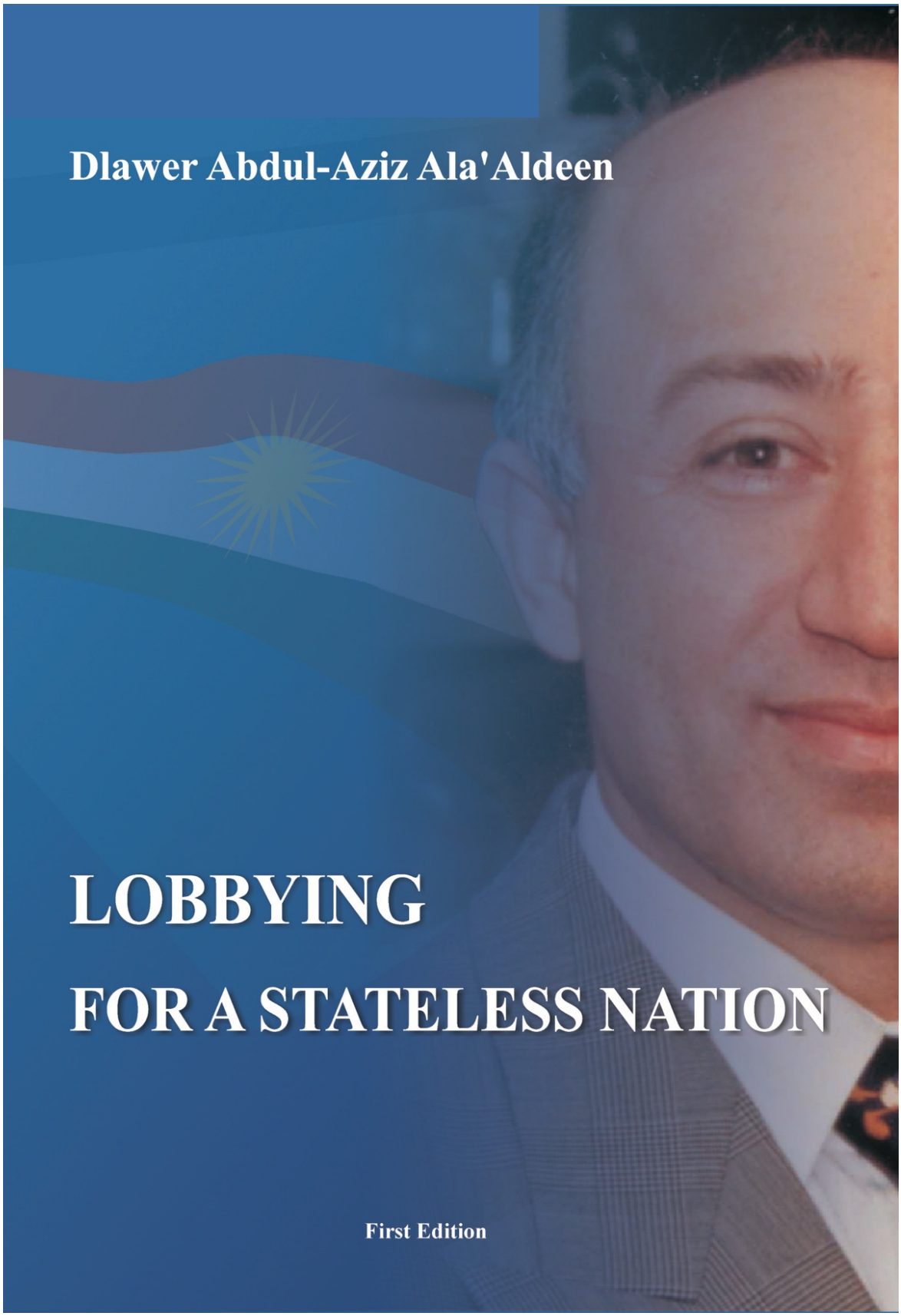

Dlawer Abdul-Aziz Ala'Aldeen

LOBBYING FOR A STATELESS NATION

First Edition

Lobbying for a Stateless Nation

My Lobbying Activities in the United Kingdom

During the 1980s and 1990s

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Dedicated to:

My people

The victims of Anfal campaigns and chemical weapon attacks

My parents, survivors of chemical attacks

My siblings and family

All those who supported me or contributed to our lobbying efforts

Lobbying for a Stateless Nation

This publication is a translation of selected chapters from a book originally published in Kurdish in 2007. Only the chapters relating to my lobbying activities during the 1980s and 1990s are included here.

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Chapter One: Historical Context

From Despair to the Realisation of a Long-Deferred Dream

No other national movement has endured such extreme oscillations between light and darkness as the Kurdish movement. It has always existed between two opposing poles of destiny. The curve of Kurdish struggle, like a sudden landslide, has repeatedly plunged from its highest point to its lowest. At various moments, it has hovered on the edge of extinction: threatened by annihilation, assimilation, drowning, or erasure. The Kurdish movement surviving such an environment, standing against the torrents of the great empires of the age, is nothing short of miraculous. For the first time in its long history, it now moves, however cautiously, towards the summit.

A Struggle for Survival

Successive Greek, Roman, Persian, Arab, and Turkish empires swept across the region, each bearing its own language, culture, and religion. Many of them settled permanently and succeeded in erasing the national identities of peoples who differed racially, linguistically, and culturally from the dominant order. When the Arab Empire surged across the Levant, Mesopotamia, and North Africa in the name of Islam, it absorbed and dissolved ancient peoples: the Phoenicians of the Levant, the Copts of Egypt, the Berbers of North Africa, and countless others. Their names were virtually erased, their identities folded into a single imperial narrative.

The Kurds followed a different path. Although they embraced Islam early and lived for fourteen centuries as neighbours and often subjects of Muslim Arabs, they did not become Arabs. Instead, they remained a people defining a northern frontier for the Arabs. From the era of Imam Hussein through the Umayyad, Abbasid, and Ottoman periods, Kurdistan became a perpetual theatre of bloodshed in the Middle East. One after another, Arab, Persian, and Turkish empires invaded, each seeking in its own way to assimilate the Kurds.

In the past century, especially during the Cold War, the heirs of these empires continued the same campaign under new banners, this time in the name of nationalism and patriotism. Yet despite all this, the Kurdish identity endured.

Neither the ultranationalist foundations of the Turkish state, nor the brutal Ba‘athist dictatorships of Iraq and Syria, nor the rule of the Persian Shiite Islam succeeded in dissolving the Kurdish people or melting their political movement into the dominant powers surrounding them.

Survival, in this sense, was itself a form of resistance.

It is evident that the harshness of the mountains of Kurdistan, combined with the courage and revolutionary spirit of its people, has long served as a guarantee for the survival of Kurdish culture, language, traditions, and national identity. Even now, at the end of the twentieth century, in an era shaped by globalisation and the so-called war on terror, the Kurdish movement can no longer be forced backwards, nor can it be dissolved into its neighbours. Today, it is the dictatorial regimes who are struggling to survive, clinging to the brittle branches of a dead tree, attempting to confront the future with the laws and instincts of the Cold War. As the World Order shifts, a new opening has emerged for the Kurds of the south, an opening that may yet form the foundation of an independent state.

