventional outlook, was immediately taken by the grandeur of the mountains. As we walked, he began enthusiastically describing his vision for developing ski resorts to attract tourism to boost Kurdistan's economy. I listened patiently before reminding him of the difficulties we were facing because of the brutal war being waged against our people.

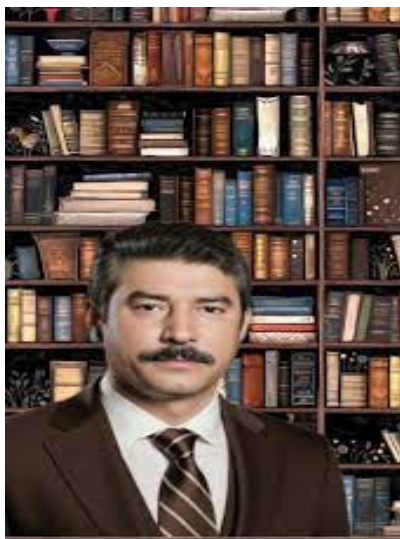
Upon our return, Barzani asked the young man about his name. In a soft, distinctly feminine voice, he replied, "My name is Sherzad," a name

that means *Lion's Cub*. The name and his delicate manner sparked a sudden burst of laughter from Mam Hejar, who was unable to control himself and abruptly left the room.

Recognizing the inappropriateness of Mam Hejar's reaction, Barzani gently called him aside after the guests had departed and offered a quiet reprimand. Mam Hejar, ever quick-witted, responded, "I'm sorry, but one should never name a child until it reaches the age of eighteen. Only then can you truly assess their character and bestow a fitting name. Perhaps 'Lion's Cub' was not the most suitable choice for the general's son."

For Barzani, Kirkuk was a Red Line

Following the March 11, 1970 Agreement between the Kurdish Revolution and the Iraqi government, the Ba'ath Party dispatched Abdullah Sallum Al Samarrai, the Minister of Culture and Information of Iraq, to meet with Barzani and address the highly sensitive issue of Kirkuk province. The pivotal question was whether Kirkuk should be incorporated into the federal region of Kurdistan or remain under the jurisdiction of the central government of Iraq.



Abdullah Sallum Al Samarrai (1931-1996)

In anticipation of the minister's arrival, Barzani's team made meticulous preparations. They assembled historical maps, official documents, and a compelling body of evidence aimed at demonstrating Kirkuk's deep-rooted ties to Kurdistan. The materials underscored the city's historic identity as part of the Kurdish homeland, with a predominantly Kurdish population living alongside Turkmens, Assyrians, and Arabs.

That summer, Abdullah Al Sallum journeyed to Haji Omran and was welcomed by Habib M. Karim, the General Secretary of the KDP, Dr. Mahmood Osman, a member of the Politburo of the KDP, and Jarjis Fethullah, a member of the KDP Central Committee. Before the meeting

began, Barzani, showing a keen interest in the proceedings, asked for permission to attend as a silent observer. The minister readily agreed.

The Kurdish delegation presented an extensive dossier comprising historical documents and maps from various eras and multiple languages, all substantiating Kirkuk's unequivocal Kurdish identity. After the thorough presentation, the minister, without much deliberation, responded: "I say to you, Kirkuk is Arabic and not Kurdish."

Despite repeated arguments and additional compelling evidence from the Kurdish side, the minister remained resolute, echoing the same refrain, "I say to you, Kirkuk is an Arabic City."

Barzani, who had been quietly observing, could no longer tolerate the impasse. In a firm tone, he addressed the minister directly in Arabic, "You keep repeating the phrase 'I say.' But tell me, who are you?" Taken aback, the minister identified himself as Abdullah Al Sallum Al Samarrai. Barzani continued, "And what is your position?" The minister responded, "I am the minister of culture and information of Iraq." Barzani then asked pointedly, "Did the people of Iraq elect you to speak on their behalf." To which the minister admitted that he was not.

In a decisive move, Barzani declared, "I will not allow you to claim that Kirkuk is not Kurdish without presenting supporting evidence or documentation. Mere words carry no weight in this assembly. With a government in which you serve as a minister, we see no basis for negotiation." Barzani then promptly called for the meeting to be closed, and the minister hastily returned to Baghdad.

In the days that followed, the minister was relieved of his cabinet position and was reassigned as Iraq's ambassador in Cairo. The episode underscored Barzani's stance; Kirkuk was a red line, non-negotiable in the Kurdish struggle.

Barzani Admits to Getting Old

During a farewell visit to Barzani before my departure to London, he made a special request for a high-quality pair of binoculars from Europe. Barzani longed to replace a cherished pair that he had once received from British Army officers who had visited him in Barzan in the 1930s. He had lost them and had never found their equal.

I assured him optimistically about modern advancements, remarking, “The binoculars nowadays are much better than the ones you had. I’ll try to find you the best available.” Barzani responded with a smile and a simple condition, “I will be more than happy if they are just as good.”

Following a recommendation in London, I selected a pair of Swiss-made Zeiss binoculars of exceptional quality.

Upon my return to Kurdistan, Barzani examined the binoculars carefully, then eagerly ventured outdoors to test them. When he returned, he said, “No, they are not as good as the ones I had.” Surprised, I reacted, assuring him that the pair I brought was among the finest available.

He then shared a revealing insight, “The ones I had allowed me to see the tail of a goat moving from a considerable distance. However, with these, I cannot even make out larger objects from a closer range.”

Sensing the opportunity for a gentle truth, I asked, “Will you promise not to be upset if I tell you something?” He nodded, urging me to go ahead. “In the 1930s, forty years ago, you were a young man with sharper eyes, and your vision was stronger. Now, as time has passed, your eyes have changed. So, it’s not the binoculars but a sign of the times.”

Barzani laughed heartily, admitting, “Nobody has said that to me before.” This exchange not only reflected the warmth of a shared moment but also highlighted the grace with which Barzani embraced the reality of aging.

Barzani’s Diplomacy During the Six-Day War

In the spring of 1967, a telegram arrived at Barzani’s headquarters, announcing the unexpected arrival of General Abu Faisal Al Ansari, the Chief of Staff of the Iraqi military.

The purpose of this clandestine meeting was soon revealed: a proposal to dispatch a contingent of Peshmerga fighters to join the Iraqi army, in preparation for the impending conflict between Egypt and Israel.

Barzani, taken aback by the request, grappled with the ethical implications of aiding an army responsible for bombarding Kurdish villages and inflicting heavy civilian casualties.

The general seeking to justify the proposal cited President Abdulrahman Arif’s vision of involving Kurds in what he believed would be a historic Arab victory over Israel.

Barzani, with a characteristic foresight, offered an alternative: instead of sending fighters, he sent advice to President Jamal Abdul Nasser, warning, “My advice to His Excellency is to refrain from going to war with Israel. If he does, his army will not last more than a week.” The general who had recently visited Egypt and witnessed the strength of its armed forces replied, “But the Egyptian Army possesses advanced, high-quality weaponry.” Barzani calmly countered, “General, you of all people should know that the quality of a weapon is important, but what matters more is the quality of the soldier behind it.”



Iraqi leaders, including Saddam Hussein and General Hardan Al-Tikriti, often visited General Barzani

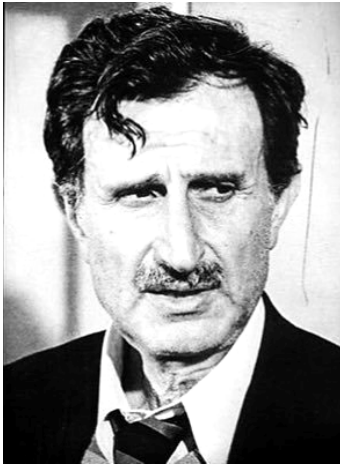
The general left the meeting disheartened, unhappy with Barzani’s response. When the Six-Day War unfolded, and the Egyptian army faced defeat, he humbly called Barzani to acknowledge the accuracy of his assessment. Barzani, with a touch of humility, conceded, “I was off by a day.” He reiterated his central point—that victory is won not by weapons alone, but by the strength and spirit of the individuals who wield them.

Janpolat and Barzani: A Tale of Friendship and Cultural Connection

In the wake of the historic March 11, 1970 Agreement between the Kurdish Revolution and the Iraqi government, a steady flow of leaders and distinguished figures made the pilgrimage to Kurdistan.

Among these esteemed guests was Kamal Janpolat, a prominent Lebanese politician and Druze leader. His journey, facilitated via Baghdad, included a helicopter ride and the protection of Ba'athist bodyguards, underscoring the diplomatic significance of his visit.

Upon landing in Kurdistan, a subtle tension arose as the Ba'athist bodyguards sought to accompany Janpolat in the car destined for Qasr El Salam, his designated residence in Nawpirdan. Perceptive of the unease caused among his Kurdish hosts, including Barzani himself, Janpolat tactfully dismissed the guards. He thanked them sincerely for their service and, with a firm yet diplomatic tone, added that, among his Kurdish family, he felt entirely safe and well protected.



Kamal Janpolat (1917-1977)



Waleed Janpolat (born 1946)
is the present Druze leader.

As the car ascended the hill towards Qasr El Salam perched just off the Hamilton Road, it made an unexpected stop. Barzani, known for his commitment to physical regimen, stepped out and briskly climbed the rest of the way on foot. When he rejoined the group, he explained that this impromptu

hike was his way of making up for his missed morning routine. Barzani was in his seventies, and Janpolat praised his vitality and healthy habits.

The gathering got together for a shared luncheon, during which Barzani, in a spirit of camaraderie, suggested they switch to speaking Kurdish. Janpolat responded with gracious humility, expressing his regret at not having learned Kurdish during his upbringing in Lebanon. Acknowledging his Kurdish roots, he shared how his family, while living among Druze communities, had actively championed the rights and protection of the Druze people. This long-standing advocacy ultimately led to his father being entrusted with the mantle of Druze leadership—a legacy deeply rooted in the family’s enduring commitment to justice and communal responsibility.

A Humble Leader’s Distaste for Adulation

In the early days of the Kurdish Revolution, the establishment of the first radio station sparked great excitement in the surrounding areas, even though its broadcast range extended only a few kilometers. One evening, the station aired a segment filled with effusive praise for Barzani, hailing him as the Hero, the Lion, the Legend. But the man at the center of these accolades, the esteemed leader himself, was far from pleased.

Barzani, unhappy with the embellished titles, summoned the broadcaster, Dilshad Masraf. He asked bluntly, “Who decided to call me a hero? Who gave me these labels?” Dilshad, taken aback, explained that it was a popular sentiment. Unfazed, Barzani dismissed the justification, insisting he be referred to as simply “Mustafa,” without embellishments. He concluded the meeting with a clear warning that if such grandiose language was used again, the radio station might be torn down brick by brick over the broadcaster’s head.

As Dilshad left the meeting, he carried with him a mix of relief and concern, unsure of how to tread the fine line between respectful praise and Barzani’s strict aversion to flattery.

A similar moment unfolded during the 8th KDP Congress in Nawpir-dan in August 1970, when Professor Kamran Bedirkhan, who had spent nearly his entire life in exile, stirred profound emotions. Barzani, acknowledging the significance of the moment, treated Kamran with the utmost respect. However, during the congress proceedings Barzani felt a familiar discomfort, Kamran lavished praise on Barzani as the Great Leader who ushered in Kurdish freedom. Despite feeling embarrassed by the

accolades, Barzani maintained a dignified silence out of respect for his guest. Attempts to curb the applause from delegates proved futile, prompting a light-hearted response from Barzani himself. Even in the face of adulation, his commitment to humility and genuine leadership shone through, creating a memorable interplay of emotions during a historic congress.

Writing the Life Story of Barzani

During a visit to Kurdistan in February 1975, I crossed the Iranian border from Khane to Haji Omran. There, I was guided to Idris Barzani's tent, where I found myself in the company of Kak Idris, Habib Muhammed Karim, the General Secretary of the KDP, and Dr. Mahmood Osman.

After a warm welcome, Idris shared his frustration over Mullah Mustafa Barzani's continued reluctance to authorize the writing of his life story. Barzani insisted that his achievements did not merit such a project. Idris turned to me with a proposal, "As a guest, you might have better luck in persuading him. If he objects, we promise to stand by you." I agreed, but with a caveat, "I'll only broach the subject if the conversation leads there naturally." A condition that they readily accepted.

As we approached Barzani's tent, we found him in a jovial mood. Without hesitation, he offered his condolences, saying, "I heard about the demise of your king." Puzzled, I quickly understood that he was referring to King Gustav VI of Sweden.

Seizing the moment, I replied, "You're right. Physically, he may have left this world, but for the Swedish people, his spirit lives on, eternally present in their collective memory. Children learn of his deeds in school-books, countless volumes have been written about him, and television programs and seminars still reflect on how Sweden was under his reign. His legacy endures, immortalized by his people."

Barzani, sensing the underlying message, inquired whether Idris had spoken to me prior to my arrival. I admitted that he had and that I shared his view entirely. I stressed that the younger generation of Kurds has a fundamental right to know the essence of their leader. We are eager to hear about your life, your accomplishments, and the valuable lessons we can learn from your experiences.



Gustav VI Adolf (1882-1973), former king of Sweden

Barzani, however, voiced his reservations about this idea. He questioned whether his contributions truly warranted a written account, suggesting instead that the focus should be on the lives of heroes like Areef Hamid, a Peshmerga commander renowned for his numerous victories against the enemy.

“Areef Hamid’s bravery was inspired by your own,” I replied, arguing that his contributions to the Kurdish people are indisputable. “More than fifty years ago, you sparked a Kurdish uprising against the oppressors, rallying a movement that continues to this day. You’ve endured both the bitterness of defeat and the sweetness of triumph, traversed perilous paths from Mahabad to the Soviet Union while facing aggression from numerous adversaries. Through your efforts, Kurdistan has claimed its rightful place on the world’s stage.”

Barzani, however, interjected with a note of regret, acknowledging that he had not yet secured even basic autonomy for the Kurdish people.

I sought to reassure him that such a day would undoubtedly come. Saying that while some nations achieved independence with ease, even granted by former colonizers, our forefathers were misled by false promises. Therefore, we must bear the consequences of their naivety and forge

our own path to freedom through perseverance. Time and time again, history has shown that unwavering determination will ultimately lead to victory.

I drew a parallel between Barzani's legacy and that of Napoleon Bonaparte, who, despite his ultimate defeat and dying in exile far from his beloved France, is still remembered by the French people as a national hero.

I expressed concern to Barzani about the limited and biased accounts of his life available to the Kurdish children, shaped solely by the narratives of adversaries. "Please," I implored, "allow us to present a fair and accurate portrayal of your life to the next generation of Kurds."

A profound silence followed as we awaited his response. At last, Barzani spoke with quiet resolve, "I accept your proposal, but on one condition: no writer or journalist is to approach me to praise or glorify me. Whoever leads this effort must have a deep understanding of my life and be present during my meetings to accurately record and interpret the conversations."

Idris and the others erupted in jubilation, "We agree!" their voices brimming with hope and anticipation of preserving Barzani's legacy.

The following day, we gathered again with Idris to finalize our plans. It was decided that Mam Hejar Mukriyani, the esteemed Kurdish poet, would be entrusted with transcribing the story in Kurdish to ensure its authenticity. For the English translation, we proposed Hawar Kaka Ziad.

Tragically, our efforts were cut short by the unexpected signing of the Algiers Accord between the Shah of Iran and Saddam Hussein. This political setback marked the abrupt end of our endeavor to document Barzani's life story. However, his indomitable spirit would forever remain an enduring symbol of resilience and unwavering determination for the Kurdish people.

Though the story we envisioned was never formally recorded, Barzani's influence lives on. His legacy is etched not in the pages of a book, but in the hearts and aspirations of people striving for a better future. He remains immortal in the collective memory of the Kurdish people. An enduring figure who continues to inspire the pursuit of justice, dignity, and freedom. His contributions may not have been formally recorded as we had hoped, but his spirit and influence continue to shape the Kurdish identity.

Barzani's Enduring Legacy of Humility and Leadership

Throughout these accounts, the character and leadership of Mustafa Barzani shine with remarkable clarity. His interactions with Kamal Janpolat and his stern disapproval of undue praise reveal a leader deeply rooted in humility and sincerity. Despite his central role in the Kurdish struggle for freedom, Barzani's refusal to accept grandiose titles underscores his genuine commitment to the cause rather than personal gain.

Barzani's ability to balance the dignity of leadership with a personal touch, as seen in his impromptu hill climb and his respectful handling of Janpolat's visit, illustrates a man who led by example. His insistence on being referred to simply as Mustafa reflects a profound understanding of the true essence of leadership—one that is not clouded by vanity but driven by the welfare and unity of his people.

In a world so often defined by the pursuit of power and recognition, Barzani's legacy stands as a testament to the virtues of humility, respect, and unwavering dedication to one's principles. His story is a powerful reminder that true leadership is measured not by titles or accolades but by the lasting impact one has on one's people and the enduring strength of their character.

Two Assassination Attempts Against Barzani

The Ba'athist regime's engagement in the March 11, 1970 Agreement with Mullah Mustafa Barzani was not solely a gesture of reconciliation, but also a strategic maneuver. While the agreement publicly acknowledged Kurdish rights, it provided the regime with a four-year window, which they exploited to consolidate power and plan the suppression of the Kurdish movement and Barzani's elimination.



Ibrahim Gavari (1949- 2025) meeting Mullah Mustafa Barzani

One particularly sinister plot involved Ibrahim Gavari, a Syrian Kurdish journalist and member of the KDP-Syria. Under the pretense of conducting an interview, Gavari was dispatched to Barzani's headquarters, carrying a briefcase rigged with a time bomb. Fortunately, the plan failed, and Gavari's account of the details provides a chilling narrative.

Gavari, an active journalist who frequently traveled between Syria and Iraqi Kurdistan, caught the attention of the Ba'athist intelligence services. They summoned him to Baghdad and proposed a task: to visit Barzani at his headquarters. If successful, they promised a significant reward. To prove his ability to meet Barzani, they tailored a distinctive suit and requested a photograph with Barzani. With Masoud Barzani's support, Gavari presented himself to Mullah Mustafa, who arranged for a photographer to take pictures of them together. He wore the distinctive striped suit to prove the picture was newly taken.

Once convinced, Ba'athist intelligence unveiled its sinister plan. They intended to send Gavari, in his role as journalist, back to Iraqi Kurdistan to interview Barzani, carrying two briefcases, one containing a time bomb. Gavari agreed to take on the dangerous task with—little did they know—Barzani's secret approval.

A rigorous three-month training program followed, held in the office of Interior Minister General Saadoon Ghaidan. During this time, Gavari was granted access to Saddam's palaces and numerous government ministries, carefully cultivating a persona that implied he had a familial tie to Saddam.

After completing the training, he was driven to Mosul province and escorted to the border checkpoint leading to liberated Kurdistan. Upon crossing with the briefcases, Gavari immediately disclosed the assassination plot to Barzani. Without delay, Barzani organized a press conference, publicly revealing the attempted assassination and displaying the briefcase containing the time bomb for all to see.

The Iraqi government demanded Gavari's extradition, but Barzani firmly insisted that a Kurdish court try him. Alarmed by the potential exposure, the Ba'athist regime sent Abdul Khaliq Al Samarraï, a respected figure in Barzani's eyes, to intervene. Upon learning the truth, Al Samarraï expressed remorse and distanced himself from the regime. His break with the Ba'athists came at a cost; he was later arrested and executed in Baghdad on unrelated charges, marking a tragic end to his complex political journey.

Nine Mullahs Sent to Kill Barzani

In another harrowing attempt to eliminate Barzani, the Ba'athist government devised a devious plot. It was one that exploited the customary respect granted to religious figures—Muslims, Christians, and Ezidis—who were traditionally exempt from searches when visiting Barzani due to their societal standing.

The regime gathered nine elected Sunni religious leaders and arranged for them to visit Barzani in Haj Omran, near the Iranian border. Unbeknownst to these clerics, they were each fitted with tape recorders strapped to their chests, under the pretense of recording Barzani's voice for analysis of his motivations and demands. In reality, these tape recorders concealed remote-controlled bombs, set to be detonated by their two drivers waiting in the car behind the building.

On September 29, 1971, the nine religious leaders led by Abdul Jabbar Al Adhami entered Barzani's modest reception room without undergoing any security checks. Once inside the rectangular space, they

took their seats. Barzani sat at the center of one of the long sides, facing the two windows. Parked directly behind those windows were the vehicles that had transported the visitors. Their taillights concealed rockets, primed to fire once the mission was complete, blocking any possible escape.

Seated next to Barzani, Abdul Jabbar Al Adhami, initiated the conversation. A young tea boy moved between them with a tray, triggering the explosives. The boy was killed instantly, his body absorbing the blast and inadvertently shielding Barzani.

Reacting swiftly, Barzani escaped through a side door, seconds before the religious leaders detonated one by one, their bodies torn apart. The drivers, responsible for triggering the vests rigged with explosives and launching the rockets, attempted to flee but were swiftly neutralized by Barzani's guards.

The building was ablaze and shrouded in dust, and it was widely assumed that Barzani had been killed in the blast. Miraculously, he emerged from the ordeal alive with only a small wound above an eyebrow. News of the failed attempt quickly reached Saddam Hussein, who, in a cynical move, sent a telegram congratulating Barzani on his survival, while simultaneously accusing the Shah of Iran of orchestrating the plot.

Despite the tragic loss of nine religious leaders, Barzani responded with a tone of calm defiance. He thanked Saddam and revealed that one of the guests had survived. He added that the outcome of the interrogations would be shared in due course. The message left Saddam momentarily rattled, until he realized that Barzani had masterfully turned the failed attack into a calculated act of psychological warfare.

The chamber where the nine religious leaders tragically lost their lives has since been transformed into a museum in the heart of Haj Omran. This solemn space now graciously opens its doors to the public, serving as a powerful memorial to the heinous events that unfolded within its walls. More than just a historical site, the museum offers a space for reflection, a tribute to those who perished, and a symbol of the resilience that rose from the ashes of tragedy.

Barzani and Ismet Sharif Vanly

Ismet Sharif Vanly (1924-2011) was born in Syria and became a distinguished scholar, activist, and academic. Studying law and philosophy in France, the United States, and Switzerland, he became one of the leading intellectuals of the Kurdish movement. A pioneering figure, he helped establish the Kurdish Students Society in Europe (KSSE) and served as a dedicated representative of the Kurdish revolution from its earliest days.

I first met Mr. Vanly at a KSSE congress in Münster, Germany, in 1961. It was on this occasion that I submitted the membership application for the Kurdish Students Society in Istanbul (KSSI) to be affiliated with the KSSE.

Vanly was a devoted Kurdish patriot, sincere, principled, and tireless in his advocacy of the Kurdish cause on the international stage.

During my time in Turkey, we remained in close contact. He coordinated the arrival of international journalists and visitors, whom I helped to cross into the liberated Kurdish territories. Together, we even facilitated the transfer of a dismantled radio station to support the Kurdish cause.

Later, as the Swedish-Kurdish Committee (SKK) was being formed, Mr. Vanly visited the committee members on several occasions. His presence and counsel provided invaluable support, significantly helping me build credibility and trust within the committee. His dedication to the Kurdish people and their struggle was unwavering and deeply inspiring.

Our paths crossed on several occasions at Kurdish gatherings in France, Belgium, and Germany. Despite his deep commitment, Vanly faced one major challenge: he never fully mastered the Kurdish language. Having spent most of his childhood in Damascus, speaking Arabic, he relied on Arabic when communicating with fellow Kurds. At times, this gap was embarrassing for him, especially when a Kurdish supporter did not speak Arabic.