Sweet Dreams Come True

In the past, when a Peshmerga took up arms and headed for the mountains, when a political leader sketched the strategy of a movement, or when a lobbyist spoke for Kurdistan abroad, the dream went no further than autonomy and self-rule. None of them imagined governing from within the state rather than opposing it from the margins. Today, that dream has taken a tangible form. Kurdish politicians stand at the top of the administrative hierarchy of a semi-independent federal Region. The Peshmerga are entrusted, by constitutional mandate, with the defence of the homeland. Kurdish lobbyists now speak not merely as activists, but as representatives of the Kurdistan Regional Government. These were once distant aspirations. Today, they are lived realities.

In September 1984, at the height of the Iran-Iraq War, as the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) was engaged in talks with Baghdad and the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) operated from Iranian territory, I left Kurdistan via Iran, then Syria and settled in the United Kingdom. After establishing myself and learning the rhythms of British life, I gradually became familiar with the country’s political system. Exile, however, was neither easy nor safe, especially for those who remained active in the Kurdish opposition. Saddam’s regime was deeply embedded in Europe and did not hesitate to pursue, arrest, or assassinate its opponents. At the time, Margaret Thatcher’s Conservative government supported Baghdad against Iran and chose to overlook the regime’s inhuman conduct. Lobbying in Britain, therefore, carried real risks, particularly for anyone with family still inside Iraq.

Kurdish society in Britain was then very small. The total number of Kurds across the country did not exceed a few thousands. Most lived quietly, detached from Kurdish communal life and distant from the political fate of their homeland. Newroz celebrations, at best, filled a hall of three hundred people, families included. Those engaged in social and cultural work numbered no more than one or two hundred, and the same familiar faces appeared at every gathering. Much of this activity took place outside party structures. Participation in demonstrations, vigils, overnight protests, and organised advocacy for Kurdish human rights was limited to a handful. Those fluent in English and in the language of British governance, those capable of acting as public voices for the movement, were fewer still, counted on the fingers of one hand.

Only toward the end of the 1980s did this begin to change, as the migration of Kurdish youth and families from both south and north Kurdistan slowly increased. With them came new energy, new urgency, and the first signs that helplessness and hopelessness might, one day, give way to the realisation of long-deferred dreams.

However, after the Anfal genocidal campaign and the crossing of the Peshmerga forces to the Iranian side, between 1987 and 1991, the number of refugees suddenly increased, and a significant number of former Peshmergas and intellectuals and party cadres arrived in Britain, and many actively participated in social movements. However, until the early 1990s, the size of Kurdish society in Britain had not yet reached the critical mass to become influential and impact policies in the country. In the mid-1990s, however, the double embargo imposed by the regime and the United Nations on the Kurdistan Region, and the fratricidal war between the PUK and KDP, led to an influx of migrants to Europe, to the extent that the image of the Kurds has become an icon of, or synonymous with, refugees. Tens of thousands of Kurds from southern Kurdistan arrived in Britain and settled throughout the country. The mass migration of Kurds and the development of Kurdish society brought many benefits to the movement, despite the emergence of various problems and disadvantages.

In the past, Kurdistan had no living connection with the outside world, and its network of contacts, at the national level, was not at the level needed to secure the required knowledge, expertise, cultural assistance and political support for the Kurdish people. But with the growth and dispersion of refugees in all four corners of the earth, Kurdish influence in the world is now at a much higher level. Thanks to the Kurdish community abroad (or Kurdish diaspora), the standard of living in Kurdistan during the sanction years remained higher than in the rest of Iraq. In the 1990s, until the change of regime, more than a billion dollars flowed into Kurdistan, keeping the country's economy alive. During the double blockade (the UN sanctions and Baghdad's blockade on Kurdistan), our people survived the scourge of famine thanks to this aid.

In the 1980s, Kurdish society abroad was open-minded, responsible and creative in many ways. In times of crisis, they lobbied together despite ideological and party differences. Unfortunately, most of the time, the party members were busy with party politics, and their working methods were classical. Their relationship mirrored that of the parties inside Kurdistan. That is, when the parties were united in Kurdistan, their branches abroad cooperated, and during the fratricide, society in diaspora was fragmented, and the partisans carried out destructive activities.

Regime Threats and Intelligence Surveillance

The situation in the 1980s was extremely sensitive for lobbying. The vast majority of the Kurds in the UK were young and unmarried, while their families and relatives were in the hands of the regime. With any activity against the regime, they risked their lives and those of their families. Saddam's regime had an endless capacity to gather information about active members abroad and had spies at all levels of society. In some cases, we were aware of who the spies were; however, the absence of concrete evidence and the influence of opposing parties allowed them to continue attending meetings and participating in activities. As a result, trust eroded within the society, and no one fully trusted a new acquaintance. People exchanged personal information with hesitation and fear. Friends' visits to each other's houses did not go beyond the ring of relatives and friends very close to each other. In meetings, we had to be confidential and try to protect our information and always ensure the safety of our families. Each of us had an artificial nickname and tried to hide our real name from our new friends. When demonstrating in front of the regime's embassy, we had to cover our faces and protest with masks and scarves.

Despite all precautions and warnings, the regime’s intelligence apparatus was able to gather detailed information about each of us. In 1985, the first meeting of the Kurdish Cultural Centre in London was held, and I was one of its three panel chairs (moderators). Inside the community, and even beyond it, I was known as Dr Aiso. Yet many people knew me personally, and my real identity could not be concealed for long. From that moment on, I was exposed to the risk of interrogation, intimidation, and retaliation by the Iraqi embassy.

In March 1987, following a demonstration in front of the Iraqi embassy, I gave an interview to ITV News channel. On the evening of the second day after the protest, an Arab man called me from the embassy. His voice was calm, almost casual. “We know who you are and where you come from,” he said. “I advise you to take advantage of Iraq’s new amnesty and return. If you do not return, then stop fighting against your great country. A bullet costs a quarter of a dinar; we will cool you down.”

What shocked me most was not the threat itself, but the precision. How did they have my phone number? I decided to change it immediately. The next day, I

discovered they already had my address. That morning, I received three items in the post: a newspaper, an official statement announcing the regime's amnesty, and a note bearing a blunt warning. *If you do not shut up, we will silence you.*

Such intimidation did not slow our work. On the contrary, it hardened our resolve. We continued to organise demonstrations and conferences, to document and publicise the regime's human rights violations, and to engage with journalists, broadcasters, members of parliament, political parties, and civil society organisations. Alongside this, we maintained cultural, social, and political activities within the British Kurdish community. Coordination with Kurdish parties and grassroots organisations never ceased.

Everything changed after August 2, 1990, the day Kuwait was occupied. From that moment, Kurdish society abroad was granted a rare breathing space. The regime's embassies found themselves under international scrutiny and political pressure, unable to monitor, intimidate, or sabotage Kurdish activity as before. Kurds in exile became more visible, more confident, and more active.

After the liberation of Kuwait, the return of refugees, and the partial liberation of Kurdistan, Saddam's regime was severely weakened. This collapse translated into an unprecedented sense of freedom for Kurds abroad. Mental barriers fell. Political caution loosened. Fear receded. Social and security constraints dissolved across the diaspora. Even Kurds who had previously studied abroad at the regime's expense, once cautious, silent, or complicit, began to shed their fears and participate in relief and reconstruction efforts. Some who had once been Ba'athists or informants quietly turned toward social work and humanitarian assistance. Alongside the arrival of new refugees, this shift dramatically expanded the circle of active Kurdish figures abroad.

For the first time, the community was no longer whispering. It was speaking openly, collectively, and without looking over its shoulder.