Barzani, on one occasion, characterized Vanly as something of a “show-off,” citing his preference for luxurious hotels during official visits as incongruous with representing a people facing hardship. While this accusation held a degree of truth, the manner of its presentation

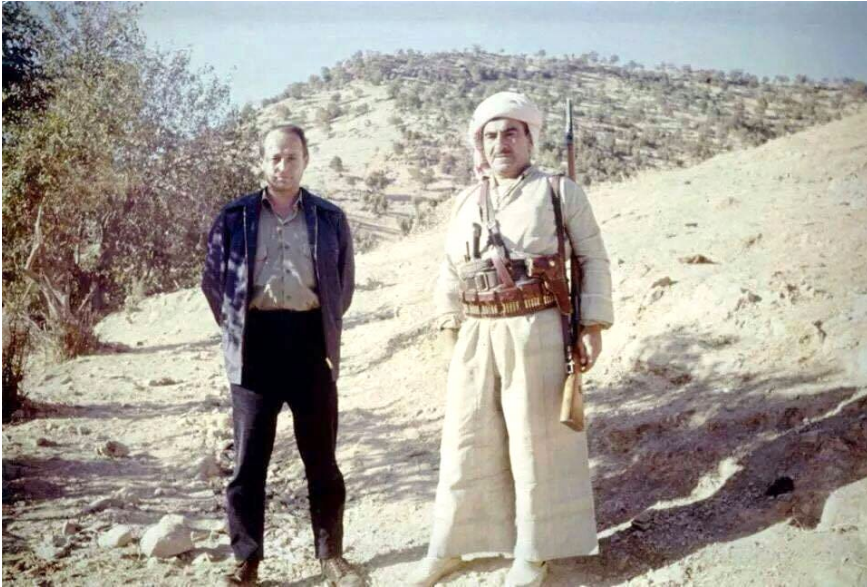
was, by many accounts, excessively harsh. Despite his intellectual acumen, Vanly possessed a fundamentally simple and somewhat naïve character, often too readily trusting in people and their assurances.

Following his ousting as Barzani's representative, Vanly received an invitation to Baghdad to meet with members of the Ba'athist regime. They promised to support his endeavors for the Kurdish cause in Syria. Buoyed by these assurances, Vanly published statements praising his visit and the Ba'athist officials, whom he described as young, sincere, yet inexperienced rulers in need of his guidance. Upon hearing this, I called him from London to express my surprise and disappointment. His response was a poignant Arabic expression, "Everyone must cry for his own Leyla," implying that each individual must focus on their own pressing concerns, in his case, Syrian Kurds.

It soon became apparent, however, that Vanly had misjudged the Ba'athist rulers in Baghdad, as they systematically ignored all the promises made to him. In an attempt to rectify his earlier endorsement, he published a lengthy and forceful statement denouncing the Baghdad Ba'athists. This pattern of public criticism was repeated, greatly irritating the Iraqi regime, which then dispatched a three-man team to assassinate him.

Vanly vividly recounted the harrowing incident. Three young Iraqi Arabs had arrived at his Lausanne apartment, claiming to be delivering gifts from Baghdad. As he went into the kitchen to prepare coffee, an explosion shook the room. Startled, the three visitors immediately fled. Vanly, dazed, initially thought the gas stove had exploded and felt it was cowardly of his guests to run away. It was only when he noticed blood pooling on the floor and felt himself collapsing that he realized the truth—he had been shot.

With great effort, he managed to ring his neighbor's bell. The neighbor promptly called for an ambulance, which took him to the hospital. It was later revealed that an assassin had aimed a gun at his head but narrowly missed; the bullet instead tore through one cheek and exited the other, shattering several teeth in the process. The assailants, it turned out, had escaped in a waiting car. Alert bystanders, suspicious of the vehicle, had noted its registration number, which was subsequently traced back to the Iraqi embassy.



Professor Ismet Sharif Vanly (1924-2011), with Mullah Mustafa Barzani

When news of the assassination attempt became public, Mullah Mustafa Barzani telephoned me from Washington. He asked me to visit Vanly in the hospital and convey his heartfelt wishes. When I did, Vanly was deeply moved, tears streaming down his cheeks.

My First Encounter with Masoud Barzani

Problems at Tehran Airport

Obtaining an Iranian passport, thanks to the Kurdish revolution's connections with Iran, was a gamechanger. It freed me from the constraints of my Swedish Travel Document and suddenly made the world much easier to navigate.



With Masoud Barzani in Seri Blind, April 2024

The Central Hotel in Tehran became a hub for Kurdish visitors and those journeying to and from liberated Kurdistan. It was there, in the summer of 1968 during my first visit, that I met the young Masoud Barzani. I was struck by his grasp of international politics, especially for a 13-year-old. Accompanied by Sheikh Mohammed Hersin, who oversaw Kurdistan's commerce, I discussed the Swedish economy and its neutrality during the two world wars with Masoud Barzani.

Masoud happened to be carrying Machiavelli's *The Prince*, a book he held in high regard. He quoted a passage he particularly liked: "A prince should not surround himself with people more intelligent than himself." After that, I occasionally found myself lightheartedly wondering whether his inner circle had been chosen with that principle in mind.

However, the real story in Tehran was Shamsaddin Mufti, the revolution's representative, and a lawyer from a respected family in Erbil. Known as "Amir Qassemi." He preferred to work alone, handling everything himself. Despite the importance of his role, he was a one man show—and not an exceptionally organized one. It seemed that nearly everyone who passed through Tehran had a complaint about him.

Before my next trip from Europe, Masoud had asked me to bring some electronic gadgets for intelligence work—walkie-talkies, mini cameras, and listening devices. Mufti had assured me that they would breeze through customs without being inspected.

Back at Tehran Airport, everything changed. He insisted on a full security screening. I reminded him of his promise, but he would not budge, citing Iranian sovereignty. It was a standoff. I threatened to take the boxes back to Sweden. Eventually, we reached a compromise: the contents were declared "electronic toys," and the boxes were weighed.

The drama continued at the Central Hotel. Mufti wanted to keep the boxes in the hotel's storage room, out of my sight. I insisted they stay in my room. This breach of trust strained our relationship even further.

Back in Kurdistan, I shared my airport ordeal with Mullah Mustafa Barzani. He was not surprised. "Many have complained about Mufti," he said, describing Mufti's behavior as more that of an Iranian intelligence agent, a Sāvak representative, more than a Kurdish one.

Thankfully, Mufti was removed and replaced by Dr. Shafiq Qazzaz. This was a breath of fresh air, marking a real improvement in our dealings with the Iranian authorities.

Memorable Encounters and Experiences

President George H. W. Bush

In 1995, while planning to establish a Saudi Brazilian trading company, I had the opportunity to meet Mario Garniero, a renowned Brazilian financier and international investor born on August 15, 1937.

Later, Mr. Garniero invited me to attend a conference in Monaco on the establishment of a Latin American Union. The event drew significant attention, particularly after it became known that President George H. W. Bush and First Lady Barbara Bush would be the guests of honor.



With George H. W. Bush and Barbara Bush in Monaco in 1995 during the Latin American Union Conference

Mr. Garniero's invitation offered me a unique opportunity to discuss the Kurdish issue with the former U.S. president.

A Glimpse into a South American Summit

The conference took place in a grand hall, gathering approximately 400 delegates from across the globe. With a vibrant Brazilian flair, the event was seamlessly organized, and attentive hostesses ensured guests were well taken care of throughout. The panel featured ministers from various

South American countries and focused primarily on strengthening business ties between South America and the United States.

With United States First Lady Barbara Bush in a Latin America Conference in Monte Carlo,



Monaco



With Neil Bush, the third of the Bushes' four sons. London, 1992

As Mr. Bush settled into his seat, surrounded by journalists eager to capture the moment, a vivacious young Brazilian journalist playfully called out, “Mr. President, do you remember me?” Mr. Bush replied with his characteristic charm, “How could I forget a beautiful lady like you?” Laughter erupted as she playfully retorted, “You men say the same thing to every woman you meet.”

A Conversation with the Bushes

As the journalists dispersed and dinner was served, Mr. Bush turned to me and asked which Latin American country I came from. I politely explained that I was not from Latin America, but rather a Kurd from Iraqi Kurdistan. His interest was immediate. “Barbara, come here!” he called to his wife. “Here is a Kurdish friend from Iraq.”

Mrs. Bush graciously approached us, expressing genuine sympathy for the Kurdish people’s struggles. She shared that President Bush held deep admiration for the Kurdish fight for independence. I expressed my sincere gratitude and appreciation for their kind words. Mrs. Bush then returned to her seat. Though the evening centered on Latin America, our conversation soon touched upon the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

Before dinner, in a casual but pointed tone, President Bush remarked, “When are we going to get rid of that son of a bitch? (Meaning Saddam Hussein).” I responded, “Mr. President, the premature end of the war ordered by Your Excellency allowed Saddam to retain power; this not only prolonged the suffering of the Iraqi people, but also further destabilized the region.”

President Bush acknowledged the validity of my point, noting that the objective of the U.S. had been solely the liberation of Kuwait, not a regime change in Iraq. He expressed concern about the precedent such interventions might set, raising the question “If we start changing regimes, where does it end?” He stressed that the responsibility for removing leaders ultimately lies with the affected countries and their people.

Later in the evening, our conversation naturally shifted to the challenges faced by the Kurdish community. Seizing the moment, I posed a direct question, “Mr. President, could you please explain why the United States does not support the establishment of an independent Kurdish state? Have the Kurds done anything to upset the United States?”

Mr. Bush responded candidly, delving into the complex geopolitical realities of the region. He pointed to the strong opposition from neighboring nations, particularly Turkey, which remains firmly against any discussion of Kurdish independence. He emphasized that meaningful support for Kurdish aspirations could only materialize if the Kurdish community demonstrated unwavering unity and coherent advocacy for its cause.

As the evening progressed, our conversation shifted to China following my mention of my work there. The president expressed a clear fondness for the country and articulated a vision of a future in which China's rise would proceed without U.S. interference.

Later, we adjourned to the garden for drinks, where the insightful thoughts of former German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt further enriched the discussion.

Sweden

Olof Palme: The Man I Met and Reflections on His Assassination

When I first met Olof Palme in 1967, I was deeply impressed by his character and his sharp, thoughtful responses. He expressed strong sympathy for and support of the Kurdish cause and promised to do everything he could for the wellbeing of the Kurds in Sweden.

For the first time, Kurdish publications flourished in Sweden. During that period, Kurdish-language publications reached a global peak. Apart from what he did for the Kurds, Palme was a bright and intelligent representative of Sweden in international circles. I will never forget his response during a BBC interview when he was asked why Sweden had the highest suicide rate in the world. His reply was simple and sharp, "Because we give the correct figures."

February 28, 1986, was a truly dark day for the Kurds. The assassination of Swedish Prime Minister Olof Palme left many of us in tears over the loss of a steadfast supporter and genuine friend. Soon after, we were shocked by an announcement from the police chief at the time, Hans Holmér. He publicly accused the PKK before a thorough investigation had even begun. This raised many serious questions.

Early one morning, I was awakened by a telephone call from the investigation team working on Palme's murder. As a Kurdish representative,

they asked for my thoughts on who might be behind the assassination. My reply was simple, “I do not know who is behind this terrible deed, but I know who is not.” My line of thinking was clear. It could not have been the Kurds, for many reasons. Among other things, most Kurds regarded Palme as a father figure. He supported them both internationally and in Sweden, despite heavy criticism and pressure from the Turkish authorities. The murderer must have been highly professional to carry out such a crime. The Kurds, as a movement or as a people, could never have carried out such an act. The investigator laughed softly and apologized for disturbing me.

However, I have my own analysis of the matter.

There were three circles that hated Palme:

1. Swedish right-wing organizations
2. The Turkish state, which resented Palme’s support for the Kurds
3. The CIA, which viewed Palme as a supporter of communism and as someone who weakened American influence internationally—for example, through his support for Vietnam in its war against the United States.

What follows is not based on evidence, but on my political assessment, shaped by the forces that opposed Palme during his lifetime. It is possible that one of these groups recruited a criminal Kurd and hired him to carry out the crime, or allowed such a person to be used, hoping he would be arrested and identified as the murderer. In this way, they could kill several birds with one stone: discredit the Kurds in Sweden and eliminate a perceived “dangerous communist”—an outcome that would have served both the CIA and elements of the Swedish right.

For the Kurds, his voice fell silent far too soon. His place can hardly be filled. May he rest in peace.

Prince Bertil Oskar Bernadotte: A Swedish Prince's Venture into Business

Imagine meeting a prince not in a grand palace, but in the bustling heart of London. That was how I met Prince Bertil Oskar Bernadotte, son of the legendary Folke Bernadotte—a name that carries the full weight of twentieth-century European history. Though his family line had forfeited its formal royal title generations earlier due to an unsanctioned marriage within the Swedish royal house, Bertil was nonetheless widely regarded, and often addressed, as a prince—by lineage, bearing, and reputation, if not by constitutional decree.

We were introduced in April 1990 through a Swedish businessman with whom he was then associated—far from the ceremonial world one might expect, yet unmistakably marked by the quiet confidence of someone raised in the shadow of royalty. Prince Bertil was a warm, candid, and refreshingly down-to-earth person. Over many chats, often over a cup of tea in his elegant Hans Square home, he confided in me with an openness that was both surprising and sincere. You could sense a quiet sadness in him, a sort of gentle rebellion against the constraints of his royal life. He spoke of the rift with his family, a consequence of his wife Jill's past, one that included a stint with a risqué magazine. It meant she was not welcome at royal dinners, and Bertil, a man of fierce loyalty, simply would not go without her.



Prince Bertil Oscar Bernadotte and spouse Jill Bernadotte (1912-1997)

He was living in one of London's most beautiful neighborhoods, but beneath the surface, he was struggling financially. His life of luxury was not as comfortable as it appeared. He told me about King Hussein of Jordan, who, honoring Bertil's father's legacy, invited him to Amman every year. But Bertil felt stuck, unsure how to turn these invitations into something more than just a pleasant visit.

One day, he mentioned another invitation was on its way. He was worried and asked me for advice. He wanted to

get a job in Jordan. I knew that asking for a job would be a dead end. I said, “Bertil, forget about asking for a job—think bigger.”

I suggested he approach it strategically. “Think of a reputable company—one that could bring real value to Jordan,” I told him. “Introduce them to King Hussein. Present their services as a way to contribute to the country’s development. You’ll be doing a favor for everyone, including yourself, provided you sign an agreement with the company in advance to secure your share in the profits.”

Bertil’s eyes lit up. He took my advice to heart. Before long, he was facilitating a connection between a British shipping company and King Hussein. The company was eager to expand its operations and saw a real opportunity in Aqaba. The king was impressed, and soon a project to upgrade the port’s shipping facilities was underway.

A few weeks later, I got a call from Bertil. His voice was full of warmth and genuine gratitude. “It worked!” he exclaimed. “Thank you so much. Your advice made all the difference.”

It was a small victory, but a victory, nonetheless. Here was a prince navigating the complexities of identity, legacy, and personal ambition, finding a way to align his personal aspirations with his royal heritage. In turning a challenging situation into a mutually beneficial opportunity, he reminded me that even princes have their struggles, and that sometimes, all it takes is a bit of strategic thinking and a helping hand to find a way forward.

Ignatius Ya’qub III: A Meeting of Two Worlds in Sweden

Ignatius Ya’qub III (1913–1980) was an iconic figure of the Syriac Orthodox Church who etched his name into its annals. Born in the Bartella subdistrict of Iraqi Kurdistan, he embodied the rich cultural and spiritual tapestry of his homeland. He spent much of his youth in Mosul, in the Ninewa District of Iraq.

Serving as the 121st Syriac Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch and head of the Syriac Orthodox Church, he was renowned as a repository of knowledge, having mastered more than seven hundred ecclesiastical melodies preserved in the sacred book *Kazoof*.

Our paths intersected in 1971, during my time as the Kurdish Representative in Scandinavia. A chance encounter with a fellow Syriac refugee in Sweden, Pastor Yousef Sai'd, led to this meeting.

When I learned of the patriarch's upcoming visit to Sweden, and knowing his Kurdistani Syriac origins, I felt compelled to extend a warm welcome on behalf of the Kurdish community in Scandinavia.



Carl XIV Gustaf, King of Sweden (Born 1946)



Ignatius Ya'qub III (1912-1980)

Stockholm's Arlanda Airport was the setting for this momentous occasion. A distinguished group of Swedish clergymen, dressed in ceremonial vestments, awaited the patriarch's arrival. When he entered the VIP room, he impressed all present with a commanding presence, a regal figure adorned with vibrant jewels and a distinguished beard.

The Archbishop of Sweden opened the gathering with a warm welcome. I followed with a few words of my own, expressing heartfelt pride in the patriarch's heritage from my homeland, Kurdistan—roots that filled me with immense pride as I addressed the assembly.

Moved by my words, the patriarch invited me to sit beside him and extended a remarkable offer to accompany him throughout his visit to Sweden. He explained that he was seeking someone who could act as a neutral bridge between the divided Assyrian factions in the country, someone who could help foster understanding and reconciliation. Thrilled by this unexpected honor, I accepted without hesitation.

Our journey together began in a royal limousine sent from the palace. As we travelled together, the patriarch shared captivating stories of his childhood. I continued to accompany His Eminence to his meetings with churches and official circles, witnessing firsthand the respect he commanded and the quiet strength he carried into every room.

During our visit to the Crown Prince of Sweden, Carl Gustaf, the patriarch expressed heartfelt gratitude for Sweden's generous support of the Assyrian community, particularly for welcoming them as refugees and offering a place they could call home.

In response, the crown prince began voicing concerns about the economic challenges that Sweden was facing at the time. The patriarch replied with grace, "Then I must thank you even more for accepting us despite the difficulties you have." The prince continued to speak candidly, acknowledging the strain caused by the growing number of refugees. As the meeting came to a close, the patriarch turned to me with a wry smile and remarked, "Jamal, I think you should send your crown prince to a course in diplomacy."

Israel and a Sojourn in Jerusalem: General Yitzhak Mordechai

General Yitzhak Mordechai, born on November 22, 1944, in Akre in Iraqi Kurdistan, became a prominent figure in Israeli history. He served as commander of both Israel's Northern and Southern Commands and later as minister of defense.

During a visit to Israel, accompanied by my Iraqi Jewish friend David Sassoon, I received a phone call in the lobby of my Tel Aviv hotel from General Mordechai, who expressed surprise and disappointment that I had not reached out to fellow Kurds, himself included, upon my arrival. He graciously extended an invitation to his home in Jerusalem for dinner.



Yitzak Mordukhai, born 1944. Former Minister of Defense of Israel

Two military vehicles whisked us along a scenic route, the lush verdure of the landscape evoking the charm of the European countryside. We soon arrived at a splendid villa perched on a hilltop offering a breathtaking panoramic view of Jerusalem. There, we were warmly greeted by a gathering of around ten Kurds, including Mr. Isaac Yona, head of the Contractors

Union of Israel and originally from Zakho; the general director of the Ministry of the Interior, originally from Erbil; and a banker, several journalists, and other members of the Kurdish community.

The villa exuded a distinctly Kurdish atmosphere, adorned with familiar decor alive with the resonant melodies of Kurdish music and a menu that proudly celebrated the rich, flavorful traditions of Kurdistan.

During dinner, a surprise telephone call interrupted our conversation. It was General Mordechai's mother, speaking in the Kurmanji dialect of Akre. She expressed her heartfelt regret at not being able to attend due to health reasons, her voice filled with longing. She yearned to hug me, to savor the scent of Kurdistan, the homeland she so dearly missed. General Mordechai confided that his mother still wept whenever she spoke of her hometown of Akre.

After dinner, the General graciously made several phone calls on my behalf to arrange meetings and interviews, including one with Minister Dr. Yossi Beilin.

Dr. Yossi Beilin

Dr. Yossi Beilin, born on July 12, 1948, is a former Israeli politician who held multiple ministerial positions in the Israeli government. Today, he is a respected journalist and professor of political science at Tel Aviv University—a multifaceted figure whose career bridges politics and academia.

During a visit to Israel, I had the privilege of meeting Dr. Beilin in his Jerusalem office, thanks to the efforts of General Yitzak Mordechai.

Our discussion focused on the internal conflict between two major Kurdish political parties, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK).

Dr. Beilin expressed deep concern over the ongoing infighting, highlighting the detrimental impact it has on the Kurdish struggle for independence.



Dr. Yossi Beilin, born 1948, is a prominent Israeli politician and academic

Initially, I attempted to downplay the seriousness of the conflict, suggesting it was largely driven by external forces intent on weakening the Kurds. However, Dr. Beilin remained unconvinced. With conviction, he stressed the critical importance of unity for a community like the Kurds. “Tell me, he challenged, what do these two parties (meaning KDP and PUK) possess that they cannot share? Don’t they understand the precarious nature of their geopolitical situation and how much weaker it makes them?”

Seeking a constructive path forward, I asked whether Israel might play a role in resolving the Kurdish conflict. Dr. Beilin’s reply was firm; Israel would only consider involvement if the Kurds first presented a united front. He argued, “Why should Israel offer its help if unity does not prevail?”

This prompted a shift in my approach. Realizing the need to underscore a more immediate threat to Israel’s security, I turned the conversation towards the dangers posed by Iranian-backed Islamist groups such as Ansar al Islam and Jundullah operating along the Kurdish-Iranian border. I cautioned that, if left unchecked, these groups could gain strength and establish a foothold in the Halabja region, transforming it into a breeding ground for terrorism. Such a development, I warned, could have far-reaching consequences beyond the region. “You may begin receiving terrorists from Kurdistan,” I stressed, “not just from Palestine.”

Dr. Beilin, recognizing the gravity of the situation, listened attentively, took detailed notes, and requested additional information.

Shortly after this conversation, news surfaced of an American delegation visiting the PUK leadership in Sulaimani. This was soon followed by targeted airstrikes that significantly weakened the forces of Ansar al Islam. Whether this chain of events was a direct outcome of my conversation with Dr. Beilin or a mere coincidence remains unclear, but the timing was striking.

The Kurds and the Jews

Since my very earliest years, I remember that our kindest neighbors were Jewish. We often visited them in their religious festivities, while they came to celebrate ours with us.

They differed from other minorities in Kurdistan; they spoke perfect Kurdish and wore Kurdish attire, while the Assyrians, for example, rarely spoke Kurdish and preferred Arabic.

I often heard from my grandfather Haji Aswad that dealing with Jewish people was easy and inspired confidence, more so than dealing with Muslims.

It is rather interesting to note that the Jews living among the Arabs in southern Iraq were mostly involved in the jewelry and precious stones trade. At the same time, those in Kurdistan were farmers and property dealers. When I inquired about the reason for this difference, I learned that in the Arab regions, the Jews never felt entirely safe; in times of danger, they could quickly gather their jewels and precious stones into a bag and flee. Among the Kurds, however, they did not face the same risk.

One story from my own family still moves me deeply. My father's uncle, Salman Mawlood Qassab, fell in love with a wonderful Jewish woman, Fakhriya Qassab, and after a long courtship, they married—a love story that became the talk of Erbil. As a child of six, I adored her. She had no children of her own, and perhaps that was why she treated me with such affection and motherly kindness.

I spent many weekends at her home; she spoiled me with sweets and stories, and I can still remember her laughter.



Mustafa Barzani in Israel, 1962



Barzani in Israel with Moshe Dayan, and Dr. Mahmood Othman at the far left 1962



Israelis during a visit in Kurdistan 1963

Then came the day when the Iraqi government ordered the Jews to leave for Israel. Fakhriya could not risk staying behind. One day, she vanished. Her husband was devastated, and grief consumed him; not long after, he died. Decades later, when I visited Israel in 1974, I searched everywhere for her—but in vain. Her memory remains with me, a tender scar that never fades.

Years later, during my involvement in the Kurdish revolution, I witnessed how the bond between Kurds and Jews continued in quiet acts of solidarity. Almost all the Jews who escaped the Iraqi government's brutality reached Israel through Kurdistan, with the help and protection of the Kurdish leadership. That friendship did not go unremembered. I saw its echoes far from home. Once, while shopping on Regent Street in London, I spoke Kurdish to a friend. The shopkeeper overheard us and, with tears in his eyes, refused to take any payment. "You Kurds saved my family's life," he said. "Please accept this as a sign of gratitude."

The same happened in Tel Aviv: when restaurant owners learned that I was from Kurdistan, they refused to let me pay. Their kindness reminded me that history is not only written in wars and politics, but also in the quiet acts of decency that people never forget.

The Jewish Presence in Kurdish Iraq: Ancient Roots

The Jewish presence in Kurdistan stretches back at least 2,700 years, to the Assyrian exile of the 8th century BCE. When the Assyrians conquered the northern Kingdom of Israel, they deported thousands of Israelites to regions around Nineveh and the Zagros Mountains—areas corresponding to parts of today’s Iraqi and Iranian Kurdistan. Over the centuries, these communities and their descendants became known as Kurdish Jews, speaking Judeo-Aramaic dialects influenced by Kurdish and Arabic. By the 19th century, an estimated 25,000–30,000 Jews lived in the Kurdish regions of Iraq.