Iraqi Intelligence Records on My Activities

After the fall of the regime in 2003, a file containing Iraqi intelligence reports on my movements and activities came into the possession of Kosrat Rasul Ali, then Vice President of the Kurdistan Region. He forwarded the file to me.

Reading it was a sobering experience. The documents revealed that, at first, the Iraqi Embassy in London knew almost nothing about my background. They were aware only that my name was Dlawer Aziz. They had my address, but no knowledge of my life in Kurdistan or my family history. In one official letter, the embassy formally requested the Erbil Security Directorate and local district authorities to investigate my identity and provide detailed information about my father, should they be able to identify him.

In the course of that inquiry, the Erbil security forces arrested the father of another Dilawar Aziz, who happened to be living in the United Kingdom at the time. He had never been involved in lobbying or political activity. I did not know him personally then, but I met him in 2005 and discussed the matter in detail. He told me of the repeated interrogations of his father, the harassment of his family, and the cruelty of the local authorities who had made their lives unbearable. Today (2007), Mr Dilawar Aziz works at the Iraqi Embassy in London and takes pride in serving the Kurdish community, an outcome that speaks volumes about the ironies of history.

15 August 2007

Chapter Two

From Halabja to the Kuwait War

When I arrived in the United Kingdom, as a refugee doctor, I knew very little about the art or discipline of lobbying. In the early years, as I familiarised myself with my new surroundings and gradually engaged with the Kurdish community, I participated in political and social activities as an independent Kurd, unaffiliated and neutral.

Most of these activities took the form of meetings, seminars, and events organised either by political parties themselves or by party-affiliated groups, such as student organisations. By then, trust and cooperation among Kurdish parties had significantly eroded. Negotiations between the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and the Iraqi regime were still ongoing and nearing their conclusion. As a result, the National Democratic Front (NDF, JWD) and the PUK operated separately, and often in opposition to one another, each maintaining its own networks, initiatives, and external contacts. Even within the NDF, relations were strained. Parties distrusted one another, and their members competed openly for influence and visibility.

After the collapse of the PUK-regime talks, it took considerable time for members of the PUK and the NDF, comprising the Democratic Party (KDP), Communist Party, Socialist Party, People's Party, and several non-Kurdish groups, to draw closer again. The Kurds in diaspora were as fragmented as those in Kurdistan, and political activity abroad reflected the same divisions. Coordination was weak, and collective action was rare.

Against this backdrop, the establishment of the Kurdish Cultural Centre (KCC) in 1985 marked a turning point. Founded through the determination and commitment of a small group of intellectuals and independent loyalists, the Centre became a unifying, neutral space, dedicated not to party politics but to the Kurdish cause itself and to the service of Kurdish culture, history, society, and collective destiny. In practice, it functioned as a Kurdish embassy in the United Kingdom, often serving the community more effectively than any official diplomatic mission could.

Yet even this achievement was not immune to internal tensions. Like many Kurdish organisations, the Centre's activities were largely inward-looking,

focused on Kurds engaging with other Kurds. Over time, political parties sought to dominate their administration and use its resources for partisan ends. These struggles came to the surface during elections for the Centre's management committee, which were often marked by bitterness, campaigns riddled with rival lists, accounting disputes, factional manoeuvring, and personal attacks. The very space created to transcend division was repeatedly pulled back into the gravity of it.

Before the Halabja catastrophe, the progressive Kurdish lobby in Britain, meaning Kurdish engagement with British society and institutions, was weak, fragmented, and largely ineffective. Activities were almost entirely channelled through political parties, each maintaining its own foreign contacts and operating in isolation from the others. There was little coordination and almost no sense of collective strategy. This situation persisted until the rapprochement between the PUK and the KDP and the formation of the Kurdistan Front, and it remained largely unchanged through the early stages of the Anfal campaign, until the day Halabja was attacked with chemical weapons.

From that moment on, everything changed. Kurdish lobbying took on a new form and a new urgency. Anyone with the will and opportunity became involved. Loyalists participated according to their abilities, skills, experience, and expertise. Demonstrations, marches, overnight vigils, aid collections, public meetings, and dozens of other forms of activism emerged almost spontaneously. What had once been hesitant and divided became broad, emotional, and relentless.

Yet it soon became clear that political passion alone was not enough. The Kurdish political and social struggle required scientific grounding, credible evidence, verified information, and expert analysis. This need had been discussed for years among friends and activists in London, but little concrete progress had been made. The chemical attack on Halabja changed that overnight.

The Embryo: Kurdish-British Scientific and Medical Support Group

In March 1988, in the immediate aftermath of Halabja, we faced an urgent dual responsibility. On the one hand, we needed solid medical and scientific information to explain, accurately and convincingly, the suffering caused by chemical weapons, and to communicate this to the British public. On the other hand, we needed to provide practical medical support, expertise, and advice to the victims themselves.

Until then, such efforts had been scattered and largely individual. Newspapers and public institutions often dismissed our claims, viewing our evidence as political rather than scientific. Without independent expert validation, our voices struggled to carry weight.

With the help of a group of British friends - scientists, doctors, lobbyists, and intellectuals - we formed a joint Kurdish-British support organisation with me as coordinator. Its purpose was to mobilise scientists, medical professionals, academics, and experts to work together: to gather scientific evidence exposing the Iraqi regime's crimes, to confront the regime and embarrass the British and American governments, and to apply sustained pressure on behalf of, and obtain aid for, the victims and refugees of Anfal and chemical warfare.

The organisation was initially named the *Kurdish British Scientific and Medical Support Group* (KBSMSG). Among its British members were Elizabeth Sigmund, William Sigmund, Alistair Hay, Julian Perry-Robinson, and Reverend Alan Rice. Alongside them were active yet independent members of the Kurdish community, such as Ibrahim Baravi and Kamal Ketuli, as well as experienced party-political cadres, experts, and linguists. I was entrusted with serving as the group's secretary.

Over time, the group became more cohesive and increasingly structured. I invited more than thirty Kurdish medical and scientific professionals to a meeting that, in effect, became our inaugural mini-conference. Around twenty participants attended, marking the first collective effort to bring Kurdish expertise together in an organised and purposeful way. On September 3, 1988, we held the formal inaugural assembly at which an executive committee was officially elected and appointed. Professor Kamal Majid was elected president, I continued as secretary, and Jaafar Qadir was appointed treasurer. Kamal Ketuli, Kamal Mirawdali, and Faraidoon Rafiq Helmi joined as committee members.

This committee became the nucleus of what would evolve into a scientific and medical society, one that, for decades later, remains active. What began as an urgent response to a single atrocity grew into an enduring institution, rooted in the belief that truth, when armed with science, could challenge even the most brutal denial.

Kurdish Scientific and Medical Association (KSMA)

After a period of sustained and effective lobbying, the public and, increasingly, policymakers began to recognise the role played by the Kurdish-British Scientific and Medical Support Group. As our network expanded and our credibility grew, the organisation gradually moved from an *ad hoc* initiative toward formal institutionalisation.

We began by drafting a constitution. This proved to be a demanding and time-consuming process. Every word, phrase, and definition were debated at length, often repeatedly, reflecting both our sense of responsibility and our diverse

perspectives. The result was a carefully constructed document that, remarkably, remains largely unchanged and in force to this day.

In February 1989, we issued formal invitations to doctors and academics within the Kurdish community. At the same time, we personally approached trusted colleagues and loyal supporters, asking them to lend their voices and credibility to the organisation. The response was encouraging. Letters of support arrived from many quarters, confirming that the moment for consolidation had arrived.