Everyday Coexistence: Where the Stream Did Not Divide

Kurds and Jews lived side by side in most towns and villages, sharing daily life through markets, festivals, and close-knit neighborhoods. Kurdish Muslims respectfully referred to Jews as Ehli Kitêb (“People of the Book”), and instances of inter-communal violence were exceedingly rare. Many Kurdish tribal leaders even regarded local Jewish families as part of their broader tribal community, extending protection, loyalty, and a sense of belonging that shaped a distinctive model of peaceful coexistence.

In Zakho, a small stream marked the line between the Jewish and Muslim quarters. The Kurds often helped maintain the synagogue and join Jewish festivities and Jewish families. In return, they celebrated Newroz with their Kurdish neighbors.

The Economy of Friendship

Economic life in Kurdistan was deeply interwoven between Kurds and Jews. Jewish communities were known for their skills as artisans, merchants, goldsmiths, and dyers, while Kurds were often farmers, herders, and traders. The two groups depended on each other: Kurds brought agricultural products down from the mountains, and Jews connected them to wider trade networks reaching Mosul and Baghdad. In towns like Amedi and Akre, the Friday market embodied this cooperation—Jewish shopkeepers would close their stalls for the Sabbath, and their Muslim neighbors would look after them until Saturday evening.

Social Bonds and Mutual Protection

Across Kurdistan, Kurds and Jews forged relationships rooted in loyalty and shared responsibility. Kurdish tribal leaders often stepped forward to protect their Jewish neighbors in moments of danger. In Zakho, in the early 1900s, when rumors circulated that Ottoman soldiers intended to target Jewish homes, the tribal chief Rashid Agha declared, “Whoever touches a Jew touches my kin,” and placed guards around the Jewish quarter. Similar acts of solidarity occurred in Amedi and Akre, where Kurdish religious leaders publicly rejected the false blood libel accusations that reached the region in the 19th century and defended the Jewish communities against slander and harm. These episodes reveal the depth of trust and protection that shaped Kurdish-Jewish coexistence.

The Barzani Tradition of Protecting Jewish Communities

The Barzani family—from which the later Kurdish leader Masoud Barzani emerged—grew up in an environment where Jewish neighbors were treated with respect and protection. In the 1940s, as anti-Jewish sentiment and violence spread through parts of Iraq, Mullah Mustafa Barzani was reportedly outraged by the persecution occurring in other cities. In contrast, he continued to ensure the safety of the Jewish families living in Barzan and the surrounding villages.

Cultural Harmony: Kurdish Identity and Jewish Traditions

Jewish communities in Kurdistan were deeply religious yet fully integrated into Kurdish cultural life. They dressed like their Kurdish neighbors, spoke both Kurdish and Aramaic, and shared the same musical traditions.

In many towns, Jewish and Muslim women exchanged songs, lullabies, and midwifery practices, creating a shared cultural fabric. Jewish peddlers also played an important role, carrying stories, news, and songs from one village to another—helping to sustain and disseminate Kurdish oral culture across the region.

Why Coexistence Flourished

Jewish–Kurdish coexistence endured for centuries because of a unique combination of social and historical factors. Kurdish society was rooted more in

tribal and clan loyalty than in rigid religious boundaries, making notions of honor and mutual obligation far more important than sectarian identity. Kurdistan's peripheral geography, far from Baghdad and Ottoman centers of authority, also meant it remained largely untouched by the nationalist and antisemitic agitation that later spread through urban Iraq. Economic interdependence further strengthened ties, as each community relied on the other's skills, networks, and protection. And finally, as minorities within larger empires, both Kurds and Jews recognized in each other a shared struggle for dignity, cultural survival, and the preservation of identity.

A Painful Separation: The Departure of Kurdish Jews

Everything changed after the establishment of Israel in 1948. The Iraqi government introduced harsh anti-Zionist and antisemitic laws, creating a climate of fear that reached even the remote towns of Kurdistan. Although many Kurdish Muslims wished for their Jewish neighbors to remain, nearly all Kurdish Jews emigrated to Israel between 1950 and 1952 during Operation Ezra and Nehemiah. Their departure was deeply emotional: families who had lived side by side for generations embraced for the last time, with Kurdish neighbors helping them pack their belongings. The sorrow of those farewells lives on in Kurdish oral songs, which still echo with genuine grief for a community that never returned.

A Living Legacy: Kurdish–Jewish Bonds Today

The legacy of coexistence continues to echo across generations. Kurdish Jews in Israel still speak of Kurdistan as their true home, preserving Kurdish customs, cuisine, and music with great pride.

In Iraq, many Kurdish families continue to share stories of “our Jewish friends,” remembering them with warmth and respect. Jewish holy sites—such as the Tomb of Nahum the Prophet in Al-Qosh—remain revered by Kurds as part of their shared heritage. Before the Second World War, Iraqi Kurdistan stood as a rare example of peaceful, respectful coexistence between Jews and Muslims.

Rooted in shared hardship, mutual dependence, and genuine neighborly affection, this legacy continues to shape Kurdish–Jewish ties to this day.

More Memorable Encounters

Turkey

Ismet İnönü

Ismet İnönü (1884-1973) is widely considered the second most important figure in the founding of the Turkish Republic. Alongside Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, he played a pivotal role in shaping modern Turkey. With a distinguished military background, İnönü's legacy is deeply intertwined with the emergence of a new era in Turkish history.

My initial encounter with Ismet İnönü took place in 1959 at a train station. I was traveling to Istanbul with a classmate, who was a passionate supporter of İnönü's Republican People's Party (CHP). He had come to the station to see me off. As we made our way to the train, we noticed a crowd gathering around the front carriage. There was a palpable sense of excitement in the air. To our astonishment, we discovered Mr. İnönü himself was on board, saying goodbye to his well-wishers.



Ismet İnönü (1884-1973)



Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (1881-1938)

Encouraged by my friend, I made my way through the crowd to shake hands with İnönü. Upon learning that I was an Iraqi student studying at the Middle East Technical University, he welcomed me warmly. During our conversation, he asked about my background and whether I was happy in Turkey. I replied that I was. Then he asked, "Are you Arab or Turkmen?" To which I replied, "I am Kurdish." With a gentle nod, he said, "Nice to hear that."

Emboldened by this openness, I mustered the courage to ask a more personal question. “Sir,” I inquired, “I have heard that you, too, are of Kurdish origin. Is that true?” İnönü smiled and replied diplomatically, “In Turkey, we do not differentiate between nationalities; all are considered the same.”

As I bid him farewell, my friend expressed his disapproval, suggesting I should not have asked such a question. I reminded him that it was İnönü himself who steered the conversation in that direction.

Two years later, I had another memorable encounter with İsmet İnönü, this time at Istanbul Technical University (ITU). He was touring the campus surrounded by a throng of students and faculty members. He paused to observe a scale model of a building while a professor explained its architectural features. İnönü, a twinkle in his eye, quipped, “Can the roof also be lifted once the building is constructed?” eliciting laughter from the crowd.

During the same gathering, a journalist asked İnönü about the outcome of the previous day’s meeting with the Soviet ambassador. İnönü, ignoring the question, pretended not to hear. When the journalist persisted, raising his voice and repeating the question, İnönü remained silent. At that moment, another man then leaned in and whispered, “Ask him what he discussed with the American ambassador last week.” Without hesitation, İnönü responded, “That was a private discussion and none of your business.”

Inönü, Kurdistan, and an Unverified Story

A unique episode related to İnönü unfolded during a visit to a friend in Florida. Due to my visit, my host, Mr. Hafidh, a Lebanese American lawyer, had declined an invitation to a dinner party hosted by a prominent medical doctor. Mr. Hafidh explained that he had a Kurdish guest staying with him. The doctor, intrigued, insisted on meeting this guest, which led to my unexpected invitation.

The party was held in a grand, palatial mansion. During the evening, the host, a man born in Vienna to an Austrian father and Kurdish mother, shared a remarkable personal history. He claimed that his mother was the daughter of İsmet İnönü, born outside of marriage. Proud of her Kurdish

heritage, his mother often shared stories of the Kurds with him during his childhood.

While I cannot independently verify this intriguing account, it adds another layer to the complex legacy of İsmet İnönü.

Cetin Altan: A Pen Meant for the Oppressed

Cetin Altan (1927-2015) was a prominent Turkish journalist known for his liberal views and progressive stance on global affairs. He married a woman from Iraqi Kurdistan, and together they had three children—the renowned journalist brothers Ahmet and Mehmet Altan, and their sister Zeynep.



Cetin Altan (1927-2015)

An Uncomfortable Lesson in Turkish Liberalism

Driven by a deep desire to draw attention to the plight of the Kurdish people, I sought out Altan at his office in *Milliyet*. I urged him to use his influential platform to expose the human rights violations being committed in Iraqi Kurdistan, in particular the Iraqi military's use of napalm, condemned by the international community.

To my great disappointment, Altan, whom I had long admired as a liberal intellectual, abruptly dismissed me upon learning of my Kurdish heritage. This unexpected rejection left me profoundly disillusioned.

Over time, I came to understand a difficult truth in Turkey: those who identify as leftists or liberals can, at times, display even more overt racist tendencies than extreme nationalists. This unsettling contradiction reveals a deep and persistent fault line within certain segments of Turkish society.

Shükri Baban: Another Unfulfilled Hope

Professor Shükri Baban (1893-1980) was a prominent economist and journalist. Following my disillusionment with Cetin Altan, I turned to Musa Anter for guidance. He recommended that I consult Professor Baban, who was widely respected for his insightful columns in the *Akşam* newspaper.

We approached Professor Baban with a sense of urgency and hope, detailing the dire humanitarian crisis in Iraqi Kurdistan, particularly the indiscriminate suffering inflicted on women and children by the Iraqi military's use of napalm.



Professor Shukri Baban, (1893-1980)

Given our shared Kurdish heritage, we anticipated a sympathetic response and possibly public support for the cause. But once again, we were met with disappointment. Professor Baban offered no specific commitment. Instead, he drew a parallel between the Kurdish struggle and other global liberation movements, stating, "When I write about the situation in Algeria and Palestine, I mean the situation in Kurdistan, you must understand that."

Coming on the heels of the Altan let-down, this encounter deepened my sense of disillusionment. It underscored the painful truth that even those with shared heritage or progressive credentials fell short in recognizing the Kurdish people's struggle for recognition and self-determination.

Aziz Nesin: A Meeting of the Minds

In the autumn of 1962, I had the privilege of accompanying Musa Anter to meet the celebrated Turkish humorist Aziz Nesin at his residence in Istanbul.

Aziz Nesin was a giant in Turkish literature not only for his wit, but for his fearless social commentary. As we approached his home, our anticipation swelled at the thought of meeting such a revered intellect.

The door opened to reveal a short-statured man whose warmth and charisma immediately put me at ease. As Musa Anter introduced me, Nesin's eyes lit up with a broad smile. "I swear by God, this friend of yours is a Kurd," he declared.

Anter responded with a wry smile, "Why are Turks always jealous when they see two Kurds together?"

Upon learning of my Kurdish heritage, Nesin initiated a thoughtful conversation. He remarked on the strong sense of solidarity within the Kurdish community and acknowledged their enduring aspiration for an independent state, an aspiration that regrettably remained unfulfilled. He then went on to mention that he had explored this theme in one of his books and invited me to hear the story firsthand.

Intrigued, I eagerly accepted. The narrative was set during the reign of Sultan Abdul Hamid II. After a Kurdish uprising against the Ottoman Empire had led to significant bloodshed, the Sultan devised an unconventional strategy to pacify the region. He appointed several Kurdish tribal leaders as high-ranking military commanders, granting them supreme authority over nighttime military operations in Istanbul. This shows how authority can be strengthened by bringing former adversaries into the fold.

Nesin recounted a story of a drunk officer who had run afoul of military discipline. Dragged before a Kurdish general by two guards, the guards were asked to explain his offences. He admitted to being intoxicated and causing a disturbance in a bar.



Aziz Nesin, renowned Turkish writer (1915-1995)

The general, citing the Ottoman Empire's strict prohibition of alcohol consumption, delivered a stern reprimand.

The guards then revealed the officer had also assaulted an Armenian waiter working in the bar. The general, visibly outraged, condemned the attack, emphasizing that it was unacceptable to harm a member of a respected minority. When the third offense was disclosed—an assault on a female singer performing on stage—the general's disapproval deepened. He questioned the officer's judgment, asking how he could justify striking a woman.

At that point, the general sentenced the officer to six months in prison and a demotion in rank. Realizing the gravity of the situation, the officer now desperately spoke up in Kurdish and declared his Kurdish ethnicity. The general's demeanor shifted abruptly. "Why didn't you say that from the start?" Turning to the guard, he inquired, "Remind me again, what were the charges?" The guard began, "He was drunk." "Men may drink occasionally," the general replied dismissively. "He attacked the Armenian waiter." The general shrugged, "He is a non-believer after all." "He assaulted the lady on stage." The general waved it off, declaring, "Entertainers deserve such treatment."

With that, the general then reversed his initial verdict. The officer was not only spared punishment but was promoted as well. He concluded by inviting the officer to visit him the following day if he needed anything.

This dramatic shift in the general's attitude upon learning of the officer's Kurdish heritage poignantly illustrates the complex interplay between loyalty and oppression within Kurdish society. On the one hand, Kurdish communities often exhibit strong internal solidarity, offering unwavering support to those they recognize as their own. On the other hand, loyalty can co-exist with, and even perpetuate, a broad system of injustice.

Jordan

Ismail Al Armouti: We are Grateful that Oil Eludes Our Land

During my time at Middle East Technical University in Ankara between 1957 and 1959, I had the privilege of knowing an extraordinary individual: Ismail Nazzal Al Armouti of Jordan (1933–2013), a distinguished figure in the field of mechanical engineering. He and I shared living quarters during those formative years—a circumstance that gave rise to a deep and enduring bond.

As life carried me from Ankara to Istanbul, time and distance regrettably caused me to lose touch with Ismail. The memories of our shared years lingered quietly until the mid-1990s, when chance reunited us in London. A Jordanian delegation visiting the city to discuss a port project in Aqaba unexpectedly became the conduit to rediscovering a long-lost friend.

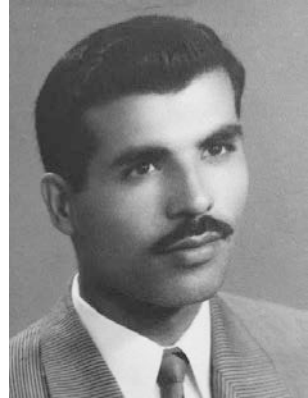
During our discussions, I took the opportunity to ask the chief engineer about Ismael Al Armouti. To my delight, he told me that Ismael had risen to become the minister of municipality and rural affairs, spearheading the Jordanian delegation to the UK for high-level talks with the British government.

I met with Ismail later that afternoon. Emotion overcame him as he reminisced about our student days in Ankara. Soon after, he invited me to visit him in Amman, the capital of Jordan—a gesture that spoke to the enduring strength of our friendship.

Al-Armouti, the son of a distinguished family instrumental in the founding of the Kingdom of Jordan, welcomed me with warmth and generosity upon my arrival. As he drove me through the bustling capital, I was struck by the remarkable pace of development unfolding before my eyes.

Gazing out at the modern skyline and busy streets, I could not help but remark, “Jordan truly deserves admiration for its accomplishments, especially given its limited resources.” After a pause, I added with a thoughtful smile, “Just imagine how much further it could go if it had oil within its borders.”

Ismail smiled thoughtfully before replying, “Jamal, I always thank Almighty God that we were not given oil. Had we possessed it, our story might



My classmate from Middle East Technical University, became among others minister of health in Jordan.

have turned out very differently. Instead of building what you see today, we might have become dependent on the easy wealth that oil brings—and, like some of our neighbors, fallen into idleness and corruption. Just look at Iraq.”

His reflection revealed a deeper wisdom—that Jordan’s lack of oil had, in its own way, fueled a spirit of resilience and accomplishment.

Syria

The Damascus Hotel Project

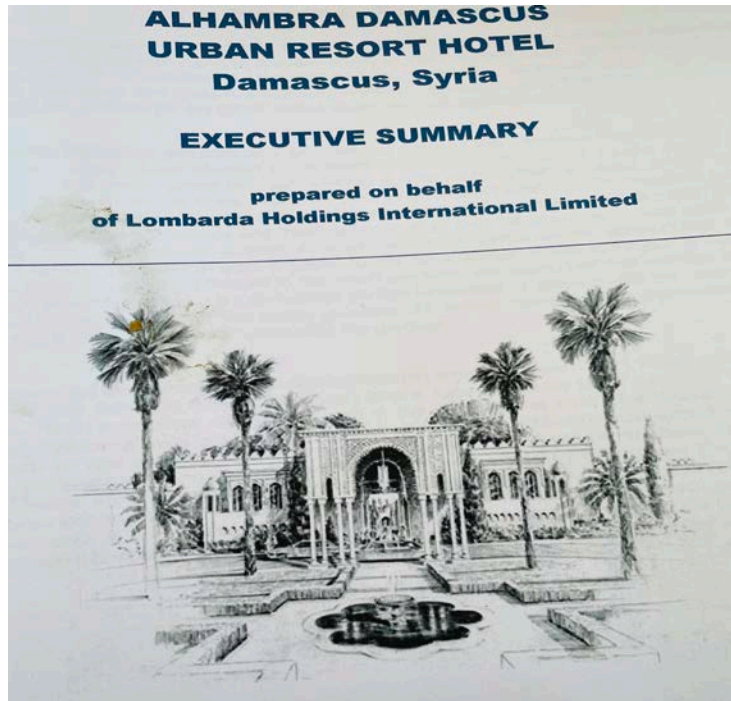
Among the many places I visited, Syria stands out as a land of warmth and generosity. Its people were exceptionally kind and welcoming, leaving an impression that has stayed with me ever since.

A memorable chapter unfolded when, through a mutual acquaintance, I was introduced to Prime Minister Mustafa Miro. Together with my British friend, Chris Dandridge, we explored an exciting idea—the development of a five-star hotel in the heart of Damascus, backed by British investment.

With the enthusiastic support of the Minister of Tourism, Mr. Miqdad, we moved quickly to make the project a reality. We agreed to acquire a plot in the Adawiya district, contributing 25 percent of the investment. The design was commissioned from the renowned British architectural firm WATG, specialists in world-class hotel design.



With the minister of tourism in Damascus in negotiations to build a five-star hotel in Al Adawiya. On my left is my business partner Patrick Honey



Five-star hotel project documentation in Al Adawiya in Damascus

The minister, clearly impressed by the design, hinted that the contract would be finalized after Eid al-Adha. Then came an unexpected suggestion: why not spend the holiday in London, and upon our return, have the signing ceremony broadcast live on Syrian state television?

But while in London, an unforeseen twist disrupted our plans. A telegram arrived from the minister of tourism, abruptly announcing that our carefully negotiated contract had been cancelled. No explanation was offered—only silence where clarity should have been. We were left stunned, wondering what had truly transpired behind the scenes.

I returned to Damascus at once, determined to understand the sudden cancellation of our contract. I sought meetings with both the minister and the prime minister, hoping for an explanation—but my efforts were met with silence and evasion.

It was then that my Syrian Kurdish friend and confidant, Abdurrahman Awni, stepped in. Well-connected within the upper circles of power, he arranged a meeting with Rami Makhoul, the nephew of Syria's

president. There, the truth emerged: our project had been quietly handed over to Prince Alwaleed bin Talal of Saudi Arabia.

A faint hope of saving the project still lingered. Rami Makhoul approached me with an offer: I could reclaim it if I signed a statement accusing the minister of demanding bribes. It was clearly an attempt to entangle the minister in legal trouble—a deal I could not accept.

Even while assuring me that the minister had never asked for money, Makhoul urged me to “look at the bigger picture.” I refused to take part in a lie that would destroy an innocent man’s reputation. Letting go of the project was a bitter decision, but it was the only way to act with integrity and protect someone who did not deserve to be punished.

And so, our Damascus dream quietly came to an end—a reminder that holding onto one’s principles sometimes comes at a personal cost.

Elevating Syrian Sovereignty

A respected British company approached me with a proposal to invest in the Port of Latakia. The plan was ambitious—to triple the port’s capacity and deepen its draft to 15 meters. Prime Minister Mustafa Mero welcomed the idea and instructed me to invite the company’s CEO to meet with the minister of transportation.

The minister, who considered himself a fellow Iraqi due to his Deir al-Zor origin, was initially receptive. We discussed a build-operate-transfer (BOT) arrangement that would require no upfront costs for Syria. However, concerns soon surfaced about relinquishing control of the country’s main port to a foreign company.

I assured him that the company’s intention was not to take ownership, but to manage the port efficiently, recover its investment through operations, and return full control to the Syrian authorities after eight years. Despite these assurances, the minister remained uneasy, and the talks ended without agreement.

The Latakia Port project became a vivid example of the tension between modernization and national sovereignty—a reminder that progress must be pursued with both economic vision and respect for a nation’s pride and independence.

Brazil

Armando Conde: A Banker with a Heart

People often say that bankers have no heart—a cliché that seems to fit the nature of their profession. But Armando Conde was different; he had two. I first met him in Uruguay, where his bank played a key role in helping me acquire a livestock business. As the son of the founder of Banco Crédito Nacional, Brazil's second-largest private bank, he carried himself with the easy confidence of someone born into privilege.

During a later visit to London, Armando called me with a sense of urgency. He needed help in finding a particular Italian sausage for his residence in South Kensington. I declined, explaining—half seriously, half in jest—that I only took on requests of real importance. To my surprise, he accepted that answer without taking offense.

Over time, our conversations in London revealed a man weighed down by loneliness and regret. He spoke openly about his wife's frequent absences, his son's imprisonment, and his estranged daughter. He bemoaned the lack of genuine friends, counting only five, including me.



The Brazilian delegation in Saudi Arabia from left: Dr Arsuaga, Khaled Omar Alamdar, Armando Conde, Sheikh Omar Alamdar, Jamal Alemdar, Ammar Alamdar

Despite his fortune, Armando seemed profoundly unhappy. He doubted the sincerity of those around him, convinced his employees were devoted only to his money. He often asked why his children had lost respect for him, blaming his own drinking habits and volatile temper.

Even with his personal struggles, Armando was kind and generous. He proposed a joint venture with Sheikh Omar Alamdar, who would become a close and a trusted friend, and invited me to visit his coffee and rubber plantation in the Amazon. Our journey included encounters with indigenous people and a detour to Brasília, Brazil's meticulously planned capital.

Through Armando Conde, I gained a glimpse into the complexities of wealth and privilege, as well as the personal struggles that can accompany them.

In the Jungles of the Amazon

During that visit to Brazil with Sheikh Omar Alamdar, Armando had arranged an exceptionally well-organized itinerary for our group. One of the highlights was a trip to his vast plantation in the Amazon, where the sprawling estate was dedicated mainly to the cultivation of rubber and coffee.

We stayed in charming two-person cottages, and upon arrival in the afternoon, a private helicopter trip offered us spectacular views of the Amazon rainforest. The property, nestled along the banks of the Amazon River, radiated a quiet, almost otherworldly beauty.

Armando, the gracious host that he was, suggested a dinner of freshly caught fish from the Amazon River. A worker expertly speared an enormous fish, and that evening we shared a feast unlike any other. Despite having twenty guests at the table, we barely managed to eat a quarter of it—the rest, as Armando joked, was left “for the jungle to enjoy.”

The following day, we set out on a bus tour of nearby villages inhabited by the indigenous people of the Amazon. Armando, ever cautious but informative, advised us to stay on the bus when we stopped at a local market, warning of possible risks in interacting with locals. But curiosity got the better of me, and I wandered into a small shop where I met several villagers. They were warm and welcoming, and we managed to communicate through gestures and smiles.

When I returned, our hosts were surprised and a little alarmed. To them, it was a risk I should not have taken. Past mistreatment had left many villagers wary, while outsiders often met that wariness with caution—and sometimes fear.

Back in Rio de Janeiro, I prepared for a meeting with the directors of Banco Crédito Nacional (BCN) to discuss potential trade partnerships between Saudi Arabia and Brazil. The meeting was scheduled for 3 p.m. on a Friday, and, as usual, I arrived on time—only to find the bank completely empty. Armando's private secretary led me to the top floor, where the directors were still enjoying a leisurely lunch over wine. They drifted into the meeting one by one, each offering polite apologies for their lateness.