On March 18, 1989, following a large march and demonstration in London marking the anniversary of the Halabja tragedy, we gathered in the hall of the Kurdish Cultural Centre from six to nine in the evening. With the presence of thirty supporters and members, and with guests who had travelled from abroad, among them Najat Mahwi from Germany, we convened the founding conference of the organisation.

At that meeting, we formally renamed the group the *Kurdish Scientific and Medical Association (KSMA)*. Once again, I was entrusted with the responsibilities of coordinator/administrator/secretary. Fuad Hanari was elected president, Kamal Ketuli vice president, Jaafar Kadir treasurer, and Sarkawt Karim a member of the executive committee. Fuad Hanari was not widely known within the broader Kurdish community at the time, but I knew of him through family and close friends. He was a long-standing friend of my father and a highly respected professional. I visited him at his home and explained our vision, asking him to lend his name, experience, and credibility to our efforts by serving as president, while I undertook the management, advocacy and the work of building the organisation. He was initially hesitant, cautious about taking on such a public role. After further discussion, however, he agreed. In time, he became far more than a symbolic figurehead. He emerged as a leading activist and made substantial contributions to the growth, credibility, and effectiveness of the organisation.

What had begun as an urgent response to catastrophe had now become a structured institution, one grounded in science, professionalism, and collective responsibility, and committed to giving the Kurdish cause a voice that could no longer be dismissed.

As experience accumulated, the work of the KSMA became steadily more effective, and its circle of supporters and members continued to grow. From the outset, the Association adhered to the same constitution, rules, and programs, and over time, it established a consistent record of active engagement in support of the Kurdish people and the Kurdish community in the diaspora. Kurdish organisations and political parties alike have acknowledged and testified to this historic role.

As circumstances evolved and major events reshaped Kurdistan's political and social landscape, the focus and priorities of the Association evolved as well. In the period following Halabja and Anfal and leading up to the uprising, KSMA's activities centred on lobbying, organising annual commemorations of Halabja, and raising funds for victims and refugees. After the liberation of the Kurdistan Region in southern Kurdistan, the emphasis shifted toward building bridges between Kurdish institutions and scientists and doctors abroad, with the aim of supporting the emerging Kurdish administration, higher education system, healthcare sector, and related fields.

One milestone exemplified this transition. On October 26, 1991, KSMA organised the first International Kurdish Scientific and Medical Association Conference. The event brought together 126 scientists and physicians from across the world. Participants travelled from a wide range of countries, including Nadir Nadirov from Kazakhstan; Azad Khanaqa, Ahmed Jilusi, Najib Khafaf, and Warya Karim from Germany; Ahmed Osman and Fuad Darwish from the United States; as well as several colleagues from Scandinavian and other European countries.

The conference marked a turning point: from emergency advocacy to long-term institution-building, and from survival to reconstruction grounded in knowledge, professionalism, and international cooperation.

Beyond Advocacy

One of the central objectives of KSMA was to collect reliable data, statistics, analysis, and expert advice to support lobbying efforts, strengthen the Kurdish national movement, and assist Kurdish communities both in Kurdistan and abroad. Beyond advocacy, the Association played a decisive role in supporting universities, higher education students, and the development of academic leadership.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, KSMA offered guidance and practical support to refugee students and professionals in the diaspora, helping them navigate unfamiliar systems and connecting them with colleagues in their fields. After the partial liberation of the Kurdistan Region in the early 1990s, the Association shifted its attention toward rebuilding. KSMA worked to link Kurdistan's universities with institutions abroad, secure material assistance, and obtain scholarships for Kurdish students. Dozens of lecturers, scholars, and researchers were sent to Kurdistan through KSMA to teach, train, and contribute their expertise in various capacities.

As the importance of higher education support became increasingly evident, and as the number of universities, colleges, and students grew, it was clear that this work required a dedicated structure. The scale of the task demanded sustained

focus and a separate organisational effort. In the summer of 1992, we therefore established the Salahaddin University Support Committee (the sole university in the Kurdistan Region at the time), composed of active members of KSMA alongside several committed volunteers from outside the Association.

Following the establishment of the Universities of Duhok and Sulaimani, and several new institutes, Fuad Hanari and I visited Kurdistan in the summer of 1992. There, we witnessed an ambitious expansion of higher education taking shape against a backdrop of extremely limited national resources and strained human capacity. The determination was unmistakable, but so were the constraints.

On our return journey, travelling through Turkey, we reflected at length on what we had seen. We agreed that the scale of the challenge required a dedicated and broader framework of support, one that would serve all higher education institutions in Kurdistan, not only Salahaddin University. During that journey, we resolved to establish a new, focused network to meet this need.

Fuad Hanari agreed to lead and spearhead this initiative, while I committed to continuing my work through the KSMA. Soon after arriving back in London, we met at KCC, and after long deliberation, the Salahaddin University Support Committee was renamed the **'***Committee for the Support of Higher Education Institutions in Iraqi Kurdistan' (SCHEIK)***.** Under the leadership and dedication of Fuad Hanari, Mohammed Khelani, Shirwan Ghafoor, and a number of tireless and loyal colleagues, the committee carried out substantial and lasting work. Its activities ranged from sending funds, medical equipment, books, and essential supplies to facilitating professional examinations and other forms of institutional support. I, for my part, was able to secure a substantial amount of medical equipment and textbooks from my own hospital in Nottingham, including a large and cumbersome anaerobic cabinet for a microbiology laboratory. Mohammed Kheilani and several colleagues hired a van, collected the equipment and drove it to London, to be transported by truck all the way to Kurdistan. There were many such examples of voluntary effort, often unrecorded and carried out quietly, driven not by resources or comfort, but by commitment and a shared sense of responsibility.

Among our most significant achievements at SCHIEK was securing recognition from the UK General Medical Council for Salahaddin University's Medical College, followed later by those of the Universities of Sulaimani and Duhok. This recognition opened the door for medical graduates to pursue further study and professional practice in the United Kingdom. The impact on morale within Kurdistan's emerging medical and academic institutions was profound. Since then, many doctors trained at these universities have come to the UK, benefiting directly from this hard-won achievement and, in turn, strengthening both Kurdish and British professional communities.

Each of us activists contributed in whatever way we could, through KSMA or SCHEIK, through other organisations, or through individual initiative. What has always been clear to me is that the greatest asset of the Kurdish movement abroad lies in its professionals: men and women who volunteer their skills, knowledge, and experience in the service of their country. Drawing on their understanding of foreign systems, they have worked tirelessly, often quietly, to support Kurdistan through their professional expertise.

Today, Kurdistan possesses far greater financial capacity than in those early years, and its doors are open to the world. We, as individuals and institutions, have sought to use these new opportunities to further train Kurdistan's academic leadership and to expand the number of qualified teachers, students, and administrators within the higher education system. At the University of Nottingham, we have been able to organise dozens of student scholarships and several training programs for academic leaders. University-to-university relations have reached a notably high level.

In 2004-2005, KSMA published 'Zanin', the first annual electronic scientific journal in English. This achievement was made possible by the courage and commitment of a group of Kurdish academics in Kurdistan and abroad. In addition to the authors and scientific advisers, Dilan Roshani played a central role in designing the journal and publishing it online. As Editor-in-Chief, I oversaw the publication of two issues, both of which remained accessible at www.zaninonline.org.

The journal, notable for its high scientific standards, was conceived as a platform to bring together Kurdish scholars at home and in the diaspora. We hoped that, in time, Kurdistan's universities would adopt and develop it into a national scientific research platform. It may be too early to claim success. Kurdistan has yet to fully escape inherited systems of academic control, shaped by both the wider Middle Eastern context and the legacy of the Iraqi state, and its universities and research centres have not yet reached complete intellectual independence. Nevertheless, academic leaders continue to aspire to raise standards and align Kurdish higher education with global norms. That aspiration, sustained over time, remains one of the most promising signs for the future.

Examples of Scientific and Medical Activities in the 1980s

The KBSMSG, which later evolved into the KSMA, worked in close coordination with the Kurdish Cultural Centre, the Kurdistan Front, and a range of other Kurdish organisations. One of the guiding principles of the Association was the recognition that, until Kurdistan was liberated and free elections could be held, the popular Kurdish political parties were the *de facto* representatives of the Kurdish people. In the absence of state institutions, they had filled the political vacuum and assumed leadership of the national movement.

For this reason, we believed that any independent non-partisan professional organisation seeking to serve the Kurdish cause, whether in support of the Peshmerga, refugees, internally displaced people, or Kurdish society more broadly, had to work in coordination with the political parties and maintain communication with their representatives. This was not a matter of ideology, but of pragmatism, practicality and impact. Without such coordination, efforts risked duplication, confusion, or unintended interference with one another.

Experience showed that lobbying conducted in isolation, without alignment and mutual awareness, was weaker and less productive. By contrast, coordinated action, respectful of roles and responsibilities, strengthened both political advocacy and humanitarian impact, allowing scientific and medical initiatives to reinforce the broader struggle rather than fragment it.

Kurdish Medical Aid

One of the organisations with which we worked closely was *Kurdish Medical Relief (KMR)***.** Its president was Lord Avebury (Eric Lubbock, 4th Baron Avebury), an English politician and human rights campaigner. Its secretary was the lawyer Mary Dynes, and among its most active members were Munira Moftizadeh, Rizgar Amin, and Marie Oshay. With the support of charitable institutions and members of the Kurdish community, they worked tirelessly to raise funds and to provide medical assistance, legal aid, and advice to refugees.

Funding came from a combination of charitable grants and donations collected directly from the Kurdish community. I vividly recall one particular day, February 4, 1989, when more than fifteen members of the KBSMSG and KMR joined together for a fundraising campaign on the busy streets of London. Each of us carried banners depicting the plight of Kurdish refugees. I positioned myself at the exit of Covent Garden Underground station, a poster of Halabja hanging from my neck, shaking a hand-held charity donation box and loudly calling out for donations. By the end of that single day, we, collectively, had raised three thousand pounds.

Through such sustained and practical efforts, KMR played a significant role, not only in contributing to humanitarian assistance for Kurdish refugees in Turkey, but also in helping to shoulder part of the financial burden of lobbying and advocacy in Britain. Their work demonstrated how coordinated, grassroots commitment could translate directly into both relief and political impact.

Halabja Memorial Committee

To strengthen lobbying efforts and coordinate with other organisations, we established a joint committee to engage directly with British society. The committee was initially known as the *Kurdish and British Solidarity Group*, and

was later renamed the *Remember Halabja Committee (*1989**),** under which it continued its work. I served as a representative of the KBSMSG (later KSMA) and as one of the committee's coordinators.

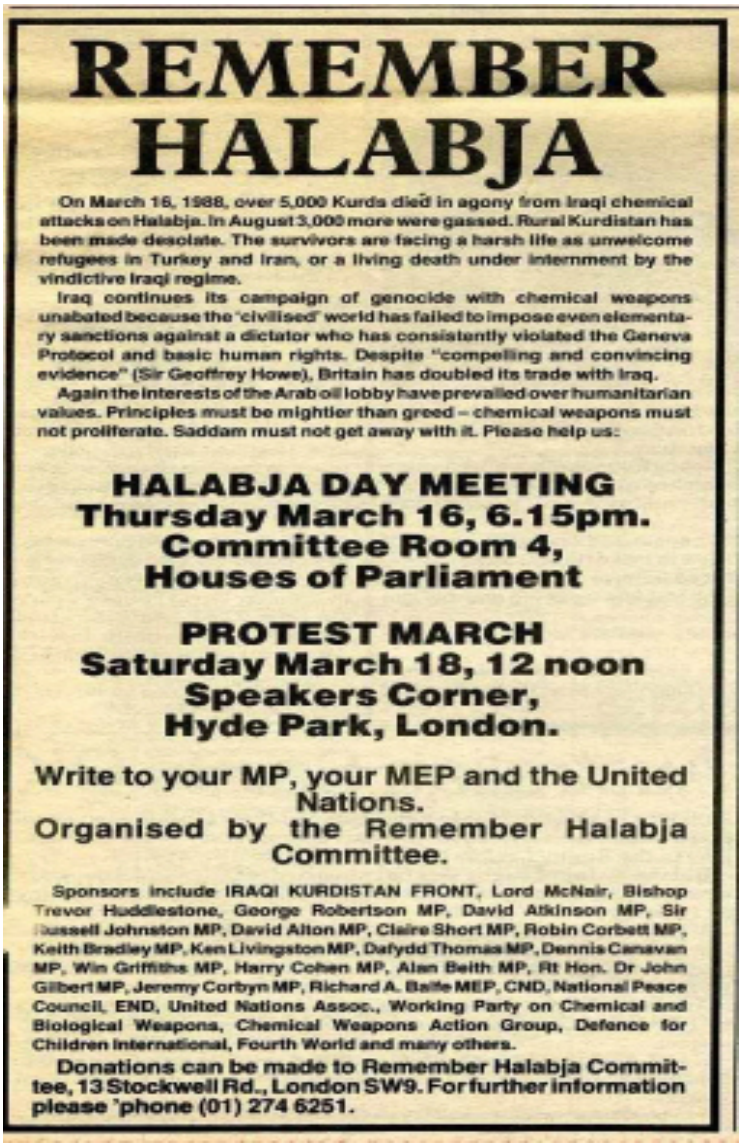
The committee brought together representatives from across the Kurdish political spectrum. Hoshyar Zebari and Siamand Banna represented the KDP; in several meetings, Hoshyar Zebari also acted as moderator, chairing sessions. Kawa Fatah Besarani represented the Communists, while Khidir Masum and Sabah Saeed represented the PUK. Samir Faily occasionally represented the Kurdistan Socialist Party, and Jabar Faily represented the People's Party. At times, British experts and friends joined our meetings, though their participation was not regular.

The Committee's most significant achievement was the commemoration of the Halabja anniversary held at the Palace of Westminster on 16 March 1989. The event was attended by several prominent British public figures, many of whom spoke openly in support of the Kurdish people and the victims of Halabja. Among them were Bishop Trevor Huddleston, Archbishop of St James's Church in Piccadilly; Lord Kilbracken, a former journalist; Lord Avebury of the Liberal Party; Bruce Kent, President of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament; George Robertson, Labour MP and Shadow Defence Secretary; David Philip and David McDowell of *Minority Rights Group*; and Alistair Hay, a chemical pathologist and leading expert on chemical weapons.

Two days later, on March 18, 1989, the Committee organised a major demonstration and march, known as the March of Remembrance. At one o'clock in the afternoon, a large crowd of Kurds and British supporters gathered at Hyde Park Corner. As one of the organisers, I was responsible for coordinating the speakers. Among those who addressed the crowd were Jeremy Corbyn, a Labour MP; Professor Steven Rose of the Open University; Angela Kenning of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament; and Theresa Dean of the National Peace Council.