At first, I was taken aback by their relaxed attitude, but I soon understood it was simply part of the Brazilian way. When they suggested postponing the meeting to Monday, I agreed—realizing that their easygoing approach was, in its own way, wise. Sometimes, taking life a little less seriously can make it far easier to handle, and it was a valuable takeaway for me.

Africa

Kenya

In the autumn of 1998, an African business associate approached me with a request to help Kenya develop a much-needed power station. He spoke passionately about the country's growing electricity shortages and, claiming a personal connection to President Daniel arap Moi, offered to arrange a meeting. He also emphasized Kenya's lack of funding and urged me to consider financing the project.

To assess the project's feasibility, I contacted Mr. Clive Marks, a financial consultant with Costain International, a British company I had previously worked with in China. Mr. Marks explained that the project could be structured under a build-operate-transfer (BOT) model, provided the Kenyan government was willing to enter into a power purchase agreement (PPA) with the operating company. Under this framework, the company would finance the construction, recover its costs, and earn a profit over time through electricity sales before transferring ownership back to Kenya.

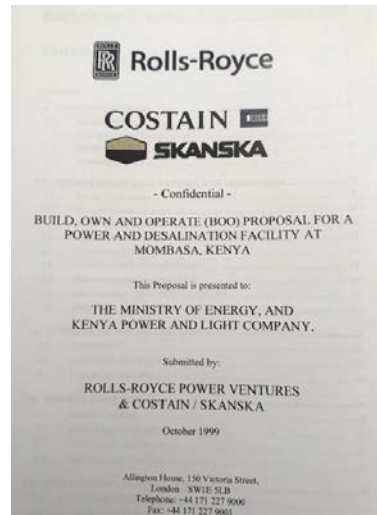
Encouraged by this approach, I told Mr. Marks I would return after obtaining a green light from the president. I then traveled to Nairobi, where President Moi received me warmly, expressing gratitude for the initiative to support the Kenyan people. When I raised the question of a PPA, he referred me to the Minister of Energy, Mr. Mutitu, noting that the minister had deep expertise in such agreements and would be the right person to take the discussions forward.

Mr. Mutitu, a warm and engaging figure, expressed his full support for the project and his willingness to facilitate all necessary agreements. The plan was ambitious—a 300 MW power station, with 150 MW dedicated to both the Nairobi and Mombasa regions.

In collaboration with Clive Marks of Costain, we formed a consortium in which Costain would act as the main contractor, responsible for project design and financial coordination. Rolls-Royce was to supply the turbines, while the Swedish company Skanska would handle the construction of the plants.

A suitable site in Nairobi, prepared under Mr. Mutitu's direction, was quickly secured, but the Mombasa location was still undeveloped. Accompanied by the president's envoy, Mr. Kulay, along with representatives from Costain and Skanska, I traveled to Mombasa to assess the situation

firsthand. Aware of the risks of traveling through the dense terrain after dark, we worked swiftly to complete our inspection before nightfall.



Power and desalination project proposal



While looking for a site for a power plant project in Mombasa, our car got stuck in the mud:
Monkey encounter



With President arap Moi of Kenya, September 1999



Mr. Kublay, the private secretary of the President of Kenya, October 1999

As we headed back, our jeep got stuck in thick mud, leaving us stranded and vulnerable. Night began to fall and concern grew among my colleagues. Urging Mr. Kulay to seek help, I emphasized the importance of remaining quiet to avoid attracting attention.

Then, unexpectedly, a group of monkeys appeared in the trees, chattering and throwing stones. Before long, a man named Adam approached, offering assistance. Skeptical, I prevented him from leaving, giving him some money to stay until we instructed him further. Another passerby offered help, and we repeated the process, remaining cautious but polite, and isolated from the nearby villages.

After about three tense hours, Mr. Kulay returned with soldiers but without proper tools. Working together, we managed to extract the jeep and made it back onto solid ground.

Together with Mr. Kubilay and the minister of energy, Mr. Mutitu, we asked Adam and his companions to guide us back to the main road. On the way, a British engineer from Costain remarked on how calm I had stayed while others were frightened. I told him that having faced tougher situations before made this one easier to handle.



With Mr. Kubiay and the Minister of Energy, Mr. Mutitu

Three Kurdish Women Stuck in Kenya

When I returned from Kenya in March 1999, I received an unexpected phone call from Yaşar Kaya, the former Speaker of the Kurdish parliament in exile. This call drew me into a critical mission. He urgently sought my help for three Kurdish women who had accompanied Abdullah Öcalan, the Kurdish leader, during his flight from Greece to Kenya.

Believing that Öcalan was en route to South Africa at the invitation of Nelson Mandela—a journey they understood to have the tacit support of the CIA—the women accompanied him in good faith. In reality, they

were unaware that the trip was a carefully laid trap. On February 15, 1999, Öcalan was abducted in Nairobi and handed over to Turkish intelligence at the Kenyan military airport. He was transferred to Turkey, where he remains imprisoned for life.

Left behind in Kenya, the three women—long-time aides to Öcalan—were detained by Kenyan authorities. With no valid passports, they faced the frightening prospect of deportation to Turkey.

Yaşar Kaya, aware of my involvement in various projects in Kenya and of my connection to President Daniel arap Moi, contacted me urgently, hoping I could intervene to prevent the women's extradition. Acting without delay, I reached out to Mr. Kulay, the president's private secretary, urging him to do everything possible to halt their transfer to Turkish authorities. When Mr. Kulay returned, his news was grim: the women had no valid travel documents, and the Kenyan authorities intended to repatriate them to Turkey. I was blunt about the stakes—imprisonment, torture, even death—and made it clear that I would hold the Kenyan government accountable in international courts if they sent the women back. Mr. Kulay promised to raise the matter with the president and to explain the situation in full.

In a welcome turn of events, Mr. Kulay soon returned with reassuring news: the president had personally intervened and ordered an immediate halt to the women's deportation to Turkey. Arrangements were swiftly made in cooperation with the Red Cross to secure their safe transfer to Germany, where they were granted residence. The sense of relief that followed was overwhelming.

Some time later, while I was in Sweden, Dilan, one of the women, came to visit me and expressed her gratitude. Her visit was deeply moving—a reminder of how even a small act of help, at the right moment, can change the course of someone's life.

Zimbabwe

Socialism, Zimbabwean Style

In April 1991, an invitation from John, an Irish businessman I had met in London—his surname, regrettably, escapes me—led me to Zimbabwe. He spoke with such enthusiasm about the country's burgeoning business opportunities that I could not resist exploring them firsthand.

John, a long-time resident, operated an electronics business supplied by his factory in Hong Kong. Zimbabwe, having recently shed its colonial past as Rhodesia and now under majority Black rule, was a revelation. The country's sophisticated infrastructure, stunning landscapes, idyllic climate, and abundant wildlife painted a picture of remarkable potential. The era of Ian Smith, who had unilaterally declared independence from Britain in 1965, was firmly relegated to history.

My base in Harare was John's opulent villa, a testament to his success. According to him, President Mugabe had expressed interest in the property, though John consistently declined his offers.

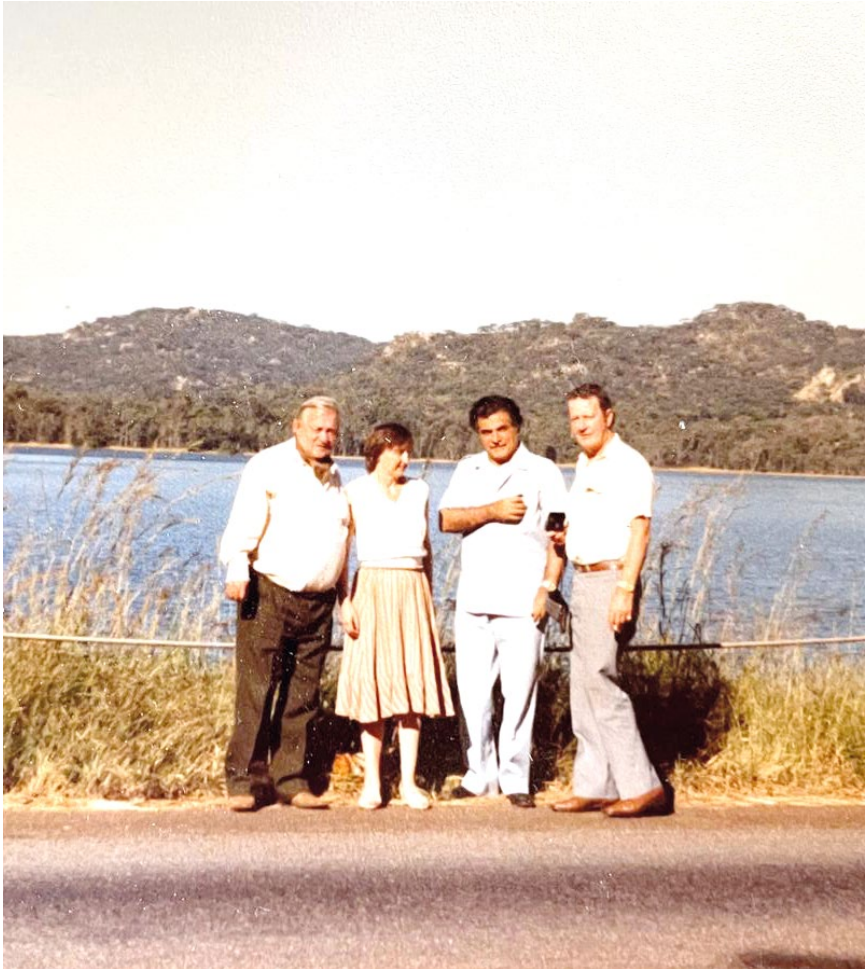
The villa buzzed with activity, often hosting cabinet ministers who gathered to enjoy premium whiskies and other imported luxuries, courtesy of John's import license and access to Hong Kong currency. Reflecting on the lingering British influence, John noted with wry amusement that early morning drinking had evolved into a peculiar status symbol. If one hoped to engage a minister or an official at their sharpest, he advised it was best to do so before 11 a.m. The afternoons, for ministers, with the notable exception of the president, tended to be less productive.

Adding to the villa's charm was John's father-in-law, a cheerful London gentleman on his inaugural Zimbabwean visit. He was endlessly delighted by the glorious weather. Often remarking on it with wide-eyed enthusiasm—remarks that John gently reminded him were best reserved for England, where sunshine was a rare treat.

One morning, the Minister of Justice joined us for breakfast. As he reached for a cigarette, John's father-in-law offered him a light from an exquisite lighter, a birthday gift from his wife. The minister, with a disarming blend of candor and socialist pragmatism, took the lighter, put it in his pocket, and remarked, "Zimbabwe is a socialist country; What is mine is mine, and what is yours is ours." John's father-in-law, taken

aback, explained the lighter's sentimental value, but received a rather practical response before the conversation moved on.

Later, John shared a hard-won lesson: discretion was key. Displaying valuables to Zimbabweans, he cautioned, often led to their "redistribution." It was a lesson his father-in-law learned firsthand, a gentle reminder that cultural nuances could sometimes lead to unexpected outcomes.



Jamal with friend in Harare

Eastern Europe

Romania: Empowering Unity

In August 1969, during the 13th Congress in West Berlin, I embarked on a mission to foster unity among Kurdish students abroad. My plan was to tour countries with Kurdish student populations, identify their challenges, and seek practical solutions. The journey began with an unexpected invitation from the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party.

To my surprise, I found myself staying in a small but elegant historic palace, attended by domestic staff who looked after my every need with effortless hospitality.

My first assignment was to meet with a group of Kurdish students in Romania. They spoke of their frustration with the way Iraqi communist students dominated both the scholarship process and student activities. At public events, the Iraqis used only their own symbols and slogans, leaving little room for Kurdish identity—even during celebrations such as Nowruz.

When I heard that the Iraqi students were planning a welcome gathering for me, I took the opportunity to speak to the forty or so attendees about the importance of cooperation. Although they initially denied any fault, they eventually acknowledged that Kurds had been unintentionally sidelined during Nowruz celebrations. To address the issue properly, I met with Mrs. Gizela Vass, a member of the Romanian Communist Party's Central Committee, who had been unaware of the situation. After hearing the concerns, she redirected the scholarship payments to the Kurdish students—effectively ending the Iraqi students' control over the process.

This diplomatic success did not sit well with the Iraqi students, but the Kurdish students were relieved and grateful. During dinner at the flat of the student leader, Sulaiman Khoshnaw, I learned about another issue troubling the group: Sulaiman had begun imposing his personal religious values on the other students. Some complained that he discouraged them from going to restaurants and restricted certain everyday behaviors. Sensing the growing tension, they asked for my help in resolving the situation. I advised them to treat one another as equals and avoid falling into a rigid, military-style hierarchy. Mutual respect, I reminded them, was essential for maintaining harmony so far from home.

The dynamic between Sulaiman and the other students resembled that of a general commanding his soldiers, reinforced by the authority he felt from his KDP nomination. I encouraged them to see one another as equals and fellow students rather than subordinates. Most of them welcomed this approach—except for Sulaiman, who clearly worried about losing his hold on the group.

To address Sulaiman's rigid demeanor, I enlisted the help of a Romanian student working at the Soviet consulate. In a strategic move, I asked her to befriend Sulaiman, promising her a dinner invitation in return. Sulaiman's transformation, from a shy and reserved individual to someone more positive and liberal, was evident when he arrived at the restaurant that evening clean-shaven, having shaved off his mustache.

This diplomatic journey not only resolved issues of scholarships and behavior but also showcased the transformative power of breaking free from conservative constraints. It was a testament to the liberating force of unity and understanding among Kurdish students.

Between Ideology and Reality: Kurdish Students in the USSR

As I continued my mission to meet Kurdish students abroad, I left Bucharest and boarded a train to Moscow. There, I was welcomed into the home of Dr. Hussain Barzani—a warm, modest apartment that quickly became a gathering place for Kurdish students from across the Soviet Union. His life story, marked by hardship and perseverance, reflected much of the Kurdish struggle itself.

When the students came together in his flat, the atmosphere was lively and full of camaraderie. But beneath the laughter, it became clear they were facing serious challenges. The most urgent issue concerned four Kurdish students who were about to be expelled for expressing criticism of communism. They had been given a week to pack up and leave the country, a decision that meant sudden separation from their families and a deeply uncertain future.

Their only possible refuge was West Berlin, one of the few places they could enter without a visa. But financially, the situation was bleak. Their rubles were worthless there, and they tried to exchange them at any rate they could get. Wanting to help, I bought some of their rubles at the

regular market rate and used them to purchase gifts to take back to friends in Sweden.

Money was a constant struggle for the Kurdish students. Their small union scholarships barely covered basic living costs. At one point, a few of them humbly asked whether I might leave behind my suits—a modest request, given the poor quality of clothing they could find locally. Moscow itself offered a strange contrast: shops filled with high-quality Western goods, but only purchasable in U.S. dollars—a currency out of reach for ordinary Russians.

A meeting with the leadership of the International Student Union in Moscow, which I attended together with Dr. Hussain Barzani, helped resolve several practical problems faced by Kurdish students. A later visit to Friendship University—known internationally as Lumumba University—revealed a more complex reality. Many students, sent by communist parties from across Africa, the Middle East, and Asia, appeared to carry expectations that extended beyond academic achievement alone.

This became particularly evident in the university’s mandatory “graduation exit clause,” which required students to return to their countries of origin upon completing their studies. While officially framed as a means of ensuring that graduates contributed to national development at home, the requirement left little room for individual choice, further study, or professional paths abroad. As a result, the institution often seemed to serve political objectives as much as educational ones.

I left Moscow with a heavy heart. The city was filled with young people striving to build a future under difficult conditions—far from home and with limited support. I could offer help only in small ways, but I hoped that even modest gestures might ease their burden.

Tatarstan: A Journey to the Middle of Nowhere

In March 1993, I received an invitation to visit Tatarstan from a factory that manufactured two models of trucks—Mas and Kamas. The factory was located in the middle of nowhere, surrounded by the vast, barren landscape of Tatarstan.

Accompanied by my Kurdish friend, Raad Al-Zahawi, we departed from London late at night and landed in Moscow early the following morning. From there, we were scheduled to take a domestic flight at 10 a.m. to Naberezhnye Chelny, the industrial city where the factory was based.



Kamas factory in Tatarstan

Melting snow dripped from the ceiling of the airport, forming puddles on the cold floor. Amenities were minimal; a single attendant dispensed a peculiar syrupy drink, and the ticketing office remained stubbornly closed. We waited. Finally, around 2 p.m., a harried attendant emerged to process our tickets, along with those of the nine other passengers bound for the same destination.

We were then asked to carry our luggage and walk nearly 500 meters through the snow to reach our plane, a small, aging aircraft that looked as though it belonged in a museum. We had not anticipated such harsh weather, and our light shoes quickly got soaked through, leaving our feet numb from the cold.

Inside the plane, the situation was no better. The cabin was freezing, with no heating whatsoever. When I tried to fasten my seatbelt, it came apart in my hands—it had been crudely fixed with nails. Many other passengers had the same problem. We sat shivering in our overcoats, waiting for takeoff.

After a 20-minute delay, the hostess announced that the pilot had decided to wait longer because another plane, preparing to land, was circling above with its landing gear frozen solid. It was running low on fuel and preparing for an emergency crash landing. I immediately asked her to tell the pilot that it would be far safer for us to take off now rather than risk being on the

ground during a potential crash. Fortunately, my suggestion was accepted—and within minutes, we were in the air.

The flight was rough from start to finish. Strong winds shook the small plane violently, and the turbulence made the two-hour journey feel endless. When we finally landed in Naberezhnye Chelny, we were exhausted but deeply relieved.

We were met by photographers eager to document our arrival for their company magazine. We were then driven to the company's hotel in the city center, newly built and completely empty. The fresh paint gave off a strong smell that gave us headaches. There were no restaurants in the area, and for dinner we were served a simple meal of salami and sausages.

The next morning, we were taken on a tour of the Kamas factory, an enormous industrial complex stretching ten kilometers in every direction. Every single part of the trucks was produced on-site, from start to finish. The directors proudly expressed their desire to expand into Middle Eastern markets, now that Tatarstan was free to trade independently following the collapse of the Soviet Union.

That evening, the foreign minister of Tatarstan arrived from Kazan, the capital, to discuss opportunities for attracting foreign investment to the republic.

By the following day, however, exhaustion had set in. After such a dramatic and challenging experience, we decided to cut our visit short and return home two days earlier than planned.

It was, without doubt, one of the most unforgettable journeys of my life, a stark and vivid glimpse into a country in transition, full of ambition, hardship, and raw, untamed spirit.

Croatia: Embracing a Cultural Connection

In 1991, I arrived in Zagreb, at that time the heart of a newly independent Croatia, looking for business opportunities. Through my friend Nikola Majstrovic, a photographer at Swedish Television, I was introduced to several key figures. Nikola, originally from Bosnia but born in Croatia, had joined me on a memorable trip to Kurdistan in 1968. That journey resulted in a well-received documentary on the Kurdish revolution, financed and broadcast by Swedish TV2.

At the elegant Hotel Esplanade in Zagreb, I hosted a lunch for the governor of the Croatian Central Bank and the vice president of Croatia. The vice president, a short, bald man with a lively curiosity, told me he had always wanted to meet a Kurd. Over lunch, he shared something unexpected: according to historical research, Croats trace their origins to Kurdistan, having migrated from Mesopotamia in ancient times. Zagreb University, he said, was actively studying this heritage in Iranian Kurdistan.

Before we parted, he gifted me two English-language books on the origins of the Croatian people. He also voiced a practical concern: Croatia lacked enough farmers to cultivate its land. With this in mind, he asked whether the Kurdish authorities could send 20,000 Kurdish farmers and their families to help rebuild Croatia's agricultural sector. I relayed the proposal to the Kurdish government, but no response ever came.

Decades later, while on holiday in Croatia in the summer of 2022, I asked a taxi driver what he knew about the origins of Croats. He admitted he was uncertain but shared a recent governmental narrative taught in schools: Croats trace their roots to Kurdistan. He added, with a puzzled expression, that he was not entirely sure where Kurdistan was located.

Ba'athists Exposing Their True Nature: Hardan al-Tikriti

In the late 1960s, Saddam Hussein succeeded in removing Hardan al-Tikriti—the powerful military strongman of the Ba'ath Party—by appointing him ambassador to Sweden, effectively exiling him from the center of power.

Salim Nassim, a member of a wealthy Iraqi Jewish family who had lived in Sweden for many years, managed to maintain good relations with the Iraqi embassy in Stockholm. From time to time, he would bring us news and observations about what was happening inside the embassy.

One day, Salim told us about an encounter that left a deep impression on him. On a pleasant summer afternoon, he was walking with Hardan in Djurgården, a picturesque public park where crowds of young students were celebrating their high school graduation. The atmosphere was joyful—music, laughter, and carefree faces filled the air.

Hardan stood silently, watching the young people for a long moment. Then he turned to Salim and said, "I must confess something. I did not

know that life could be so beautiful. If I had known this earlier, I would have conducted politics and exercised power in a very different way. But I promise you this: if I ever return to power, I will do everything I can to preserve peace and tranquility, and to give the people of Iraq a chance to enjoy life and live as human beings—something we ourselves were never given the opportunity to experience.”

His words revealed a sudden awareness of what had been lost to a lifetime of struggle for power: the simple beauty of peace, youth, and human joy.

Hardan was later assassinated in Kuwait by two gunmen sent by Saddam. He had defied Saddam’s direct orders not to return to Iraq and was on his way back to Baghdad to attend his mother’s funeral when the attack occurred.

Tariq Aziz

As I mention elsewhere in my memoir, I attended a meeting at the Iraqi Embassy in 1971 to prepare our speeches for the Vietnam conference in Stockholm. Present at the meeting were Tariq Aziz, representing the ruling Ba’ath Party; Aziz Sharif of the International Peace Movement; Amer Abdullah, a member of the Politburo of the Iraqi Communist Party; and myself, representing the Kurdistan Democratic Party.

I did not approve the draft proposal prepared by Amer Abdullah because it made no reference to the Kurds at all, limiting itself instead to “the Iraqi Arab people and other nationalities.” I objected firmly to this exclusion and suggested to read my own speech on behalf of the Kurdish people in Iraq. Tariq Aziz was the only one who supported me.

As we were leaving the embassy building, Tariq Aziz approached me and said, “You have now witnessed the hypocrisy of the communists. They adopted this position believing it would please Moscow. After all, they do not take their orders from the Iraqi people, but from the Soviet Union.”

He later suggested that either he should invite me to dinner that evening or I should invite him. I replied that it was my duty to invite him, since he was a guest, but as a student I could not afford to take him to a restaurant. I therefore proposed that we have dinner in my flat instead. He gladly agreed.

During dinner, he invited me to visit Iraq as his guest, assuring me that the country was now peaceful after the March 11 Agreement. I thanked him for the invitation but declined. When he pressed me for a reason, I hesitated only briefly before answering frankly: I did not trust the regime in Baghdad. Tariq was visibly startled by my candor.

I then asked him to be equally honest with me: could he be absolutely certain that he himself would never one day fall victim to the same regime? After a moment's pause, he admitted that he could not. In the end, he respected my refusal to pretend otherwise.

Samir Abdul Aziz Al Najm: Everything Has a Price

In October 1996, in the vibrant streets of London, an unexpected encounter unfolded while walking with Dr. Ihsan Barbuda, an architect who had fled Saddam Hussein's oppressive regime. We bumped into Samir Al Najm, a former Iraqi minister en route from Baghdad to Cairo. Al Najm was an old acquaintance of Barbuti.

Barbuti, seizing the moment, inquired about the state of affairs back in Iraq. Al Najm, initially guarded, eventually opened up, painting a grim picture of his homeland's deteriorating political landscape. He recounted a disturbing incident: Uday Hussein, Saddam's son, had publicly humiliated him by slapping him during a televised seminar.

This blunt act served as a chilling testament to the chaotic and brutal nature of the Iraqi regime.