Following the speeches, the march proceeded along Park Lane and through Knightsbridge, eventually reaching the Iraqi Embassy. There, the demonstration concluded with chants and protests that continued until four o'clock in the afternoon. From there, many of us went directly to the Kurdish Cultural Centre, where, at six o'clock that evening, the founding conference of the Kurdish Scientific and Medical Association (KSMA) began.

The day captured the convergence of memory, protest, and institution-building, mourning the past while laying foundations for a more organised and credible struggle ahead.



REMEMBER HALABJA

On March 16, 1988, over 5,000 Kurds died in agony from Iraqi chemical attacks on Halabja. In August 3,000 more were gassed. Rural Kurdistan has been made desolate. The survivors are facing a harsh life as unwelcome refugees in Turkey and Iran, or a living death under internment by the vindictive Iraqi regime.

Iraq continues its campaign of genocide with chemical weapons unabated because the 'civilised' world has failed to impose even elementary sanctions against a dictator who has consistently violated the Geneva Protocol and basic human rights. Despite "compelling and convincing evidence" (Sir Geoffrey Howe), Britain has doubled its trade with Iraq.

Again the interests of the Arab oil lobby have prevailed over humanitarian values. Principles must be mightier than greed – chemical weapons must not proliferate. Saddam must not get away with it. Please help us:

HALABJA DAY MEETING
Thursday March 16, 6.15pm.
Committee Room 4,
Houses of Parliament

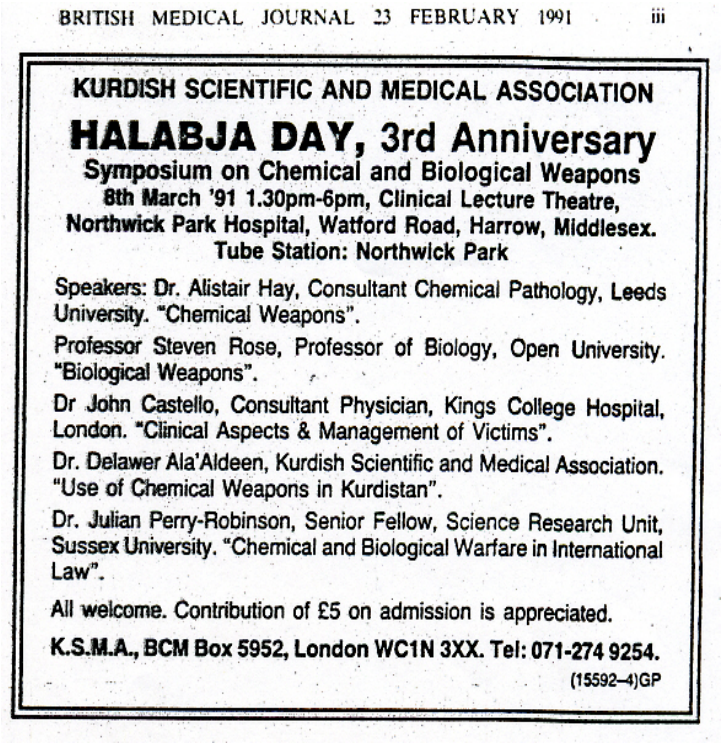
PROTEST MARCH
Saturday March 18, 12 noon
Speakers Corner,
Hyde Park, London.

Write to your MP, your MEP and the United Nations.
Organised by the Remember Halabja Committee.

Sponsors include IRAQI KURDISTAN FRONT, Lord McNair, Bishop Trevor Huddlestone, George Robertson MP, David Atkinson MP, Sir Russell Johnston MP, David Alton MP, Claire Short MP, Robin Corbett MP, Keith Bradley MP, Ken Livingston MP, Dafydd Thomas MP, Dennis Canavan MP, Win Griffiths MP, Harry Cohen MP, Alan Beith MP, Rt Hon. Dr John Gilbert MP, Jeremy Corbyn MP, Richard A. Balfe MEP, CND, National Peace Council, END, United Nations Assoc., Working Party on Chemical and Biological Weapons, Chemical Weapons Action Group, Defence for Children International, Fourth World and many others.

Donations can be made to Remember Halabja Committee, 13 Stockwell Rd., London SW9. For further information please 'phone (01) 274 6251.

This poster was advertised in newspapers and pasted on walls across London. We were expected to remove the posters the following day. However, my colleagues had used a strong adhesive, making this impossible. On Monday, 20 March 1989, George Robertson MP informed me that NatWest Bank had lodged an official complaint with his office and demanded immediate action. I went personally to assess the situation and found that numerous posters had been placed on the exterior wall of the Bank, and they were extremely difficult to remove.



BRITISH MEDICAL JOURNAL 23 FEBRUARY 1991 iii

KURDISH SCIENTIFIC AND MEDICAL ASSOCIATION

HALABJA DAY, 3rd Anniversary

Symposium on Chemical and Biological Weapons

8th March '91 1.30pm-6pm, Clinical Lecture Theatre, Northwick Park Hospital, Watford Road, Harrow, Middlesex. Tube Station: Northwick Park

Speakers: Dr. Alistair Hay, Consultant Chemical Pathology, Leeds University. "Chemical Weapons".

Professor Steven Rose, Professor of Biology, Open University. "Biological Weapons".

Dr John Castello, Consultant Physician, Kings College Hospital, London. "Clinical Aspects & Management of Victims".

Dr. Delawer Ala'Aldeen, Kurdish Scientific and Medical Association. "Use of Chemical Weapons in Kurdistan".

Dr. Julian Perry-Robinson, Senior Fellow, Science Research Unit, Sussex University. "Chemical and Biological Warfare in International Law".

All welcome. Contribution of £5 on admission is appreciated.

K.S.M.A., BCM Box 5952, London WC1N 3XX. Tel: 071-274 9254.

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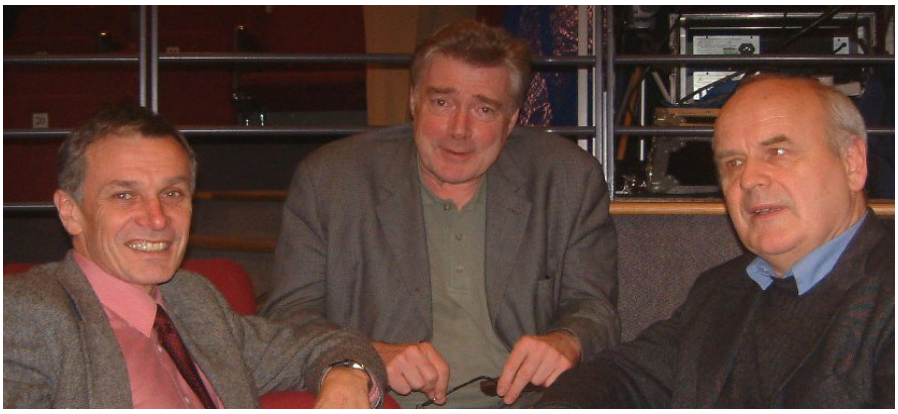
The KSMA continued to organise the Halabja Day commemorations and promoted them annually in the high impact British Medical Journa, BMJ



Alistair Hay, Julian Perry-Robinson, Gwyn Roberts

Campaign for the Refugees of Chemical Attacks in Bahdinan

In late August and early September 1988, more than 43,000 refugees from the Bahdinan area of southern Kurdistan fled the final phase of the Anfal campaign, fearing imminent chemical attacks. They crossed into Turkey, where they were placed in three camps: Diyarbakır, Mardin, and Muş.

In response, the Kurdish community in Britain, together with sympathetic British lobbyists, launched an urgent campaign to support and protect the refugees. Our objectives were twofold: to expose and discredit the Iraqi regime's crimes, and to apply pressure on the Turkish government, which at the time appeared intent on forcing the refugees to return. Ankara justified its position by claiming that the Iraqi government had declared a general amnesty. To reinforce this narrative, Turkish authorities occasionally invited Iraqi diplomats to visit the camps in an effort to reassure the refugees and persuade them to go back.

In one particularly troubling episode, Turkish authorities transported 2,500 refugees from the Mardin camp to the Iranian border and released them there. Iran initially refused entry, but eventually accepted them as refugees. At the same time, Turkey barred international humanitarian organisations from entering the camps. Instead, the authorities demanded 300 million dollars to manage the situation themselves, funding that no international actor was willing to provide.

From the moment the refugees arrived in Turkey, we, as British-based civil society activists, undertook dozens of coordinated actions. These included letters, formal correspondence, press interviews, and sustained engagement with government officials, members of parliament, and humanitarian organisations. On August 31, 1988, with the support of Jeremy Corbyn and other public figures, we organised a demonstration in front of the Iraqi Embassy. That protest marked the beginning of a broader and more systematic lobbying campaign aimed at protecting the Bahdinan refugees and preventing their forced return.

Occupation of the UN Office

At 10:30 a.m. on September 2, 1988, around fifteen of us entered the United Nations office in London and occupied the director's room. The action took the staff completely by surprise. They immediately called the police, but once our intentions became clear and it was evident that the protest was peaceful, the director asked the police officers to remain outside and not intervene.

Our demand was straightforward and urgent: that the UN Secretary-General at the time, Javier Pérez de Cuéllar, intervene immediately to save the lives of

The Guardian, 3 September 1988. Kurdds demonstrating against the Badinal chemical attachsk

Kurdish refugees facing renewed attacks by the Iraqi regime. At the same time, British media outlets were alerted. Journalists arrived quickly, interviewing us inside the building. Barham Salih of PUK acted as the group's spokesman, though many of us spoke directly, conveying our collective outrage and appeal. Throughout the day, news of the occupation and our condemnation of the Iraqi government were broadcast repeatedly on television and reported widely in the press.

Those who entered the office with us included myself, Sherko Fathullah, Sabah Sabir, Kamal Ketuli, Mohammed Maroof, Hawre Namali, Husam, Kawa Fatah Besarani, and two other Kurds affiliated with the Iraqi Communist Party. Several more Kurds arrived after the police had secured the building. They hung banners outside and began demonstrating. Their delay was because they had already been protesting earlier that morning in front of the Iraqi Cultural Centre and came to the UN office in groups from there.

The director of the UN office forwarded our message directly to Pérez de Cuéllar, who was visiting Portugal at the time. Before five o'clock in the afternoon, a faxed response arrived. In it, the Secretary-General expressed his

sympathy for the suffering of the refugees and the victims of the Iraqi regime, and promised to take action in response to our appeal. With that assurance, we ended the occupation and left the building at around 5:30 p.m.

Criticising the Soviet Union: One Message, Divided Opinions

Under the leadership of Jeremy Corbyn MP, we formed a small but determined delegation composed of myself, two Members of Parliament (Jeremy Corbyn and Harry Cohen), alongside Alistair Hay of the British organisation 'Working Party on Chemical and Biological Weapons'; Lucy Beck and Meg Beresford from the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND); Anne Bennett of the Quaker Peace Group; and several Kurdish activists, including Barham Salih (PUK), Kawa Fatah (Communist), and others.

Over the course of several days, we visited a number of key institutions. Among the most important meetings were our visit to William Waldegrave on September 13, 1988, and our meeting at the Soviet Embassy on September 23. The encounter with Waldegrave proved far more productive than the one with the Soviet representatives. Waldegrave was critical of Saddam's regime but stressed that British and Iraqi interests are best served by engaging the regime and offering advice and criticism behind the scenes.

At the Soviet Union's Embassy, not only did the Soviets reject our criticism, but divisions within our own delegation also became painfully apparent.

At the Soviet Embassy, after Jeremy Corbyn had delivered his remarks, Barham Salih addressed the Consul directly. He accused Soviet scientists of working at the Akashat chemical factory, ostensibly to produce pesticides, which the Iraqi regime was then using to manufacture chemical weapons. The Consul reacted angrily and began to argue back, but Barham stood his ground and repeated his claim. Eventually, the Consul demanded that Barham put his statement in writing, sign it in his own name, and submit it officially on behalf of his (PUK) organisation.

Jeremy Corbyn and Lucy Beck supported Barham's intervention. At that point, however, Kawa Fatah, an active member of the Iraqi Communist Party, intervened in a very different tone. He declared, "The Soviet Union is a permanent friend of the Iraqi people and the Kurdish people. My friend here," - he gestured toward Barham, "is expressing only his personal opinion and that of his organisation. We do not support his words." Without explicitly naming his own organisation, Kawa continued: "I do not believe the Soviets would assist a regime like Saddam's in developing chemical weapons. But we have come here to lodge a criticism of the Soviets' silence in the face of Saddam's crimes. We demand that the Saddam regime be condemned, sanctioned, and exposed."

At these words, the Soviet Consul calmed down and drew a deep breath, which made me deeply unsettled. I asked to intervene. Corbyn said, I would like Dlawer to speak, he is a scientist and independent.

I began by saying:

"I have come here as a scientist and a doctor, and I speak from a position of impartiality. I approach this issue through the lens of human ethics and political ethics. Saddam's war against the Kurds is not a conventional war; it is a war of genocide. Any state that assists Iraq in any capacity, military or non-military, is contributing to the strengthening of the Iraqi regime and to the continuation of that genocidal campaign. In this sense, the Soviet Union bears responsibility for the crime, even if it was not directly involved in the production of chemical weapons, and even if its scientists went to Iraq under the pretext of agricultural assistance. The Akashat issue and military support are real and visible, and cannot simply be denied."

I continued,

"There are three Kurds in this room, and if there were a vote, I would stand with Barham Salih and support his words. Historically, the Kurdish people have regarded the Soviet Union as a friend. Precisely for that reason, its responsibility toward the Kurds is greater than that of Western governments. Yet in practice, the opposite has been the case. We therefore ask you not only to refrain from supporting the Iraqi regime, but also not to remain a passive observer of its crimes. We ask you to take an active role in holding it to account."

Barham then added that the Soviet Union should use its relationship with Iraq to demand access to chemical weapons sites and suspected factories, and to inform its own people, and the wider world, of the truth. The Consul replied that he would take our statements and demands seriously, convey them to his superiors, and inform us of their response.

When we left the embassy, Kawa was visibly angry with both Barham and me. He argued that we should not confront the Soviet Union in the same way we challenged Western governments, warning that such an approach would alienate Moscow. I responded calmly that we had not come to flatter the Soviet Union, or any other member of the UN Security Council, but to hold them all accountable. Complaints, I said, are not expressions of hostility; they are demands for responsibility.