Intrigued, Barbuti pressed further, reminding Al Najm of his earlier career as a primary school teacher, a humble beginning in stark contrast to his current predicament. Al Najm, with a sigh of resignation, acknowledged the truth of Barbuti's observation. He conceded that accepting the mantle of a minister inevitably meant subjecting oneself to such indignities. It was a sobering reflection; a quiet admission of the heavy price paid for political ambition in a land gripped by tyranny.



Samir Abdul Aziz Al Najm, born 1937

Aftermath of the Collapse of the Kurdish Armed Struggle

Idris Barzani and Reza Rahimi: A Meeting with Iranian Parliamentarians

Mohammad Reza Rahimi, a Kurd with a distinguished political background, left a lasting mark on Iranian politics. Born on January 11, 1949, he served as a member of the defense committee in the Iranian parliament, later as governor of Kurdistan Province in Iran, and ultimately as vice president of Iran from 2009 to 2013.



Idris Barzani (1944-1987)



Muhammed Reza Rahimi, born 1948

I first met Mr. Rahimi in London in the early 1980s. He was seeking medical assistance for his wife, and our paths crossed at a Kurdish social gathering. Mr. Rahimi expressed frustration over the Iranian embassy's difficulty in finding a reputable cancer specialist to treat his wife.

Fortunately, I was able to help. In appreciation, the Rahimi family extended a warm invitation for me to visit them in Tehran.

On March 6, 1975, following the collapse of the Kurdish revolution in Iraq as a result of the Algiers Agreement, a wave of Kurdish refugees fled across the border into neighboring Iran.

During a visit to Iran, shortly thereafter, I traveled to Karaj, a small town northwest of Tehran, where I met Idris Barzani and other Kurdish

refugees residing in a makeshift camp. My arrival was unexpected, and Idris greeted me warmly. It brought him a brief moment of joy amid a dire situation. Outside his dwelling, a growing crowd of refugees had gathered. Many had just arrived from various parts of Iran, hoping for assistance and support. Yet they found themselves in desperate circumstances, with minimal financial aid and inadequate provisions to meet their basic needs. Idris spoke candidly about the challenges they faced. The camp lacked the resources to provide meaningful relief. Even more distressing was his account of the Pasdaran, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, who were overseeing the area. Known for their often-brutal tactics, their treatment of the refugees was often harsh and demeaning. Many felt humiliated by the conduct of these security forces, highlighting the stark contrast between the vulnerability of a displaced population and the unchecked authority of those charged with maintaining order.

Even when limited aid was available, it was often insufficient to cover the refugees' travel expenses to return to their homes in different parts of Iran.

During my conversation with Idris Barzani, I explained the purpose of my visit to Iran: I had been invited to meet several Kurdish members of the Iranian parliament, introduced by Mohammed Reza Rahimi.

Idris immediately recognized Rahimi's influential role in Iranian politics. I proposed raising the plight of the Kurdish refugees with these parliamentarians, a suggestion Idris enthusiastically endorsed. It offered a potential avenue to address the refugees' dire circumstances by appealing to those with political influence.

The following day in Tehran, Mohammed Reza Rahimi graciously hosted me at the parliament building, introducing me to twelve Kurdish parliamentarians, some of whom wore traditional Kurdish attire. During this visit, I also met Hassan Rouhani, then deputy speaker of the parliament under Hashemi Rafsanjani, and, later, president of Iran.

In discussions with the Kurdish parliamentarians, I relayed Idris Barzani's account from the previous day. I described the desperate situation of the Iraqi Kurdistan refugees in Karaj, emphasizing the suffering under the control of the Pasdaran and Idris's struggle to provide sufficient aid to the overwhelming numbers seeking assistance. I highlighted the financial constraints that prevented many from returning to their homes across Iran. I urged the

parliamentarians to advocate for their fellow Kurds, who should be considered as guests by the Iranian Kurds, deserving of solidarity and support.

One of the parliamentarians, Mr. Ata'i, responded with deep concern and affirmed the need for action. I suggested organizing a fact-finding visit to Idris Barzani in Karaj, a proposal that was swiftly approved. The following day, Rahimi, Ata'i, two other Kurdish parliamentarians, and I traveled to Karaj to meet Idris. It was during this visit that I first met Nechirvan Barzani, who greeted us as he returned from university, books in hand. Decades later, I met him again in Erbil in 2000, when he was serving as prime minister; he remembered that visit and spoke of it with warmth and curiosity.

Visiting a Famous Neighbor

While the parliamentarians met with Idris to discuss the refugees' situation, I took the opportunity to visit Mam Hejar Mukriyani, the renowned Kurdish poet and Idris's neighbor.

Mam Hejar expressed deep concern over the Iranian authorities' treatment of the refugees and lamented the lack of support for republishing his poetry collection, "Bo Kurdistan" (Towards Kurdistan).

I offered to fund the printing upon my return to Europe, an offer he gratefully accepted. He suggested including a note in the book stating that he had no financial interest in its sales, while I reassured him that he would be fairly compensated in the future.

When I rejoined Idris and the Iranian delegation, I noticed a visible sense of relief and satisfaction on Idris's face. One of the key outcomes of the meeting was the decision to transfer responsibility for the Kurdish refugees from the Pasdaran to the Ministry of Interior and the parliament.

In the weeks that followed, the decision resulted in a noticeable improvement in the refugees' circumstances, changes that Idris gratefully acknowledged on multiple occasions. This shift from the harsh oversight of the Pasdaran to a more civilian approach brought about a positive change in the experience of the refugees.

Heir to a Legacy: Nechirvan Barzani

Nechirvan Barzani, the son of Idris Barzani, born 1966, is a remarkably intelligent and wise person. Despite his relatively young age, his views and judgments on events are more balanced than those of others in the leadership.

I regarded Nechirvan Barzani's leadership as the natural continuation of Mullah Mustafa Barzani's legacy. He inherited the diplomatic finesse of his late father, Idris Barzani—Mullah Mustafa's son—who possessed an exceptional ability to leave visitors feeling satisfied, even when they did not get everything they wanted. Nechirvan's intelligence and charm clearly marked him as a rising star in Kurdistan's political arena.

Early Encounters and a Lasting Impression

I first met Nechirvan in Karaj, Iran, in 1987. He was a refugee. As mentioned earlier, I was visiting his father, Idris Barzani, alongside three Iranian Kurdish parliamentarians, to discuss the harsh treatment Iraqi Kurdish refugees were receiving from the Pasdaran (the military police). Fortunately, the meeting had a positive outcome, leading to improvements in the refugees' economic and social conditions.

Our second encounter was in September 2000, in Pirmam, north of Erbil, where he was serving as the prime minister of the Kurdistan Region.

Nechirvan's intervention in resolving a private family matter, the mistreatment of my relative Colonel Mu'ayyed Noori by the Interior Minister, Karim Sinjari, which I will discuss later in more detail, left a lasting impression on me.

Subsequently, he entrusted me with several important responsibilities, including designing and constructing a medical laboratory in Erbil, drafting a comprehensive master plan for the Kurdistan region, and developing plans for the Erbil Citadel and parts of the Erbil airport.

In the summer of 2002, I was invited to join Nechirvan Barzani in Abu Dhabi regarding an urgent matter. He was there as head of a delegation hosted by Sheikh Zayed bin Al Nahyan of the United Arab Emirates.

On the first day, I joined the delegation in a meeting with Sheikh Ahmed Al Swedi, whom Sheikh Zayed had appointed to explore potential investment opportunities in Kurdistan's tourism sector. Due to Nechirvan's limited proficiency in Arabic, Azad Berwary began the meeting by

describing the region's breathtaking natural beauty—majestic mountains and cascading waterfalls such as Geli Ali Beg and Bekhal.

However, Sheikh Al Swedi was not impressed with this approach. He interjected, drawing a stark contrast between Kurdistan's natural splendor and the transformative power of world-class infrastructure and services. Citing the meteoric rise of Dubai, from modest fishing villages in the desert, to a global tourist destination attracting over 15 million visitors annually, he argued his point. In comparison, Damascus, despite its status as a renowned and attractive Arab capital, struggled to attract even one million tourists per year.

The Sheikh's message was clear: natural beauty alone could not drive tourism without exceptional services and amenities. Kurdistan's potential would remain untapped. This realization profoundly influenced Nechirvan's perspective and became a key factor in his decision to retain me to develop a comprehensive master plan for Kurdistan, an essential step before embarking on any large-scale development of the region.

A Crucial Role and a New Beginning

Late the following evening, Nechirvan summoned me to a private meeting at the hotel. In a candid conversation, he confided his difficulty in finding a qualified Kurd to spearhead project oversight and drive business development in Kurdistan. After carefully evaluating over thirty Kurdish entrepreneurs, he shared his decision to entrust me with this critical role.

Nechirvan urged me with firm conviction to abandon my ongoing pursuits in China and elsewhere and to dedicate myself to this endeavor fully.

He courteously acknowledged my long-standing commitment to the Kurdish people and my homeland, Kurdistan. Emphasizing the urgent need for reconstruction, he highlighted the essential role someone with my experience could play. Having personally witnessed the destruction caused by war, he underscored the dire need for skilled builders, developers, and effective administrators. The delegation's productive discussions with Sheikh Al Swedi further reinforced the pressing nature of the task at hand.

Although I was deeply motivated by the opportunity to serve, I expressed concerns about the challenges that might arise, particularly the risk of envy and unfounded accusations that could stem from my new position.

Nechirvan's steadfast support promptly dispelled my fears. Encouraged by his confidence in me, I decided to commit myself to Kurdistan fully, relinquishing my existing businesses in China, Africa, and elsewhere. Fully aware of the Kurdish government's financial constraints at the time, I chose not to seek compensation for the sacrifices involved in dismantling my businesses.

Recognizing the limitations of working merely as a government advisor, I resolved to begin my work by inviting a reputable international company to join me in this endeavor.

Laying the Foundation: Masterplan for Kurdistan

Fortunately, I was able to persuade Costain International, a renowned British conglomerate, to enter into a partnership in Kurdistan, forming KP Costain Ltd. At the time, even smaller Turkish companies were reluctant to operate in the region due to serious security concerns.

However, Costain's previous experience working with me in China and Kenya gave them the confidence to take the risk and embark on this valuable collaboration.

Our first major initiative was the development of a comprehensive Master Plan for Kurdistan. This undertaking followed months of extensive fieldwork and close consultations with local communities. The plan addressed multiple facets of life, including health, education, infrastructure, and cultural preservation. It was designed to serve as a strategic roadmap for Kurdistan's long-term development. Regrettably, the plan was never implemented.

In parallel, we undertook the construction of a central medical laboratory building located along 60 Meter Street in Erbil. Despite challenges and setbacks, including the failure of previous contractors to deliver results, we completed the building based on British standards.

As I had anticipated, resentment and detractors began to emerge, questioning the legitimacy of KP Costain Ltd. and hindering our progress. Despite my consistent efforts to counter these baseless accusations and clarify our intentions, the situation escalated, jeopardizing both our agreement and the trust we had built.



Mediya Diagnostic Center, designed by Jamal Alemdar, construction by KP-Costain, a joint venture between Jamal Alemdar and Costain International UK

Following the successful completion of the Central Medical Laboratory building and obtaining full confirmation of its structural integrity, we faced yet another setback. The final payment, though contractually due, was inexplicably withheld. To make matters worse, a corrupt official even attempted to extort a bribe in exchange for expediting it.

When Nechirvan failed to intervene or rectify the situation, Costain, deeply frustrated by the ordeal, threatened legal action against the Kurdistan government. Concerned about the potential damage to Kurdistan's international standing, I stepped in to prevent the legal dispute from escalating. Despite my efforts, Costain ultimately decided to terminate its operations in Kurdistan, and I, too, chose to leave, disappointed by the turn of events. The payment owed was never made.

Nechirvan's Offer and My Refusal

Amid circulating rumors about the minister of municipality's corrupt practices, specifically allegations of selling public parks and buildings for personal gain, Nechirvan summoned me to his office.

Concerned by the situation, he asked me to take over the Ministry of Municipality and establish a new ministry of tourism. He made a generous offer, including frequent trips to Sweden, full autonomy in selecting my deputy and staff, and access to a substantial budget.



At an international exhibition in Erbil, where KP-Costain had a stand: General Manager Sir Richard Hucker (KP-Costain); Minister of Culture Sami Shoresh (Kurdistan); and Chairman Jamal Alemdar (KP-Costain).

Despite the appealing terms, I declined. I explained that I wished to maintain my independence and avoid any controversial actions of the previous minister.

Nechirvan was surprised and remained persistent. Pressing me for reasons behind my refusal of such lucrative posts, I tried to convince him that I could be more useful if I stayed outside the cabinet, where I would have greater freedom to contribute without being entangled in politics. Ultimately, though reluctant, he accepted my decision. He offered me an advisory role instead and expressed interest in working together in the future.



Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani in a meeting with Sir Richard Hucker, General Manager of KP-Costain, and Jamal Alemdar, President of KP-Costain.

A Reflection on Respect and True Development

In September 2001, upon my initial return to Kurdistan following the establishment of the unified Kurdistan Regional Government cabinet, I was met at Fishkhabor, near the Syrian border, by an unexpected entourage. Members of my family, alongside eight Peshmerga in two military vehicles were dispatched by the Kurdish leadership, to greet me. These men, I was informed, were to be my constant escorts, accompanying me everywhere during my stay. They joined me on all visits to relatives and friends, where, in accordance with tradition, they were served as honored guests.

While their presence was intended as a mark of respect and security, it inadvertently restricted my movements. I found myself refraining from visiting many people, feeling a distinct lack of personal freedom. Eventually, I appealed to Nechirvan Barzani, then the prime minister, to withdraw the bodyguards. I explained that I felt perfectly safe in Kurdistan and saw no need for such an extensive security detail. His response surprised me. He clarified that the bodyguards were not solely for security, but were considered essential for maintaining public respect.

I countered that I was not looking for artificial reverence, but rather a spontaneous respect that emanated genuinely from the heart.

This incident illuminated a broader issue: the prevalent tendency in many developing societies to project an image of grandeur that belies a more profound lack of fundamental progress. One can observe this in urban planning, where ostentatious hotels and lavish shopping centers are erected while essential state-run schools and hospitals remain woefully inadequate. True development, in my view, must begin with investing in the quality of its people by offering universal access to free education and healthcare. This is a stark deficiency in Kurdistan today.

Despite Kurdistan's immense wealth, the government grapples with chronic difficulties in paying salaries, leading to economic stagnation and widespread public discontent. Mullah Mustafa, a figure of profound humility and modest living, serves as a poignant example for current leaders. His unassuming nature garnered the respect and sympathy of the world—a stark contrast to the displays I witness today.

It is particularly disheartening to observe younger members of ruling families indulging in overly pompous displays, seemingly reveling in public adulation and feigning momentous victories. Such acts, in my experience, are often a facade for emptiness. As the old adage wisely states, "Empty vessels make the most noise."

True power and lasting respect are not forged in ostentatious displays or forced reverence. They are cultivated through genuine service, authentic leadership, and a steadfast commitment to the wellbeing and intellectual enrichment of one's people. A society truly flourishes not by showcasing what it superficially possesses, but by profoundly investing in what truly matters: the innate potential and collective prosperity of its citizenry.

A Diplomatic Encounter

Years later, Nechirvan played a crucial role in defusing a tense situation between Ali Qazi and me. Ali was the son of Qazi Mohammed, founder of the short-lived Mahabad Republic in Iranian Kurdistan, who had been executed by the Shah.

The roots of our conflict can be traced back to August 1969 in West Berlin, where I was presiding over the 13th congress of the Kurdish Student Society in Europe (KSSE). I was forced to expel Ali Qazi from

the congress hall due to his widely known cooperation with Iranian intelligence.

Adopted by the Shah at the age of four, following the execution of his father in 1946—a pivotal moment that led to the collapse of the Mahabad Republic, Ali was viewed with deep suspicion and resentment by many Iranian Kurdish students attending the congress.

Decades later, in 2002, during a seminar in Erbil, commemorating Qazi Mohammed, Nechirvan introduced us. Ali took the opportunity to express his long-held grievances regarding my action in Berlin. Perceptive and composed, Nechirvan, sensing the underlying tension, employed his characteristic wit and diplomacy to dissolve the discomfort. With a knowing smile, he said, “Kak Ali, you do not know Jamal. When it comes to the crunch, he could even expel me.” We all laughed at that moment. What could have turned into a confrontation became a moment of camaraderie. Thanks to Nechirvan’s intervention, the situation was diffused with grace, and I was saved once again.

A Tale of Injustice and Redemption

In the autumn of 2000, upon my arrival in Kurdistan, I was met by a troubling cloud hanging over my family. My relative Colonel Muayyed Noori, a respected and high-ranking officer in the Erbil Police Force, had been incarcerated on the arbitrary orders of Interior Minister Karim Sinjari, a former acquaintance from our shared exile days in Sweden.

The cause of this injustice was the escape of a prisoner, an incident entirely unrelated to Colonel Muayyed’s responsibilities. Nonetheless, in a flagrant abuse of authority, Minister Sinjari ordered the arrest of six officers, Colonel Muayyed among them.

I visited him in prison. His distress was palpable. He anticipated the public outcry and the stain this unwarranted imprisonment would leave on his reputation. Though steadfast in his innocence, Colonel Muayyed even offered to accept a harsher punishment, should any wrongdoing be proven. But by then, the blow to his honor and standing in the community was already irreparable.

Reluctant as I was to seek special treatment, the gravity of the situation compelled me to approach the minister directly. I pleaded for Colonel Muayyed’s release, hoping for a measure of reason. Instead, I was met

with resolute defiance. The minister remained adamant, insisting that the accused remain in custody until a formal verdict was reached, utterly disregarding the human toll of his decision.

By chance, I soon had the opportunity to discuss the matter with the Prime Minister, Nechirvan Barzani. He immediately grasped the urgency of the situation and the deep-rooted injustice at play. Without hesitation, he pledged his support. His intervention was swift and authoritative. He ordered the immediate release of Colonel Muayyed, leaving the minister no choice but to comply. At that moment, relief washed over us as Muayyed was returning home.

Yet the sense of triumph was short-lived. When Colonel Muayyed failed to appear, fear gripped us once more. I had a meeting with Nechirvan the next day. Upon learning that Muayyed had not been released despite his orders to the minister, Nechirvan intervened again. Confronting the minister, he demanded an explanation for the blatant defiance. In what could only be described as a masterclass of leadership and resolve, Nechirvan asserted his authority. His words carried an unspoken, but unmistakable warning: there would be consequences. Faced with this unyielding stance, the minister finally relented. Within moments, Muayyed was released.

This ordeal was a stark reminder of the fragility of justice and the power of human compassion. It stood as a testament to the strength of family bonds and to the courage of those who stand up against injustice, even in the face of overwhelming odds.

Nechirvan and The Malaysian Project: A Tale of Ambition and Disappointment

In August 2007, a promising venture was born from the shared vision of three partners: Kamal Keytuly, professor of medical chemistry at the University of Glasgow and a close friend; Mr. Necdet Ugurel of Protek Proje, a respected Turkish consultancy firm active in Kurdistan; and myself. At the time I was still engaged with KP-Costain, a joint venture with Costain International, dedicated to attracting Malaysian investment to the burgeoning landscape of Kurdistan.



With the Malaysian delegation in Kurdistan, from left, Necdet Ugurel, Jamal Alemdar, Malaysian Minister of Energy Tan Sri Leo, Kurdistan government representative, Mr. Sonny Cheah, Dr. Kamal Keytuly

Dr. Keytuly, a distinguished member of the Kurdish Students Society in Europe (KSSE) 1979-1987, and the founder of Friends of Kurdistan Society Scotland in 1983, had cultivated an extensive network of influential contacts within both the business and governmental spheres of Malaysia. He developed this network during his tenure at the University of Malaya in Kuala Lumpur and while serving as the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) representative for East Asia (2003-2007).

Our subsequent journey to Kuala Lumpur was met with a reception of the highest order, graciously hosted by Sonny Cheah, a well-established Malaysian businessman and former adviser to the Prime Minister, Dr. Mahathir. He opened doors to the upper echelons of the Malaysian government, introducing us to several cabinet ministers. Among them was the distinguished Minister of Energy, Tan Sri Leo Moggie, who, impressed by our proposition, agreed to join our delegation to Erbil.

Between September 7-14, 2007, our well-regarded delegation, which also included two representatives from prominent Japanese banks poised to finance our projects, visited Kurdistan. We had meticulously prepared

a compelling portfolio of projects, outlining their lucrative potential and promising returns.

The presentation was so impactful that upon reviewing it, Nechirvan Barzani, then prime minister of the Kurdistan Region, remarked, “My five cabinet ministers together have failed to present such lucrative and promising projects.”

Our initial plans were well underway. We were set to acquire a parcel of land on the outskirts of Erbil for the construction of a Malaysian village and were preparing to secure a concession for oil exploration. The future of the Malaysian project appeared bright and full of promise.

However, just as our aspirations were solidifying, an unforeseen obstacle emerged. On the eve of the delegation’s departure from Erbil, we received a startling message from the Investment Office.

The Kurdistan government would not permit our project to proceed unless we conceded a 51% share of the entire venture to them, despite our intention to purchase the land outright.

This abrupt and unexpected demand dismayed our Malaysian partners and the Japanese bankers. The confidence that had been so carefully built was shattered in an instant. The delegation departed Kurdistan the next day, their hopes for a fruitful partnership extinguished, with a resolve never to return. And so, a venture that held the promise of transformative investment and collaboration was regrettably cut short, leaving only the memory of what could have been.

The Complexities of International Business

Tiny Rowland: The Ugly Face of Capitalism

Tiny Rowland (1917-1998), the formidable head of Lonrho, built a sprawling business empire across Africa, with major agricultural interests and extensive gold mining operations. His influence was so pervasive that he earned him the moniker, the “Uncrowned King of Africa.”



Tiny Rowland (1917-1998)



Mrs. Thatcher called Tiny Rowland “the ugly face of capitalism.”

My connection with Mr. Rowland emerged through a Zimbabwean business associate, which led to a collaborative effort focused on securing Iranian oil for a newly acquired German refinery in Hamburg.

Navigating the complex world of oil trading, I played a key role, leveraging my network to connect Mr. Rowland with key players in the Iranian oil sector. In particular, I facilitated contact with Mr. Mohammad Reza Rahimi, whom I believed would be receptive to supporting and helping finalize the project.

In early 1989, Mr. Rowland—never one to shy away from theatrics—made one of his signature grand gestures. He sent his Rolls-Royce and chauffeur to collect me from my Westminster office and deliver me to Lonrho's headquarters in London's financial district, the City. This display of luxury, a tactic Mr. Rowland often used to sway his African business partners, was clearly designed to impress.

Following Mr. Rahimi's endorsement of the oil-for-food barter deal, a critical meeting was held at Mr. Rowland's office to plan his upcoming trip to Tehran to sign the contract. The plan involved his private jet and a high-level delegation. Sensing the strategic importance of the deal and conscious of protecting my own role and interests, I insisted on pre-contract negotiations before proceeding any further.

These negotiations with Mr. Rowland and his legal team culminated in a 50/50 profit-sharing agreement. The pre-contract draft was then submitted for legal review to a Swiss law firm, retained by Lonrho.

Mr. Rowland, eager to move forward, immediately began planning his trip to Tehran to formalize the deal. To facilitate the visit, I reached out to Mr. Rahimi in Tehran and requested visas for Mr. Rowland and his flight crew. Given the sensitive nature of the deal, Mr. Rahimi opted for a discreet path, sending two diplomats to London to handle the visa application process privately, rather than utilizing the Iranian embassy. This careful move underscored the differing temperaments at play. Mr. Rowland's urgency versus Mr. Rahimi's cautious, security-conscious approach.

I was due to travel to Harare, Zimbabwe, on another business matter, and the two Iranian diplomats arrived in London just two days before my departure. I introduced them to Mr. Rowland, explicitly instructing them not to contact or meet with him until my return, emphasizing that any meeting should include me. They gave me their firm assurances.

Upon my return, however, I learned from Mr. Rowland that the diplomats had indeed contacted him and met at his home for Sunday lunch. Also present were Mr. Robinson, editor of *The Observer* (a British newspaper owned by Mr. Rowland), and Mr. Ashraf Marwan, an Egyptian associate of Mr. Rowland. This unauthorized direct engagement between the diplomats and Mr. Rowland, despite my instructions, was a serious breach of protocol and a clear undermining of my role in the negotiation process.

I confronted Mr. Deryai, one of the two Iranian diplomats, regarding their breach of our agreement not to meet with Mr. Rowland in my absence. He initially denied that any such meeting had taken place. However, when I disclosed that I was fully aware of the details of the gathering, including the names of those present, after a long silence, he reluctantly admitted the truth.

I pointedly questioned the incongruity of his lies with his professed religious convictions; his reply was as startling as it was absurd: he claimed that he had lied to experience the act of lying, as he had never done so before.

I ended the conversation there, informing him that his mission related to the oil-for-food deal was over, and I immediately severed all contact with him.

The following morning, the two diplomats appeared uninvited at my apartment, pleading for forgiveness. Despite my attempts to dismiss them, they persisted, apologizing profusely, attempting to kiss my hand, and swearing by God and Imam Khomeini that they would never betray the deal or me again.

That afternoon, I was scheduled to meet with Mr. Rowland to discuss a separate business matter. Upon arriving at his office, I was surprised to find the two Iranian diplomats already there, waiting for Mr. Rowland. When they saw me, they quickly retreated to the secretary's office, in an apparent attempt to avoid confrontation. They later insisted on meeting with Mr. Rowland privately, without my involvement.

Following this incident, Mr. Rowland became unresponsive to my calls. His assistant, Mr. Dunlop, contacted me unexpectedly, offering a financial settlement in exchange for withdrawing from the oil-for-food deal, an offer that was firmly refused. The scheduled contract signing was abruptly abandoned without explanation.

Soon after, the press reported that Mr. Rowland, accompanied by two Iranian diplomats, had departed for Tehran. The news came as a shock. I immediately informed Mr. Rahimi about the diplomats' unauthorized action and their apparent attempt to circumvent established agreements. Mr. Rahimi assured me that such behavior would not be tolerated. The plane was instructed not to allow any passengers to disembark and to leave the country within 24 hours. Mr. Rowland subsequently contacted me, expressing a desire to resume negotiations. He admitted that the diplomats, whom he

presumed were well-connected and influential, had proven to be deceitful and powerless.

I declined Mr. Rowland's request for a meeting, stating that the diplomats were not my associates but his, and that their behavior reflected his own ethical standards.

Although this decision meant walking away from a potentially profitable venture, it served as a costly but invaluable lesson about the importance of trustworthy partners. The incident underscored the stark contrast between my commitment to ethical dealings and the deceptive practices of Mr. Rowland and those in his circles.

In London, a Banker is Always a Banker

When I started my business, I set up an office in Roebuck House, Westminster, close to Buckingham Palace, and subsequently opened a bank account with the Royal Bank of Scotland. As my income grew, my bank manager, Mr. Gorie, frequently suggested I take advantage of the bank's services, loans, investments, and the like. I would often joke that bankers are quick to offer umbrellas when the sun is out, but just as quick to snatch them back when it starts to rain. Mr. Gorie, with a wry smile, would reluctantly admit there was some truth to that.

He was retiring and wanted to thank me for our years of business. I felt I could not let him leave without showing my appreciation, so I insisted on taking him out to lunch. He seemed genuinely touched, saying no one else had offered to do anything.

Over lunch, I asked about his retirement plans. He told me he and his wife had bought a lovely house in the French countryside and were planning to move there permanently. Being friendly, I asked him the name of the village, thinking I might visit one day. But he hesitated, explaining that if he told me, I might like it so much I would buy a place there, which could lead to a flood of visitors, spoiling its peaceful charm.

This experience, and others like it with bankers in different countries, made me wonder if their constant focus on numbers and figures somehow limits their social and imaginative horizons. It seems they are often trapped in a world of spreadsheets and calculations, forever tied to the arithmetic of their profession.

The Rise and Fall of Rafaat El Sayed: A Diplomatic Enigma

In the mid-1980s, Rafaat El Sayed, a man of dual nationalities, Egyptian and Swedish, became an international sensation. He transformed a modest company, Fermenta, into a global pharmaceutical powerhouse, earning him accolades like “Man of the Year” in Sweden and recognition from the Financial Times of London. I remember those days vividly, sharing an apartment with him in Näsbydal, outside Stockholm, and later reconnecting at a business conference.

Rafaat charmed the Swedish public with his unassuming nature. He preferred public transport over limousines and politely declined a royal dinner invitation from the King of Sweden, opting instead for a private meeting. His popularity soared as Fermenta’s stock prices skyrocketed, enriching countless Swedes.

At the peak of Rafaat’s success, the automotive giant Volvo proposed acquiring Fermenta as a gateway into the medical manufacturing sector. However, just before the ink dried on the deal, a bombshell dropped. A colleague published an article alleging Rafaat had fabricated his Ph.D. In a society that values integrity as much as Sweden does, this revelation was devastating.



Rafaat El Sayed in a triumphant pose, with the CEO of Volvo, P G Gyllenhammar, in the background

Rafaat vehemently denied the accusation, claiming his doctorate was from an Egyptian university. However, the press launched an extensive investigation, sending delegations to Egypt to verify his credentials. The results were

damning: no Ph.D. could be found. The Volvo deal collapsed, and legal proceedings ensued, uncovering a web of forged documents and fraudulent practices designed to inflate Fermenta's stock value.

I received a desperate call from Rafaat in London, his voice thick with frustration. He felt unjustly accused. When I asked him directly about the Ph.D., he insisted it was genuine. I suggested he produce the diploma to clear his name, but he claimed it was lost in a pile of documents in his basement. When I advised him to request a duplicate, he said the university was unwilling to cooperate.

Ultimately, Rafaat was tried and convicted, initially sentenced to five years in prison, which was later increased to six upon appeal. I visited him in prison, surprised by the relatively luxurious accommodations—a bedroom, living room, kitchen, and all the comforts of home. He expressed deep gratitude for my support, a sentiment he later echoed in his memoirs. I also offered assistance to his family during his incarceration.

After serving three years, Rafaat was released and resumed his business ventures outside Sweden. He embarked on a new project to establish a medical factory in Egypt, aiming to supply raw antibiotics to the Middle Eastern market. He invited me to Cairo, offering me the position of general manager.

His representative, Mr. Khafaja, met us at the airport in a limousine. Rafaat introduced me as his Iraqi friend, prompting Mr. Khafaja to launch an effusive monologue praising Saddam Hussein, lauding him as an Arab hero and champion of the Palestinian cause. Rafaat was visibly uncomfortable, attempting to steer the conversation elsewhere. I, however, countered with a direct condemnation of Saddam Hussein's atrocities.

To my astonishment, Mr. Khafaja instantly reversed his stance, acknowledging Saddam's crimes and the suffering he inflicted on Egyptian workers in Iraq. This incident reminded me of a classic joke: three engineers—an Iraqi, a Lebanese, and an Egyptian—were interviewed for a job, when asked, "What is two plus two?" the Iraqi refuses to answer such a stupid question, while the Lebanese replies, "It depends if you, are buying, or selling" And the Egyptian says, "Whatever you say. I agree."

Like the Egyptian engineer, Mr. Khafaja demonstrated a willingness to suit his audience.

Rafaat El Sayed's story is a poignant reminder of the complexities of diplomacy, the allure of success, and the fragility of reputation. It is the tale of

a man who rose to extraordinary heights, only to fall from grace, leaving behind a legacy marked by both admiration and controversy.

Ashraf Marwan

Ashraf Marwan, an Egyptian diplomat and businessman, was married to Mona Abdel Nasser, the daughter of Egyptian President Jamal Abdel Nasser. He served as Nasser's private secretary from 1969 and was a close aide to President Sadat until 1973.

I met Marwan during a high-level meeting with Tiny Rowland and his German associates concerning the acquisition of Iranian oil for a refinery in Hamburg. Following the meeting, after learning about my Kurdish heritage, he introduced himself as Jamal Abdel Nasser's son-in-law. He recounted a remarkable anecdote from 1959, a little-known episode from the tense geopolitical landscape of the Middle East.



Ashraf Marwan, son-in-law of Egypt's ex-President Nasser (1944-2007)

He described a covert operation intended to destabilize Iraq under General Abdul Karim Qasim by launching a radio station that broadcast anti-Qasim propaganda in Kurdish. The purpose was to stir unrest among Iraq's Kurdish population.

The operation, however, sparked an unexpected diplomatic incident. One day, the Turkish ambassador to Egypt stormed into Marwan's office at the Presidential Palace in Cairo, insisting on an immediate audience with President Nasser. At the time, Nasser was in a meeting with the Finnish ambassador but was urgently called away. The Turkish ambassador, visibly agitated, accused Egypt of committing a hostile act by establishing a clandestine radio station broadcasting in Kurdish, which Turkey interpreted as tantamount to a declaration of war.

In the tense exchange that followed, President Nasser of Egypt expressed bewilderment at the Turkish ambassador's accusation regarding Egyptian broadcasts to the Kurdish populations. He reminded the ambassador of the strong, long-standing ties between Egypt and Turkey. But when the ambassador persisted, Nasser, employing his renowned diplomatic skills, countered with a pointed question, "Why are you so concerned? Do you have Kurds in Turkey?"

The ambassador hesitated—his reluctance to speak revealing more than a direct answer ever could.

Seizing the moment, Nasser took the diplomatic upper hand. He offered a resolution: Egypt would cease the broadcasts, but only if Turkey signed an official recognition of the existence of a Kurdish population within Turkey's borders. This brilliant move diffused the immediate crisis and forced the Turkish ambassador to withdraw. It was a deep dive into realpolitik, demonstrating how diplomacy, when wielded skillfully, can uncover truths that decades of silence seek to bury.

Years later, a striking coincidence unfolded when I happened to hear Jalal Talabani recount the very same event during a television interview with a Kurdish Journalist from Turkey. He stated that President Gamal Abdel Nasser had shared the story with him when they met in Cairo. This particular narrative was especially noteworthy for its incisive depiction of the contrasting dynamics between the two sides.

Carl-Gustav von Rosen: Establishing The Kurdish Air Force

The renowned Swedish aviator and humanitarian Carl-Gustav von Rosen (1909-1977) earned international acclaim for his daring relief missions, most notably during the Biafran War. His compassion and commitment to oppressed people inspired me to approach him in support of the Kurdish cause.

Von Rosen envisioned a clandestine operation using two light aircraft, with two objectives. The first was a symbolic strike on the Kirkuk oil installations, then operated by British Petroleum (BP), intended to pressure BP to compensate the Kurdish revolution. The second, and more practical, goal was to establish an air bridge to transport essential supplies between Badinan and Soran during the snowbound winter months, when the mountain roads became impassable.

News of this potential “Kurdish Air Force” quickly sparked hope among Kurdish leaders and the general population. It represented not only a symbol of resistance but also a potential deterrent against aerial attacks. Some Kurdish leaders, hoping to boost morale, began proclaiming in public speeches, “If the Iraqis attack us from the air, we can now strike back.”



Carl Gustaf Von Rosen. Pioneering Swedish pilot (1909-1977)

As a first step, von Rosen dispatched his assistant, Gunnar Lundin, to accompany me to Kurdistan and assess the feasibility of the plan. Lundin’s evaluation was encouraging. He confirmed the possibility of constructing a basic airstrip near the border, close to the oil installations. He also proposed building a sand-covered hill to serve as both a landing strip and a concealed hangar for the aircraft when not in operation.

Lundin suggested two options for delivering the aircraft: a low-altitude flight along the Syrian Turkish border to evade radar detection, or shipment of the planes as disassembled “spare parts” to be reassembled on site in Kurdistan.

A key figure in the Kurdish leadership, Idris Barzani, was adamant that moving forward with the proposed aerial operations required the explicit approval of the Shah of Iran. Anticipating the Shah’s likely resistance, I proposed a covert operation, one that, if discovered, would be portrayed as the work of independent Kurdish adventurers acting without the formal backing of the Kurdish revolution. However, Idris Barzani rejected the idea, preferring to maintain transparency with the Shah. Ultimately, the Shah’s unequivocal refusal to support the plan brought the ambitious effort to create a Kurdish Air Force to an abrupt halt.

China: Launched into an Unknown World

The Land that Taught Me Wisdom

In June 1993, facing a declining business climate in London, I sought new opportunities. It was then that I met Rubar Sindi, an American Kurd from Zakho who went by the name “Sandi” and cultivated a feigned American persona. Having recently returned from a failed business venture in the United States, he was eager to start anew and asked for my support.

Sandi was a man of boundless energy and extravagant declarations. His penchant for hyperbole matched his towering ambition. He spoke passionately about China, a market he believed was brimming with untapped potential. Despite his lack of experience in the region, his enthusiasm proved infectious. After considerable deliberation, I decided to join him on this eastward expedition.

Upon arriving in Beijing, we established ourselves at the Shangri-La Hotel and immediately hired a secretary to help us navigate the complexities of Chinese commerce. Our initial market research led us to Mr. Qu, the respected president of Sino Chem, the second-largest company in China. This valuable connection was established through our secretary’s classmate, a SinoChem employee who had learned of our business objectives.

My early business dealings in China began with a gracious dinner invitation from Mr. Qu, a gesture that emphasized relationship building over immediate deal-making. This personal connection deepened as he welcomed me into his life, even facilitating our becoming neighbors, which led to regular breakfast meetings and a strong sense of camaraderie.

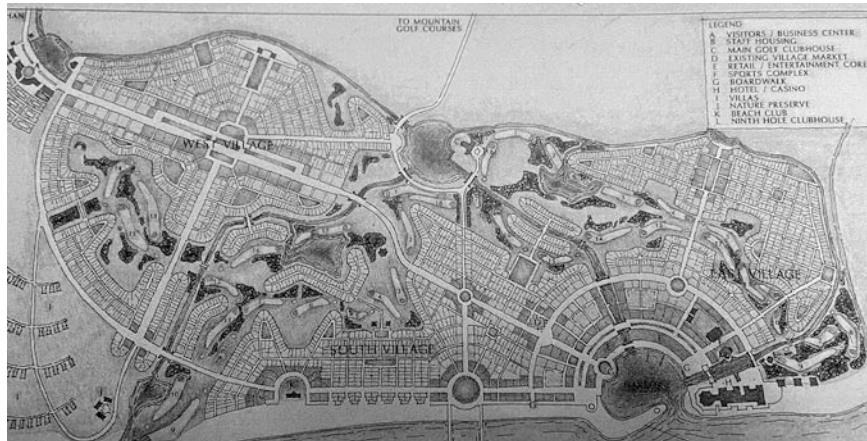
Mr. Qu’s enthusiasm for a joint venture to build a World Trade Center in Shanyang was compelling, despite the inherent challenges of attracting international investment. A proposed investment from Iraqi tycoon Nadhmi Auchi initially seemed promising but ultimately collapsed due to unforeseen circumstances.

Undeterred, we partnered with a visionary Chinese businessman called Mr. Sun to develop an international holiday village in Rushan, a coastal paradise in Shandong province, south of Beijing.

This ambitious project aimed to redefine luxury tourism, primarily targeting Japanese golf enthusiasts. It was a design that blended 5,000 dwellings and four golf courses into the Chinese landscape with international architectural appeal. A key feature of the project was the commitment to environmentally friendly design, securing a pollution-free environment by using electric golf cars throughout the village. The grand opening ceremony, held in the Great Hall of the People (the seat of the Chinese parliament), marked a significant achievement.



Over view of Rhushan International Village Project



Rhushan International Village Project. Shandong Province, Master Plan



Submitting the Rushan Shandong project to China's Great Hall of the People (parliament)

During the lead-up to Hong Kong's handover to China on July 1, 1997, I had a revealing conversation with a high-ranking official, the deputy speaker of the National People's Congress, at a dinner party. When I inquired about Hong Kong's future, he countered with a question, implying that the narrative of Hong Kong joining China was a mischaracterization. He explained that the intention was for mainland China to emulate Hong Kong's success, striving to elevate its own standards in all aspects of life, rather than diminishing Hong Kong's. This perspective highlighted China's ambition for progress and its determination to reach the level of the world's most advanced economies.

Reflecting on the forward-thinking approach of my Chinese counterparts, I was struck by the stark contrast with the seemingly perpetual conflicts that continue to plague the Middle East. Had a similar spirit of cooperation and long-term vision prevailed in our region, perhaps we could have avoided the devastation of war and instead built a future defined by peace and prosperity.

An Invitation from Beijing to Chicago from the Mid-America Committee

In February 1998, Tom Miner, chairman of the Mid-America Committee, invited me to Ohio to speak about my business ventures in China—an experience that contrasted with the difficulties many established American firms had faced there. I traveled via Chicago as a guest of the committee, a network that brought together leading U.S. companies to promote collaboration, host high-level seminars, and support international business networking. During my visit, I spoke at a committee seminar attended by senior figures—senators, mayors, and business leaders—many representing companies that had struggled to gain a footing in the Chinese market.

In my address, I focused on the cultural nuances of Sino-American business relations. I contrasted the American reliance on detailed contracts with the Chinese emphasis on personal character and integrity, arguing that while contracts offer limited protection against bad actors, integrity holds far greater weight in Chinese business culture. I underscored the necessity of understanding Chinese history, customs, and culture before engaging in business there. As an example, I noted the common, yet often problematic, practice of hiring Hong Kong interpreters, which can be perceived negatively by mainland Chinese due to historical and cultural sensitivities.

The seminar generated significant interest, with several companies inquiring about my potential assistance in navigating the complexities of the Chinese market. This unexpected offer presented a compelling new direction for my professional endeavors, shifting my focus to a distinct geopolitical and economic landscape.

China: Where Integrity is Still Alive

Upon my return from Ohio, Mr. Tom Miner informed me of a significant conglomerate owner who was interested in investment opportunities in China, leading to a meeting in Beijing. Shortly before this meeting, a gentleman and his wife approached me for guidance on appropriate attire. The wife, considering wearing her valuable jewelry, sought my counsel. I suggested that simplicity and modesty would better align with Chinese cultural norms. She heeded my advice, placing her jewelry in her handbag, deeming it too valuable for the hotel safe.

En route to the restaurant, the lady suddenly realized she had left her handbag in the taxi. Given the brief nature of the taxi ride and the overwhelming number of taxis and unfamiliar faces, immediate retrieval seemed impossible. I pointed out the difficulty of locating the driver in such circumstances.

Mr. Sun, however, confidently predicted that the driver would return the bag to the hotel.

Despite his assurances, the lady was distraught, as the handbag contained not only her diamonds but also their passports and \$5,000 in cash. We immediately returned to the hotel.

To our surprise, we found the taxi driver in the lobby with the hotel manager, signing a document confirming the return of the handbag. The lady verified the contents; everything was intact. Overjoyed, she offered the driver \$300 as a token of gratitude. Remarkably, the driver refused, stating he was simply fulfilling his duty.

This incident, set against the vast backdrop of China, was a striking reminder of the enduring power of honesty. It stands as a testament to the driver's integrity and a powerful example of virtue prevailing, a story that underscores the profound importance of ethical conduct in human interaction.

Conflict Avoidance in China

During my seven and a half years in China, I was consistently struck by the culture's emphasis on harmony and aversion to conflict. In business negotiations, even when advocating firmly for their interests, Chinese directors would readily concede and return to the negotiating table rather than risk a breakdown in relations. This deep commitment to maintaining equilibrium was evident in all my interactions.

However, my perception of China as a conflict-averse society was challenged during a visit with guests from Saudi Arabia. After two weeks of traveling through Southeast Asia, they were eager to find cuisine more aligned with their preferences. My Chinese secretary recommended a district in Beijing populated primarily by Uyghur Chinese from Xinjiang province, while cautioning us that the residents there were known for a more assertive demeanor. She expressed concern for our safety in that area.

While the restaurants in the district did indeed cater to our guests' needs, the two hours we spent there revealed a starkly different side of China. We witnessed intense altercations that escalated to the point where knives were drawn, requiring the intervention of both police and ambulance services. This was the sole instance of overt conflict I encountered during my entire time in China.

The experience highlighted the complex realities of cultural dynamics. The widely observed emphasis on harmony throughout much of Chinese society stood in stark contrast to the volatile situation we encountered in this specific community. It served as a potent reminder that even within seemingly homogenous cultures, sub-groups may exhibit distinct characteristics and behaviors that challenge prevailing stereotypes. This single incident offered a powerful counterpoint to my otherwise consistent experience of China's peaceful and consensus-driven approach.

Women's Rights the Chinese Way

In China, at the time, traditional perceptions of gender roles remained evident. Women were often raised to believe their primary role was to please men. This notion, often instilled by mothers, emphasized that a man's happiness was crucial for family harmony. Consequently, women were often taught a range of skills, from cooking to massage, singing, dancing, and music, all aimed at catering to their husbands. While Western influences were gradually challenging these traditional views, they still held considerable sway, even among highly successful Chinese women.

This was evident during a meeting with Mrs. Ma, chairman of the Bank of China. She was a devout Muslim who had learned of my Muslim background and warmly shared her own family history, mentioning that her father had served as a religious Imam in a mosque. Her surname, "Ma," a variation of "Muhammad," created a sense of pride for her and underscored her strong cultural connection.

Upon learning that I was staying at the Friendship Hotel in Beijing, Mrs. Ma invited herself to continue our discussion there. She expressed a keen interest in watching CNN, a channel typically restricted in China, but accessible to foreign guests in five-star hotels.

During her visit to my suite, accompanied by three directors, Mrs. Ma—despite her senior executive position—insisted on preparing the tea

herself in the kitchen. She explained, quite firmly, that in her tradition, the kitchen was considered a woman's domain, and she preferred that men did not enter. To me, it reflected both pride in her cultural background and a determination to live by values she held important, even at the height of her professional success.

The moment made me reflect on the complexities of gender roles and how differently "equality" can be understood. In Sweden, for example, the push for equality has often meant minimizing traditional distinctions and encouraging everyone to share the same spaces and responsibilities. Yet Mrs. Ma's perspective reminded me that equality does not necessarily require uniformity—and that respect, choice, and dignity can look different in different cultures and families.

My thoughts also drifted back to the Fourth UN Women's Congress held in Beijing on September 15, 1995, which coincidentally took place near my residence. On our office television, we watched Hillary Clinton, the keynote speaker, address the mistreatment of women in China. Amidst some laughter, my female colleagues remarked that she might first address her own husband's behavior, highlighting the universality of challenges related to gender dynamics.

China's Secret Medication

The first time Nooshin, my second wife fell ill, she suffered from severe pain in her legs and swelling in her face. We consulted a well-known specialist in London, who diagnosed her condition as heart weakness. According to him, her heart was not pumping effectively, causing fluid to accumulate in her body. He prescribed cortisone to strengthen her heart.

After we returned home, my close friend Dr. Feriad Hiwaizi came to visit. We showed him the diagnosis and prescription, but he was unconvinced. He took blood and urine samples from Nooshin and rushed them to his laboratory for analysis.

The results were alarming. Her body was already producing extremely high levels of cortisone. Even a small additional dose could have proved fatal.

He urged us to bring the laboratory results to the specialist the following day. When the doctor reviewed them, he fell silent for several moments. Then he asked for Dr. Hiwaizi's contact information. Later, he

thanked him for preventing what could have been a tragic consequence of a mistaken diagnosis.

Eventually, another physician, Dr. Leslie, identified the true cause: a tumor near Nooshin's kidney was pressing on her adrenal glands, forcing them to overproduce cortisone. It was an aggressive cancer.

The Journey to China

After this diagnosis, I took Nooshin to China. With the help of friends, we were admitted to a hospital located within the headquarters of the Chinese Air Force—a facility described to us as highly restricted.

There, we were told of an experimental treatment involving stem cells derived from embryos. According to the doctors, the cells were processed into a liquid form and injected into the bloodstream, where they were said to regenerate damaged or weakened tissue.

We were informed that the treatment was not publicly discussed in the West, as it would raise serious ethical and human rights concerns.

The physicians showed me photographs of several prominent world leaders who, they claimed, had received such injections to restore vitality and energy. Among the names mentioned were George H. W. Bush and Mikhail Gorbachev. I cannot verify the accuracy of these claims, but they were presented to us as evidence of the treatment's effectiveness.

When Nooshin hesitated, I volunteered to receive the injection first to reassure her. The doctors agreed. That night, I felt unusually alert and energetic, unable to sleep and eager to go out jogging. Encouraged, Nooshin agreed to proceed. She, too, seemed to improve in the days that followed and resumed walking in the park as she had before her illness.

Yet the doctors were candid. Because the cancer had already spread, they explained, the treatment could not eliminate it. At best, it might slow its progression. If she wished to prolong her life further, they advised, she would need to remain in China. Nooshin refused. We returned to London.

The Final Diagnosis

Subsequent examinations confirmed that the cancer had spread to her adrenal glands. Then one day, her doctor asked to speak with me privately. His words were devastating: her liver was almost entirely covered with tumors. In his estimation, she had no more than three months to live.

He told me it was his legal obligation to inform her directly. I pleaded with him not to, arguing that such news would extinguish her remaining hope and darken her final days. I asked him to give me one reason why telling her would improve her condition as a patient. After a long silence, he agreed to confide only in me.

When I returned to Nooshin, she asked what the doctor had said. I told her that her cancer was rare and that he needed to consult colleagues to determine the most appropriate treatment. She smiled with relief.

“Thank God,” she said. “I was afraid you would tell me I only had one year left.”

I informed her parents of the truth. But Nooshin herself continued to live with hope, waiting for better news. Almost exactly three months later, she passed away.

Saudi Arabia & Uruguay

My introduction to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia began with Mahmood Baban, an Iraqi Kurd and former minister under the Iraqi monarchy. Following the 1958 coup, Baban sought asylum in Saudi Arabia, where he became an advisor to Prince Naif bin Abdul Aziz, the interior minister. This connection proved pivotal in my own dealings with the kingdom.

After I resigned from the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) in 1976, Baba Ali Sheikh Mahmood, a respected figure, enlisted Baban's assistance in finding a suitable position for me in Saudi circles. Baban subsequently gave me the opportunity to manage a London office for Prince Saud bin Naif Bin Abdul Aziz. The prince, then nearing the completion of his studies in the United States, was planning to establish a business center in London.

A meeting with Prince Saud was arranged at his London residence for 4:30 p.m. After waiting an hour beyond the scheduled time without any commitment, I left. Baban later advised me to be more tolerant when dealing with Saudi royalty. However, I remained firm in my stance against such delays. This decision, while seemingly defiant at the time, ultimately earned me respect in future interactions.

My initial dealings with the Saudi prince's London office offered both valuable insights and turbulent lessons. Early on, I set a firm expectation of punctuality, a stance that earned me consistent respect despite the prince's occasional tardiness. This principle was tested during our initial negotiations regarding my compensation. I proposed a profit-sharing arrangement: 3% of the total profit from each business venture originating from the London office. My responsibilities encompassed managing the family's London properties and a staff of ten, including drivers, domestic staff, and cooks.

Overseeing this household brought its own challenges. Sargon, an Iraqi Assyrian, was responsible for managing the staff residing in a large north London house. However, I quickly uncovered Sargon's involvement in illegal activities within the properties, where the owners themselves resided for barely more than two weeks a year. Sargon's operations specifically involved the production and export of pornographic material to the Middle East, filmed in the prince's London property during his absence.

Despite his attempts to entice me into this lucrative scheme, I firmly refused and, after informing the prince, secured Sargon's dismissal. A subsequent audit revealed further financial irregularities within the management of the household.

Prince Saud bin Naif Bin Abdul Aziz's arrival in London quickly brought me into contact with Ernesto, a flamboyant Swiss Lebanese nightclub owner and "party fixer" based in Geneva with connections in the U.S. During our drive from Heathrow airport to the residence, Ernesto questioned Sargon's absence. I responded directly, explaining the dismissal and the reasons behind it. My explanation was met with silence from both Ernesto and the prince. The following day, I discovered that Sargon had been reinstated at Ernesto's behest. This blatant disregard for my ethical stance and professional judgment prompted my immediate resignation.

Following my resignation, I partnered with an Italian construction company, focusing on the purchasing, renovation, and resale of properties to wealthy Saudi Arabians, individuals who had benefited significantly from the 1973 oil crisis. This venture ultimately led to a significant connection with Prince Jalawi bin Abdul Aziz bin Musaid, the uncle of Prince Saud bin Naif.

This encounter proved to be a turning point. Prince Jalawi's understanding of the nuances of managing international staff validated my earlier decision to resign and reinforced the importance of cultural sensitivity and appropriate management practices. Our subsequent friendship led to invitations to Riyadh and introductions to other princes, including Prince Turki bin Fahad Bin Jalawi, with whom I have maintained a longstanding professional relationship and collaborated on numerous projects over the years.

Uruguay to Saudi: A Business Outside the Box

Nestled between Argentina and Brazil, Uruguay is a remarkable example of successful economic and social development. Despite its modest size (176,215 km²) and population (3.5 million), the nation boasts a high per capita income and a reputation for stability. Its strategic location, combined with astute economic practices, has been instrumental to its ongoing prosperity.

Uruguay skillfully leverages its geographical position through advantageous customs arrangements with its larger neighbors. A common practice involves procuring cattle from one neighbor at competitive prices, raising them on Uruguayan ranches, and subsequently selling them to the other when market conditions are optimal. This sophisticated livestock trading strategy has become a cornerstone of the nation's robust agricultural sector.



An interesting bridge I crossed in Uruguay

Adding to its distinctiveness, Uruguay is the only Latin American country where gambling is fully legalized. This has facilitated the development of Punta del Este, an upscale resort city that attracts affluent visitors from the region, particularly from Brazil and Argentina. The city's vibrant social scene also attracts younger demographics seeking to connect with the city's wealthy residents.

However, Uruguay's history is not without its challenges. The 1960s and 1970s saw the rise of the Tupamaros, an armed Marxist-Leninist movement, which led to military intervention from 1974 to 1985. This turbulent period ultimately culminated in a transition to democracy through a process of national reconciliation, during which former

adversaries became political partners. An illustrative example of this reconciliation is the fact that two parliamentarians—one formerly imprisoned for affiliation with the Tupamaros and the other a former prison guard—can share a table in parliamentary debate. This underscores the complex and often unexpected dynamics of Uruguayan politics.

A Livestock Odyssey from Uruguay and a Swedish Misadventure

In Al Khobar, at a gathering hosted by Prince Turki bin Fahad, Sheikh Ali Atewi—one of the largest private livestock importers in Saudi Arabia—voiced his frustration. The government had abruptly banned imports from Australia and India, the kingdom’s primary suppliers, due to animal disease. The market was suddenly starving for livestock. He turned to me. “Find another source,” he said.



Shaking hands with Sheikh Ali Atewi for a livestock deal

Back in Sweden, I connected with Lennart and Knut Nilsson, experienced farmers who had previously imported horses from Uruguay. Through them I was introduced to Dr. Arsuaga, a respected veterinarian and livestock exporter in Montevideo. Thus began one of the most

complex ventures of my life—linking Sweden, Uruguay, and Saudi Arabia in a single high-risk chain.

The obstacles were formidable. Sheikh Atewi's payment terms—two months after the livestock's arrival and sale—posed serious financial risk. Transporting 50,000 sheep and bullocks required a specialized vessel and enormous logistical precision. The project demanded both capital and discretion.

Fortunately, Tage Grundstrom, a director at the Swedish construction firm NCC—and a man of large appetite in every sense—agreed to finance the operation and joined us in Uruguay. After delicate negotiations, Sheikh Atewi accepted extended payment terms: three months after receipt of the shipment.

The departure from Montevideo was a spectacle. Farmers gathered to watch as thousands of animals were loaded aboard a floating structure that resembled a seven-floor hotel. The ship was equipped with air-conditioned compartments, eight silos of fodder, and eight veterinarians. It embarked on a dramatic 23-day voyage across the Atlantic.

To avoid inflating market prices, the operation was conducted quietly. Even the unloading in Saudi Arabia took place at night.

When the ship docked in Jeddah, livestock dealers lined up with their trucks, eager to claim their share. The venture succeeded. Profits were secured. Confidence soared. Sheikh Atewi immediately requested a second shipment, which proceeded even more smoothly.

While I was in Uruguay, preparing the second shipment and expansion into other Gulf markets, an unexpected call interrupted my routine. The Minister of Agriculture of Uruguay wanted to meet me. In his office, he chuckled and asked, "What magic wand did you wave in Saudi Arabia?"

Puzzled, I asked for clarification. He explained, "For years, we've hosted princes, sheikhs, and businessmen from across the Arab world. They made promises to buy our products but disappeared once they returned home. "Your case was different; you quietly exported a substantial number of livestock, without any fanfare. Something must have changed," he said. "Maybe because I am not an Arab," I replied jokingly, "I am a Kurd," leaving the minister amused at the simplicity of it all.

Eventually, Saudi Arabia lifted its ban on Australian and Indian imports. Competitors flooded back into the market and prices fell sharply.

Just as suddenly as it had begun, our extraordinary venture ended. But not before a memorable episode in Jeddah.



55,000 sheep ready for shearing before boarding the ship to Jeddah in Saudi Arabia

A Swedish Misadventure

On one visit to Saudi Arabia, I traveled to Jeddah with my Swedish partners, Lennart and Magnus Nilsson. We were warmly welcomed by Sheikh Atewi and installed in a luxurious hotel overlooking the Red Sea.

It was August—the heat was punishing. No sooner had we checked in than my Swedish companions rushed to the swimming pool for a midday sunbath. Coming from a country where sunlight is a rare commodity, they considered it a gift of nature—and free.

That evening, when the Sheikh arrived for dinner, he looked at them with concern. Their faces were bright red, nearly glowing. “Jamal,” he asked quietly in Arabic, “what is wrong with them? Are they ill?”

“No,” I replied. “They were sunbathing.” He stared at me in disbelief. “Are they crazy? We cover ourselves to escape the sun—and they seek it?” I explained that in Sweden, sunlight is a luxury. He shook his head, unconvinced.

The next day, however, another surprise awaited him. My Swedish partners skipped lunch in the hotel restaurant and chose instead a modest local sandwich shop. They also missed dinner.

When the Sheikh noticed this, he instructed me firmly, “Tell them they are our guests. All hotel expenses are covered.” The transformation was immediate.

Their appetites returned with remarkable speed. Soon they were consuming more than five meals a day—breakfast, lunch, dinner, late-night grills by the pool—and inviting me enthusiastically to join them.

Then I saw the telephone bill. In just a few days, it exceeded \$800—a considerable sum at the time—primarily for personal calls to Australia and America. They were clearly exploiting the Sheikh’s generosity.

From the beginning, knowing the hotel costs were covered, I had instructed my secretary to call me twice daily to avoid burdening our host with unnecessary charges.

I contacted Sheikh Atewi and thanked him sincerely for his hospitality, but asked that the telephone expenses be excluded. He hesitated, but when I explained that the calls were personal and unrelated to business, he agreed.

On departure day, my partners were shocked to learn that the phone bill was not covered. They protested briefly, arguing that the Sheikh had not specified exclusions. Nevertheless, they paid.

During our flight to London, not a word passed between us.

From Palaces to Wheat Fields: A Royal Partnership

My foray into Saudi Arabian business actually began with a partnership with Prince Turki bin Fahad, initially focusing on introducing Swedish lightweight concrete technology to the Saudi market. This innovative material proved highly effective in insulating buildings against the extreme Saudi heat, a significant advantage in the local climate. I was later employed in the construction of a palace for the prince and his family.

Guided by the principle that any business venture is acceptable as long as it does not land me in hospital or prison, our collaboration soon extended beyond construction. The Saudi government announced a new policy aimed at promoting domestic wheat cultivation in the kingdom in

order to achieve self-sufficiency, offering substantial financial support for feasibility studies and project execution. We seized the opportunity.

We leveraged a government-appointed Saudi company to conduct the feasibility study and partnered with an Irish agricultural firm to execute the project on a turnkey basis. Together, we successfully established a wheat farm. The government's incentive program, which included purchasing the harvest at triple the market price, significantly de-risked the venture and encouraged strong private sector participation.

However, the project presented unexpected and unique logistical challenges. Accessing water required drilling wells to a depth of 600 meters, and the water that was extracted emerged boiling. To address this, we engineered a solution by constructing shallow cooling basins before feeding the water into the pivot irrigation system.

Expanding into the Transportation Business

The 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait dramatically increased the demand for transportation between Dammam, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait. Recognizing this opportunity, we launched a trucking company with a fleet of approximately twenty trucks. Navigating the challenging regional environment, particularly during the invasion, demanded resilience and adaptability. I personally oversaw the acquisition of additional trucks to expand our capacity and meet the escalating market needs.

A pivotal management change occurred when Prince Turki replaced the Saudi manager with a Lebanese national. The prince's rationale was pragmatic; while acknowledging potential concerns about business practices, he maintained that a Lebanese manager, who delivered half the expected profits, was preferable to an honest Saudi manager who delivered none.



Jim Sillars, born 1937. Former leader of the Scottish National Party (SNP)

To further optimize performance, I recruited Mr. Jim Sillars, former leader of the Scottish National Party in the UK, to serve as operations manager. Mr. Sillars, an acquaintance from my time in London, was seeking supplemental income and agreed to join the venture. His leadership

and extensive management experience proved invaluable. Under his direction, we implemented a structured approach to driver management, including the introduction of standardized uniforms and regular patrols, to maintain operational discipline. These reforms made our operations significantly more professional, while improving efficiency and driving substantial growth in profitability, ultimately earning Prince Turki's strong approval.

Pilgrimage to Mecca

In the sweltering early summer of 1985, while working alongside Prince Turki bin Jalawi in Dammam, Saudi Arabia, I was presented with an extraordinary invitation: to join him and his 30 family members on a pilgrimage to Mecca. Initially, a wave of hesitation swept over me. Yet, the prince's persistent charm and the sheer uniqueness of the opportunity gradually eroded my reluctance, drawing me into the heart of this sacred journey.

The 24-hour bus ride from Dammam to Mecca was an odyssey in itself, a slow, deliberate passage punctuated by stops at various waypoints. Upon our arrival, we were cushioned in an atmosphere of VIP treatment. Private air-conditioned tents, furnished with plush mattresses and soft carpets, awaited us, offering a welcome respite from the relentless desert heat. A dedicated kitchen attended to our every need, and an impressive display of hospitality and care was provided amid the harshness of the climate.

One breathtaking moment remains etched in my mind. At dawn, I looked out over a sea of more than two million pilgrims, all clad in pristine white, raising their hands in unison. The sheer scale of that collective supplication of voices rising together in a collective appeal to the Divine was profoundly moving. It was a spectacle of faith that transcended any individual experience.

As part of the Hajj rituals, I joined a small, intimate group led by the prince, chanting prayers that focused solely on God. During the circumambulation of the Kaaba, the density of the crowd prevented us from reaching the revered Black Stone to kiss it. Saudi police, tasked with maintaining order, had also imposed restrictions to manage the immense throng.

Unfortunately, the sacred pilgrimage also attracted those with less noble intentions. The dense crowd, while a powerful testament to devotion,

also provided cover for illicit activities, a stark reminder that even in the holiest of places, human frailties persist.

The diversity of the pilgrims was a vibrant tapestry of cultures and nationalities, each group observing its own distinct customs. Among them, the Iranians stood out for their fervent devotion, using the occasion to promote their political agenda. Their distinctive appearance—shaved heads and uncovered buses, symbols of their desire to remove any barrier between themselves and God—was a striking sight. Tragically, their zeal, combined with the intense heat, led many of them to succumb to sunstroke, filling the local hospitals.

My two subsequent visits to Mecca for Umrah, a voluntary pilgrimage that can be undertaken at any time of the year, comprise sacred rites to seek closeness to God. As official guests of the Saudi government, we carried out the rituals with a profound sense of honor and devotion. Each journey to Mecca, whether for Hajj or Umrah, served as a powerful testament to the enduring strength of faith and the unifying spirit of pilgrimage.

Zamzam Water: A Heavenly Mystery

The Zamzam well in Mecca is held in deep reverence by Muslims worldwide, yet its story is more complex than many realize. While tales of its miraculous properties abound, my own experience led me to approach it with a sense of mindful moderation. Sadly, others have reported adverse health effects, underscoring the need for careful consideration.

The well's origins are woven into the very fabric of Islamic history, linked to the Prophet Abraham's construction of the Kaaba. Tradition tells us that when his wife Hagar and their infant son Ishmael were left in the arid valley, a spring miraculously gushed forth as Ishmael struck the ground. This, it is believed, is the very source that continues to flow today.

In a surprising twist of fate back in Sweden in 1971, my friend Björn Ahlgren shared a confidential account of Zamzam's hidden challenges. His company, VVB, had been contracted by the Saudi government to investigate complaints about the taste of the Zamzam water. Their discreet investigation revealed that the underground source had become contaminated with sewage. To safeguard the well's sanctity and ensure its purity, a new, clean water source was discovered north of Taif. This water source then quietly replaced the original Zamzam well, which was shut

down completely. This significant undertaking, kept under wraps for understandable reasons, showcased the dedication to preserving the well's sacred status.

Despite these challenges and the occasional controversy, the Zamzam well retains its immense religious and cultural significance and is still a focal point for millions of pilgrims today.

A Week in the Saudi Desert

In Saudi Arabia, a cherished tradition among the affluent is to spend several weeks of the winter in the desert—a time of rest and cultural renewal in returning to their roots. Prince Turki invited me to join him on one such desert trip. He planned to stay for at least a month but graciously assured me I could leave at any time.



Prince Turki Bin Fahad Bin Jalawi Al Saud spends at least a month per year in the desert

A dedicated truck was packed with live lambs and poultry, sacks of rice, and boxes brimming with fresh fruit and vegetables.

Before we set off, the prince mentioned that many sheikhs and tribal chiefs would be visiting him or extending invitations to him as a sign of

respect. With this in mind, he politely requested that I wear traditional Arab attire, complete with an Igal, to suit the cultural environment better. I declined, and when the prince, with a hint of surprise, inquired about my reason, I explained, "We Kurds are sensitive about wearing Arabic clothes; such an act is often perceived as a denial of my Kurdish identity." The prince, rather amused by my candor, respected my position and agreed to my preference.

After an hour's drive, we arrived at an oasis. Tents were erected, lambs were slaughtered for a feast, and the aroma of cooking soon filled the air. We spent the night there, which was surprisingly cold. The following day, our journey continued deeper into the desert to visit a tribal chief who had warmly invited the prince to stay with him for a week.

That evening, we were ushered into a large tent where guests from various oases had gathered to welcome the prince. Following a generous dinner, poets took turns reciting verses, offering words of welcome and praise for the prince. This was followed by the customary coffee service and engaging conversations, during which many of the sheikhs reminisced about their connections with the prince's father.

During dinner, I couldn't help but notice that bones, empty cans, and other remnants were discarded outside the tent, transforming the immediate surroundings into an impromptu refuse area. When I discreetly asked our host about cleaning the area, he replied, "We don't usually clean the surroundings. When it becomes too untidy, we just relocate the tent to a fresh spot."

Despite the mess, sleeping under the open desert sky was magical. The vast expanse of stars above was a breathtaking sight, and the sand retained warmth from the sun during the day, molding it perfectly to my body, offering a surprisingly comfortable and restful sleep.

A week passed faster than I anticipated, and I was then escorted back to Dammam, while the prince and his entourage remained in the desert to continue their sojourn.

A Near Loss in Jubail

In the summer of 1992, on the eve of my departure from Dammam to London, I made a brief trip to the Al Jubail Industrial City, a large-scale development project managed by American firms. It was located about 40 kilometers from Dammam, where I lived. The purpose of my trip was to collect documents for a project bid.

At the Jubail office, the receptionist quickly provided me with the necessary paperwork. However, upon returning to Dammam, I realized I had left my briefcase in the reception area. Concerned, I contacted the Jubail office and spoke with the night guard, who confirmed that the Filipino receptionist had indeed found a briefcase matching my description.

The following morning, I returned to Jubail to retrieve my belongings. The briefcase contained my passport, ID card, flight ticket, and 5,000 Saudi riyals. To my surprise, the receptionist denied any knowledge of the briefcase, contradicting the night guard's account.

I reported the incident to the Jubail police station, which was staffed primarily by retired British Scotland Yard officers under the command of a Saudi general. They declined to investigate the receptionist for theft, citing insufficient evidence.

Undaunted, I contacted Prince Turki, who advised me to appeal to the Saudi head of the police station. At the prince's behest, the station chief ordered the British officers to launch a formal investigation.

From a nearby room, I overheard the intense interrogation that followed. The receptionist initially denied any involvement. However, under persistent questioning and faced with the threat of a search of his apartment as well as the invocation of Islamic law, which prescribes hand amputation for theft, he finally confessed.

Confronted with the grave consequences of his actions, including possible deportation, the receptionist revealed that the briefcase could be found in his apartment. The police swiftly recovered it. To my relief, the contents were largely intact, with only 100 riyals missing.

An Unexpected Kinship

In the rapidly growing city of Dammam, Saudi Arabia, a surprising connection unfolded. While driving through the streets with Prince Turki, I noticed several buildings bearing the “Alamdar” surname, a rarity in the region. The prince suggested a possible familial link to the wealthy owner, but I remained skeptical, anticipating indifference from a prominent Saudi businessman.

Later, another business trip to Al-Jubail Industrial City brought me face-to-face with Sheikh Omar Alamdar. Upon hearing my name at the reception, he inquired about a possible connection, explaining that his parents had often spoken of lost relatives in Iraq and that he had been searching for members of our family. To my surprise, he insisted I cancel my hotel reservation and stay at his home. Despite my initial hesitations, he dispatched his driver to collect my belongings.



With Sheikh Omar Alamdar, at the International Business Conference in Rabat, Morocco held October 1997

That evening, Sheikh Omar organized a gathering of his Dammam-based relatives, inviting them to a celebratory lunch the following day, in honor of our newfound kinship. While the exact nature of our familial connection remained uncertain, the warmth of the reception was undeniable.

Sheikh Omar, with his distinct Kurdish features—blue eyes and fair complexion—shared that although he did not speak Kurdish, he remembered conversing in Kurdish at home when he was a child.

A respected businessman, he often remarked that he felt a stronger bond with me than with some of his own family, regardless of blood relation.

Our connection deepened over time. Sheikh Omar visited me in both Sweden and London, and I later invited him to Brazil for Carnival in Rio, where he met my business associates. Sadly, Sheikh Omar Alamdar passed away in 2021, marking the end of a remarkable friendship that began with uncertainty and blossomed into a deeply cherished bond.

Dammam Resort Development

In the face of economic hardship, entrepreneurial vision often finds surprising ways to flourish.

Following Iraq's 1990 invasion of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia's economy stagnated. Against this backdrop, a unique opportunity arose involving a dormant ready mix concrete plant with 400 employees owned by Sheikh Omar Alamdar, a struggling architectural firm led by Dr. Badawi, with over 20 architects, engineers, and draftsmen, and a seemingly barren stretch of coastal land owned by Sheikh Mubarek Al-Hassawi from Al Ahsaá province.

The project began with a chance observation. While driving with Dr. Badawi, I noticed an appealing stretch of undeveloped coastline. Upon learning it belonged to Sheikh Mubarek, an acquaintance of Dr. Badawi, a meeting was arranged. A bold concept was proposed: the development of a 200-unit holiday village. Under the agreement, Sheikh Mubarek would contribute the land, and in return, receive 20% of the project's profits upon completion and sale. He readily agreed.

My initial design, quickly drafted, envisioned a network of canals, lakes, pools, and interconnected homes, complemented by green spaces, restaurants, and bridges, transforming the arid landscape into an attractive resort destination. This vision proved instrumental in securing the project's key resources. Motivated by the project's potential, Sheikh Omar agreed to supply concrete on deferred payment terms. Construction management was entrusted to Rauma Repola, a Finnish company with whom

I had established a connection. Three Finnish engineers were brought on board to manage the construction process.

The Power of Being Proactive

A promotional campaign using public forums, newspapers, and local television showcased the resort's design to the public. Interested buyers registered with a 20% down payment, with the balance due upon occupancy.

Public interest was significant, prompting Sheikh Omar to leverage his stake in the Islamic Bank of Dammam to manage down payments and overall project finances.

Construction began on 20% of the planned units, financed by the initial deposits. As buyers continued to make their remaining payments, construction proceeded smoothly, facilitating the seamless completion of the remaining 80%. The project proved to be a resounding success, a win-win for all parties involved. Suppliers and laborers were well compensated, and Sheikh Mubarek realized substantial profits from land he had initially considered unproductive.

This venture stands as a testament to the power of proactive initiative. Rather than passively waiting for an opportunity, my vision, decisive action, and ability to secure key partnerships transformed a challenging economic environment into a thriving development. The project's success demonstrates that creative problem-solving and a willingness to take calculated risks can attract business and generate substantial returns.

Morocco

A Milestone Conference

In 1997, I had the privilege of attending a landmark conference convened by King Hassan II of Morocco. It was a gathering that underscored his commitment to fostering dialogue and promoting peace through business engagement. Held in Rabat, the event brought together approximately 900 delegates, mostly businessmen from Israel and the Arab world, including a significant delegation of 400 Israelis. Prominent figures such as King Hussein of Jordan, Shimon Peres, Yitzhak Rabin, and Yasser Arafat were also in attendance.

The conference was notable for its candid exchanges. One particularly striking moment occurred when Yitzhak Rabin publicly recounted a clandestine meeting with King Hassan II in 1968. Disguised in Bedouin attire, Rabin revealed they had discussed potential pathways to peace during that early encounter, and he expressed his gratitude to the king for his enduring efforts since then.

King Hassan II, visibly surprised and momentarily uncomfortable, offered no direct response, leaving the audience to speculate on the nature and extent of his prior interactions with Israeli officials.

Encounter with Shimon Peres

During a lunch break, I had a more personal encounter: Shimon Peres approached me and asked where I came from. When he learned of my origin, he expressed surprise at meeting a Kurdish businessman rather than a Peshmerga fighter. A humorous exchange ensued when a bystander clarified that I had once served as a Peshmerga, eliciting laughter from the surrounding delegates. The reason for Mr. Peres's initial curiosity remains unknown.

The conference's most significant achievement was the direct interaction it facilitated between Arab and Israeli business leaders. The initial side meetings were marked by an atmosphere of camaraderie, with participants referring to each other as "cousins," a nod to their shared cultural heritage. This interaction underscored the potential for collaborative ventures and the value of earlier engagement in building trust.

Bridging Divides and Promoting Dialogue

The conference culminated in a grand dinner at the Royal Palace of Rabat. Upon arrival, delegates were greeted by a captivating performance of singing and tambourine playing by young Moroccan women. Selected annually from across Morocco as representatives of their respective municipalities, they serve in the royal palace for a year, in what is seen as a highly regarded honor.

The dinner itself was a lavish affair. Guests were seated at round tables within an opulent dining hall, where an elaborate multi-course meal was served. The sheer abundance of dishes, including an impressive array of desserts, offered a memorable experience in the art of pacing oneself at royal banquets.

The conference served as a powerful demonstration of King Hassan II's diplomatic efforts to bridge divides and promote dialogue between Israelis and Arabs. The interactions between the two groups, particularly in the business sphere, illustrated the potential for cooperation and mutual understanding. Notably, the contrast between the formal political discussions and the informal, personal interactions underscored the complex dynamics at play in the region. It was a powerful symbol of faith and a testament to the enduring stories that shape our lives.

Lessons from Greece

In the summer of 1977, following my resignation from the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and while residing in London, the “People of Constantinople,” an organization of Istanbul-born Greeks who maintained a strong connection to their heritage, invited me to Athens along with Dr. Shafiq Qazzaz. They were aware of my imprisonment and torture in Turkey and requested that I share my experiences in Turkish prisons at a public seminar. I accepted the invitation.

Upon arrival, the organization’s committee gave us a warm welcome. The seminar, scheduled to take place in the grand hall of our hotel, attracted significant interest from the Greek public and was set to receive extensive media coverage.

However, two hours before the event, a Greek military officer delivered an unexpected request: a meeting with the chief of staff of the Greek army. The chief of staff, a young and approachable individual, politely asked that I cancel the seminar. He expressed concerns that it could provoke Turkey and potentially endanger my safety.

I declined the request, asserting that there was no valid reason for cancellation. I argued that Turkish hostility towards Greece was already at its peak and that the seminar would not materially alter the existing tension. Furthermore, as individuals involved in liberation movements, personal safety was not our primary concern. I suggested that, as a military officer, he would understand this perspective.

After a moment of reflection, the chief acknowledged the democratic principles of Greece and the right of its citizens to organize such events. He conceded, allowing the seminar to proceed. The event was ultimately a success, drawing a large audience and receiving widespread media attention.

Armenian Congress in Athens

Following my continued engagement with the Istanbul Committee in Athens, I was invited to participate in an Armenian conference held in the city. Upon arrival, I observed a significant point of contention: the presence of a Kurdish representative. A faction within the congress voiced strong objections, citing historical instances of Kurdish collaboration with Turkish forces during the Armenian Genocide.

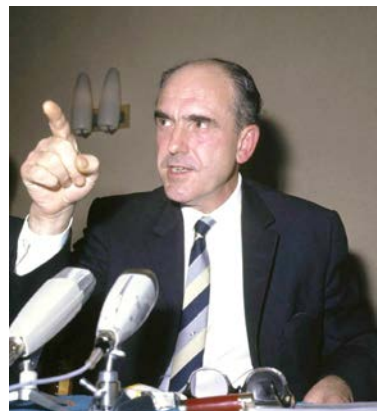
Recognizing the sensitivity of the issue, I requested to address the assembly. While acknowledging documented cases of Kurdish involvement in the massacres due to our forefathers' ignorance and by using religion to manipulate them, I emphasized the critical need for nuance. I presented the counter-narrative of numerous Kurdish families who risked their lives to protect Armenian civilians, sheltering them from the Turkish army.

My central argument focused on the imperative of reconciliation and collaborative action. I proposed that instead of dwelling on past grievances, both communities should focus on forging a united front to liberate their shared ancestral lands from Turkish occupation. This appeal for cooperation, aimed at transcending historical animosity, resonated with the audience. The congress responded with applause, and I received positive feedback in the aftermath.

This event served as a significant moment, demonstrating the potential for constructive dialogue and reconciliation between Armenian and Kurdish communities, even in the face of deeply rooted historical trauma. It underscored the importance of acknowledging complex historical realities while prioritizing collaborative efforts for a shared future.

Andreas Papandreou

While reminiscing about my time in Greece, one particular encounter stands out—a memorable meeting with Andreas Papandreou, a distinguished economist and a former prime minister and president of Greece. During the Greek military junta's rule (1967-1974), Papandreou, at that time an exiled politician, visited Stockholm, where he conducted a seminar at Konsert-huset. His discourse, focused entirely on the Greek situation, passionately detailing the junta's illegitimacy and strategies for restoring democracy. He appealed for support from the Swedish people to end the dictatorship that had taken over Greece.



Andreas Papandreou (1919-1969),
former Prime Minister of Greece

Attending the seminar, alongside my Kurdish friend, Said Dizayee, I was struck by Papandreou's enduring dedication to Greece. This contrasted sharply with the perceived tendency of some Kurdish leaders to prioritize broader international issues over Kurdistan's specific struggle. I remarked to Said, "He is a true patriot. One of our leaders would have focused on international conflicts, only briefly mentioning Kurdistan." Said concurred.

Following the seminar, we sought to express our appreciation to Papandreou. Upon learning of our Kurdish identity, he responded, "While I appreciate your kind words, I must emphasize that your time would be better spent focusing on your own liberation. My struggle is to restore democracy from a small group of colonels. Your challenge, however, is far greater: to liberate a nation divided and oppressed by four regimes. This requires a significantly deeper commitment and sacrifice."

Papandreou's response underscored the stark difference between the Greek and Kurdish struggles. The Greek resistance aimed to reinstate a deposed democratic order, while the Kurdish movement faced the formidable task of establishing national self-determination across multiple hostile states. This encounter provided a sobering perspective on the complexities and magnitude of the Kurdish struggle.

A Few Final Words and Reflections: Turkey

When I first set foot in Turkey, I was struck by its beauty, its history, and the resilience of its people. And yet, one thought has often returned to me: how much brighter the future of this country could be—if only certain lessons of the past were understood in a different light.

Beyond Atatürk

Mustafa Kemal Atatürk was a remarkable military leader, a man who reshaped a nation at a critical moment in history. His role may deserve admiration, but history should serve as guidance, not a permanent anchor. Every era faces its own challenges and demands its own solutions. Turkey's future cannot be built solely by looking back—it must be shaped by new, courageous decisions rooted in today's realities.

The Cost of Nationalism

Atatürk's vision of a homogenous Turkish state carried a heavy cost. The repression of groups that did not fit neatly into this vision—Kurds, religious minorities, and others—has left wounds that continued to bleed today. A century of denial has not erased these identities. Instead, it has deepened their resolve. The endurance of these struggles is proof that cultures cannot be silenced, they can only be acknowledged and respected.

Leaders Without Vision

After Atatürk, Turkey needed leaders bold enough to turn the page, to transform wartime policies into forward-looking reforms. Yet most lacked either the vision or the courage. Other nations found ways to heal and progress—China moved beyond Mao, South Africa rose beyond apartheid under Mandela. Turkey, however, remained entangled in outdated ideas that constrained both its democracy and growth.

The Futility of Erasing Identity

History shows that no government can erase a people through force. Atatürk himself attempted to deport the Kurds, relocating them to central Anatolia in hopes they would assimilate. But instead of disappearing, Kurdish culture endured—even in the very heart of Turkey. Saddam

Hussein tried the same tactic in Iraq, and he too failed. A culture rooted in history and land cannot be dissolved by decree.

The Strength of Inclusion

A country becomes stronger when all its citizens feel they belong. Minorities who are treated with dignity and granted equal rights will fight to defend their homeland. But when a people is pushed aside, branded as outsiders in their own country, separation become the natural path. This is not disloyalty—it is the inevitable pursuit of justice.

The Cost of Conflict

The decades spent fighting the Kurds have drained Turkey financially, cost countless lives, and consumed its energy. Imagine if those same resources had been invested in schools, industry, science, and the dreams of the young—Turkey might already rank among the world’s most prosperous nations.

Instead contradictions in policy have hurt its credibility: defending those same rights of around 500,000 Turkish minorities in Cyprus while denying the same rights to more than 30 million Kurds at home; championing Palestinian rights while dismissing Kurds as “Mountain Turks.” These double standards have weakened Turkey’s moral voice on the global stage.

A Call for the Future

Turkey is a nation of immense potential. It stands at the crossroads of continents, cultures, and civilizations. Its land is rich with history, and its people are full of resilience. But the future will not be built by denying the past or silencing identities. It will be built by embracing diversity, recognizing rights, and choosing unity through respect rather than force. If Turkey dares to take this step—if it has the courage to look forward with wisdom and compassion—it will not only heal old wounds but also rise as a true leader in the world.

Finally, it is no surprise that after a century of violence and extremism, Turkey remains torn by internal conflict with a religious party now leading the country- backed by the majority at the ballot box.

The Price of Being Gentlemen: A Final Reflection

In 1974, during a meeting with Ghassan Tueni, Lebanon's ambassador to the United Nations, I asked him a question that had long troubled me, "Why have the Kurds not been able to establish their own independent state?" He answered without hesitation, "Because you are gentlemen. And gentlemen have never established states in history."

His words struck me deeply. Years later, when I repeated them to Mullah Mustafa Barzani, he fell silent for a moment and then said quietly, "There is much truth in that."

I have reflected on those words throughout my life. By "gentlemen," I do not mean weakness. I mean leaders who placed honor above revenge, civilians above retaliation, and principle above expediency. Kurdish history is filled with such choices. Again and again, we chose humanity over hatred. But history is not written by morality alone.

Mercy Instead of Power

As mentioned earlier, in 1967, when President Abdulrahman Arif visited Barzani seeking reconciliation, he offered him two wishes. Barzani could have demanded military advantage or political concessions. Instead, he asked for the release of two men sentenced to death—Jerjis Fethullah and Dr. Muhammad Kubba. Neither was Kurdish. Barzani chose to save lives rather than strengthen his position. It was a noble act. It was also a revealing one.

A Refuge for Others

For decades, when regimes in Baghdad persecuted their opponents, Kurdistan became a refuge. Communists, Islamists, Arab nationalists, and Ba'athists found safety in our mountains. We gave them shelter not because they agreed with us, but because they were pursued.

Yet when many of them later gained power, they did not remember that hospitality. Kurdistan gave them protection; politics returned indifference—or worse.

Refusing Terror and Compassion in War

When assassination attempts were made against Barzani, some commanders proposed retaliatory bombings in Baghdad. Barzani refused. "I will not accept that civilians be harmed," he said.

In a region where terror became a language of politics, the Kurdish movement chose restraint. This preserved our moral legitimacy. It may also have limited our leverage.

Even during the long war with Baghdad, Kurdish forces did not adopt systematic brutality against prisoners. Iraqi soldiers often expressed relief at being captured by Kurds rather than by their own security forces.

In the darkest hours, Kurdistan tried to remain human.

The Limits of Moral Capital

And yet, despite these choices, we were abandoned repeatedly by great powers. We were encouraged when convenient and sacrificed when alliances shifted. We learned, painfully, that morality does not replace power, and goodwill does not deter geopolitics.

But if being "gentlemen" explains part of our history, it does not explain all of it.

Our tragedy was not kindness alone.

It was also division.

It was internal rivalry.

It was the absence of durable institutions.

It was the tendency to place personalities above systems.

It was the failure to transform revolutionary legitimacy into sustainable governance.

A people can survive in the mountains through courage.

A state requires unity, discipline, and institutions.

What Is Wrong with Kurdistan?

Nothing is wrong with the Kurdish people.

What has often been wrong is our political structure. We have produced brave fighters, inspiring leaders, and moments of extraordinary solidarity.

But we have struggled to produce lasting unity and strong, impartial institutions that outlive individuals. Gentlemen may not build states. But states built without moral foundations do not endure.

The future of Kurdistan does not lie in abandoning our principles. It lies in combining them with strategic realism, internal unity, and institutional maturity.

We must remain humane—but also organized.

Honorable—but also disciplined.

Principled—but also pragmatic.

If Kurdistan Is to Rise

Perhaps Ghassan Tuani was right in one sense: history has often rewarded the ruthless.

But I do not believe the Kurdish struggle failed because it was too moral. It faltered because morality was not matched with unity and structure. The lesson of our history is not to become less human. It is to become more united. If one day Kurdistan rises as a stable and recognized state, it must be built not only by gentlemen, but by institutions strong enough to protect their values.

And if we succeed, it will not be because we abandoned our conscience. It will be because we finally learned how to defend it.

No Regrets

Returning to the manuscript of these memoirs, I found myself in quiet disbelief. It was difficult to comprehend how I had endured so many highs and lows, encountered such a wide array of people, and journeyed across borders—from one end of the world to the other—learning at every step along the way.

One truth I can firmly claim is this: I carry no regrets—neither for what I have done nor for what I have left undone.

I am reminded of a story once told by Mullah Mustafa Barzani when he was asked, “How do you define a Kurd?” He answered not with a definition, but with a narrative. A family—a father, a mother, and their child—welcomed a guest for dinner. During the meal, the mother accidentally passed wind. Embarrassed, she struck the child and scolded him for misbehaving. A few minutes later, the father did the same and again blamed the child. When the guest repeated the act, he too, followed suit, striking the child and rebuking him. Barzani concluded, “That child is the Kurd.”

This story, simple as it may seem, carries a painful truth—one that echoes across generations.

Questions That Refuse to Fade

Yet there are questions that continue to trouble me—questions I have tried, and failed, to fully understand. Why is it that the Kurds so often fail to learn from past mistakes? Time and again, we entrust our fate to temporary opportunities created by conflicts between greater powers, without preparing for what comes next. And change does come—inevitably. We survive only as long as we are needed—or perhaps more accurately, as long as we can be used. When those powers reconcile, we are abandoned.

In the aftermath, we direct our frustration outward, blaming those who once supported us. Rarely do we turn inward—to reflect, to question, and to learn from our own missteps. And so, the cycle continues.

A History of Contribution and Denial

For centuries, we have lived on our land alongside Arabs, Turks, and Persians, sharing both geography and destiny. During periods when these nations sought to strengthen their cultures and identities, Kurds stood beside them, contributing to their advancement.

Many Kurds served broader causes—promoting languages, participating in conquests, and helping build powerful empires. Yet when power eventually consolidated in the hands of others, we were no longer partners. We became, instead, a burden—or worse, a tool used against our own people.

Our existence as a people was denied. Our language was forbidden. Our identity was suppressed. Leaders were executed, unity was fractured, and humiliation was institutionalized. The oppression reached such depths that many Kurds began to feel ashamed of who they were.

Today, we see these patterns repeating themselves in new forms. A significant number of Kurds are affiliated with political movements that openly undermine Kurdish identity. The same regimes that deny Kurdish rights have little difficulty recruiting Kurds—arming, funding, and training them to fight against fellow Kurds who demand even the most basic national rights.

In the past, religion and ideology were used to justify assimilation. Today, such justifications are no longer necessary. Assimilation continues under narrow, often exclusionary ideologies. Disturbingly, some who identify as Kurdish intellectuals participate in these efforts—consciously or not—working against the long-term interests of their own people.

The Crisis of Political Culture

If we examine political parties in Kurdistan, we find that the very concept of a “party” is often misunderstood—or misused.

For many, party affiliation is not rooted in principles or programs, but in loyalty to an individual. Members align themselves with leaders, adopting their positions uncritically—even when those positions contradict the broader Kurdish cause. In some cases, allegiance persists even when leaders cooperate with opposing forces.

For others, party membership is driven by personal gain: a salary, influence, or access to power, rather than a commitment to serve the people.

Leadership structures often encourage this dynamic, prioritizing numerical strength over genuine representation.

The result is a deeply fragmented political landscape. Conflicts between Kurdish parties frequently become so intense that the hostility between them surpasses that directed towards those who oppress Kurdistan. Paradoxically, peace with external adversaries can sometimes be achieved more easily than reconciliation among Kurdish factions themselves. Too often, it takes external powers—“superpowers”—to mediate between Kurdish groups, reminding us of a unity we should have preserved on our own.

Reflections Without Conclusion

These reflections do not come from a place of bitterness, but from a life-long journey of witnessing, learning, and questioning.

I do not claim to hold the answers. But I believe that asking the right questions—honestly and without fear—is the beginning of change. If there is one lesson my journey has taught me, it is this: survival alone is not enough. A people must also strive for self-understanding, accountability, and unity. Until then, the story of that child at the dinner table may continue to define us more than we would like to admit.

History in Motion

At the time this memoir went to press, dramatic developments were unfolding across the Middle East, directly affecting the Kurdish people. Intense military strikes by the United States and Israel against Iran resulted in significant destruction and heavy losses, bringing the Kurds to the forefront of international attention.

Amid these escalating tensions, the United States called upon Iranian Kurds to join the campaign against the Iranian regime. The Kurds, however, chose restraint. Rather than entering the conflict, they demanded firm guarantees that they would not be abandoned once hostilities ceased. Central to their position was the insistence on securing their rights to self-rule within their territories in Iran as a condition for any potential support in efforts to bring about regime change.

The Kurdish people have, at times, placed their trust in powerful external actors—often with devastating consequences. History offers painful reminders. In 1946, reliance on the Soviet Union contributed to the fall

of the Mahabad Republic and the execution of its leaders, including Qazi Muhammad. Later, similar trust was placed in the Shah of Iran, who ultimately abandoned the Kurdish cause, enabling Saddam Hussein to suppress the Kurdish movement. This led to the collapse of armed resistance and forced hundreds of thousands of Kurds into refugee camps, where they endured hardship, humiliation, and oppression.

More recently, the withdrawal of support by the United States once again left Kurdish communities vulnerable, exposed to violence and uncertainty. These repeated experiences highlight a difficult but essential lesson: no nation can rely solely on external powers to secure its future.

It is therefore vital for the Kurds to approach international politics with greater caution, consistency, and strength. True resilience begins from within. Building a unified internal front—grounded in genuine patriotism rather than tribal loyalties or narrow family interests—is essential.

To achieve this, the culture of division and revenge must give way to tolerance, cooperation, and a shared national vision. Kurdish society must evolve beyond fragmented alliances towards a cohesive and inclusive national identity. Priorities must be set wisely: the wellbeing and dignity of the people must come first. A population that is silenced, impoverished, or struggling to meet basic needs cannot effectively contribute to the realization of freedom or statehood.

Equally important is the rejection of superficial displays of progress. Grand skyscrapers and vast shopping malls mean little if ordinary citizens lack the means to support their daily lives. Such misplaced priorities mirror the failures of many authoritarian regimes, which invest heavily in appearances and military power while neglecting the fundamental needs of their people.

Justice must stand at the core of any nation striving for freedom. Laws must be applied fairly and consistently, without favoritism based on political affiliation, family ties, or personal connections. When justice is compromised, the consequences are inevitably severe.

A strong, just, and united society is the only foundation upon which a lasting and meaningful future can be built.

A Future Yet to Be Written

The Kurdish story is not one of absence, but of endurance—of a people who have persisted despite erasure, who have contributed despite denial, and who continue to exist despite every attempt to silence them. Yet endurance alone cannot define the future.

If history has taught us anything, it is that survival without reflection leads only to repetition. The patterns of division, dependence, and missed opportunity will not break on their own. They demand courage—not the courage shown on battlefields alone, but the quieter, more difficult courage of self-criticism, unity, and long-term vision.

The question is no longer whether the Kurds will endure. They have proven that they will. The question is whether they can transform endurance into agency, memory into wisdom, and suffering into strength.

A nation is not built only through resistance, but through responsibility—towards its people, its values, and its future. Unity must become more than a slogan; it must be practiced in action, protected in times of disagreement, and prioritized over personal or partisan gain. Justice must no longer be an aspiration, but a foundation. And identity must be embraced not as a burden, but as a source of dignity and purpose.

The story of the child at the dinner table has lasted long enough. It is time for a different ending.

Brief CV of Jamal Alemdar

Date of Birth: April 4, 1940 in Sidekan, Erbil, Iraqi Kurdistan

Marital Status: Married, with three children, Shirin, Sherko, and Kamran

Languages: Kurdish, English, Swedish,
Turkish, German, Spanish, Persian, Arabic

Education:

Al- Thaniya primary school in Erbil, 1946-1952

Al. Gharbiyye Intermediate School, Kerkuk, 1952-1955

Thanewiyyet Kerkuk, 1955-1957

Middle East Technical University, 1958-1960

Istanbul Technical University, 1958-1960

KTH, Royal Technical University of Stockholm, M.Sc. in Architecture
1970

Politics:

General Secretary of the Kurdish Student Society in Europe
(KSSE) 1969-1970

Chairman of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) European
Branch 1970

Head of the Kurdistan London Office 1971-1975

Representative of General Barzani and the KDP in Europe 1968-1976

Business:

Started own international business, in China, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Iraq,
Iraqi Kurdistan region, Syria, Jordan, Uruguay, Brazil, Portugal, Spain,
Turkey, Kenya, Zimbabwe, Ghana, Taiwan, UK, USA, Sweden, etc.

Chairman of Tekton Architects, London, 1976-1979

CEO of Acon Services Ltd., London, 1979-1983

CEO of Saud Arabia Business Centre, 1983-1986

Chairman of China Business Group, Beijing, 1986-1993

Chairman of KP-Costain Ltd., 1993-2000

At a time when immigration is fiercely debated and integration more vital than ever, this memoir offers proof of what is possible. It tells the story of Jamal Alemdar, a man whose life transcended borders, bridging cultures, raising the Kurdish cause onto the world stage, and showing how exile can be transformed into belonging.



From humble beginnings in Erbil to the prisons of Turkey and a refugee camp in Sweden, Jamal's life is a story of resilience, reinvention, and remarkable reach. Although an architect, his profession meant little during his time at the camp, but his command of English and Turkish gave him an edge, earning him the role of interpreter and hinting at a lifelong talent for bridging cultures.

In Sweden, he found allies who gave him a platform to advocate, organize, and amplify the Kurdish cause. His deep ties to the Barzani family—the most influential dynasty of modern Kurdish history—opened an intimate window into Kurdish politics and leadership, from the legendary leader Mullah Mustafa Barzani, Idris, Masoud and Nechirvan Barzani.

Jamal's journey later carried him across the globe, from London to China, Saudi Arabia, and Africa, where he led landmark projects and advised leaders at the highest levels. Rich with global encounters, international intrigues, and vivid reflections, this memoir is both one man's extraordinary story and a portrait of the Kurdish struggle that still shapes our world today.



ISBN: 978-91-89863-34-7