The Voice of the Church for the Refugees

One of our most meaningful achievements, something unprecedented for the Kurdish cause, was persuading Bishop Trevor Huddleston to publicly lend the

voice of the Church to the plight of Kurdish refugees. Huddleston, a renowned cleric with a global reputation for his support of the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa, agreed to dedicate prayers to the displaced Kurds in Diyarbakır, Mardin, and Muş at St James's Church in Piccadilly, London.

I had known the bishop, then seventy-six years old, for some time through English and African friends. He often drew parallels between the Kurdish struggle and that of Black South Africans, seeing in both the same demand for dignity, justice, and recognition. On the evening of September 14, 1988, at eight o'clock, we gathered at the church with a group of English supporters, including Elizabeth Sigmund and her husband Bill. Hazhir Taymourian, then a BBC reporter, and Muzaffar Shafi'i of BBC Persian Service ensured that the prayers were broadcast live on BBC Radio Persian, so that the refugees themselves could hear them.

Inside the church, British Christians stood alongside around thirty Kurds from the community. Several Kurdish children, dressed in traditional clothing, lit candles. Two of them read a message in English addressed to displaced Kurdish children. The moment was quiet, solemn, and deeply moving.

Bishop Huddleston then delivered a powerful address, after which Reverend Alan Rice led the congregation in Christian prayer for the refugees. Elizabeth Sigmund read words of reassurance directed to the Kurds in Turkey, which I

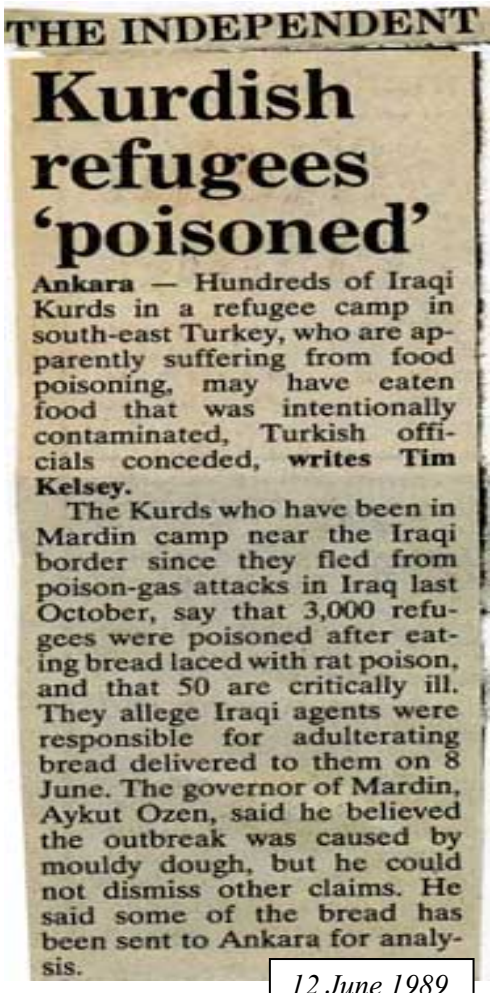
Praying for the victims of Badinan chemical attacks and the refuges in Diyarbakir, Mardin and Mus. Myself with Liz Sigmund and Rev. Alan Rice.

translated. I had prepared a Muslim prayer in Kurdish beforehand, and I read it into the church microphone, offering comfort and reassurance to those listening afar, reminding them that they were not alone, and that the Kurdish community and international charities stood with them.

We concluded the ceremony with the anthem *Ey Reqîb*. Earlier that same morning, word had reached the refugee camps in Turkey, and many refugees listened to the prayers as they were broadcast. For a brief moment, across faiths and borders, the suffering of a forgotten people was carried by the shared language of compassion and solidarity.

Mardin Refugees and Poisoned Bread

On June 8, 1989, Iraqi mercenaries arrived in the Mardin camp and poisoned 2,070 refugees by poisoning the camp's bread. These included 667 children, 740 women and 663 men. Fifty of them were taken to the hospital on the first day. The action was published in the *Independent* newspaper (12 June 1989). According to the descriptions of the illneses, we found that the symptoms resembled the effects of organophosphorus toxicity, for example, nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, temporary paralysis, lameness of the tongue, and inability to walk, impatience and weak eyesight, and others. But to prove that, we needed scientific evidence. At the time, Turkey would not allow such an investigation. In addition, when the Turkish police and camp officials learned of the news, they closed the camp doors and cut off access. To remove the evidence, they collected all the leftovers of the poisoned bread inside the camp, and the camp baker (who was of Mardin Arab descent, and the refugees suspected him) disappeared from the camp.



THE INDEPENDENT

Kurdish refugees 'poisoned'

Ankara — Hundreds of Iraqi Kurds in a refugee camp in south-east Turkey, who are apparently suffering from food poisoning, may have eaten food that was intentionally contaminated, Turkish officials conceded, **writes Tim Kelsey.**

The Kurds who have been in Mardin camp near the Iraqi border since they fled from poison-gas attacks in Iraq last October, say that 3,000 refugees were poisoned after eating bread laced with rat poison, and that 50 are critically ill. They allege Iraqi agents were responsible for adulterating bread delivered to them on 8 June. The governor of Mardin, Aykut Ozen, said he believed the outbreak was caused by mouldy dough, but he could not dismiss other claims. He said some of the bread has been sent to Ankara for analysis.

12 June 1989

The British and American governments at the time were also not keen on any independent investigation carried out on this issue. Yet to lobby effectively and to defend the rights of the refugees, we needed evidence,

scientific, verifiable evidence. At the time, I held only a refugee travel document, and Turkey refused to grant me a visa. Faced with this obstacle, I asked the journalist Gwyn Roberts (well known for his Channel 4 documentaries on Halabja and chemical attacks) and Dr John Foran (President of International Medical Relief) to travel to Mardin on our behalf and obtain blood samples from patients, along with samples of bread, suspected of being poisoned.

Gwyn Roberts approached ITV News and succeeded in persuading them to cover the costs of his and John Foran's journey. I supplied them with syringes, blood-collection equipment, and appropriate transport containers. They flew to Mardin on June 13. A local taxi driver took them close to the camp, but they were not allowed to enter. They feared that the Turkish intelligence services (MIT) might detain them or otherwise interfere. Eventually, however, they managed to get cameras and sampling equipment into the camp through intermediaries.

Inside, one of the refugees took photographs documenting the patients and the conditions in which they were living. Another refugee, who had some nursing experience, collected blood from eight patients. John Foran and Gwyn Roberts succeeded in bringing all eight blood samples, along with samples of bread, which the refugees had concealed, to Britain.

Once the samples arrived, we divided them into four sets and sent them to leading laboratories: the biochemistry departments at the University of Southampton, Guildford, St Luke's Hospital, and the Poison Unit Laboratory at Guy's Hospital. These institutions had international reputations in toxicology and chemical analysis. Each laboratory conducted specialised tests for neurotoxic and metallic agents, including mercury, lead, barium, mycotoxins, and other compounds.

From a scientific standpoint, it was essential that any findings observed in one laboratory be independently replicated in another neutral centre. In the final stage, the tests revealed evidence of nerve-agent exposure in the patients' blood serum. Although the initial indications were strong, the toxicologists insisted on absolute certainty. They spent weeks repeating analyses and comparing the samples with those from healthy individuals.

In early August 1989, the confirmation finally arrived. The scientists were satisfied beyond doubt and issued their final reports. For us, this was a turning point: evidence had replaced accusation, and denial had lost its shelter.

That very day, Gwyn Roberts went straight to the head of ITV News and spent several hours laying out the evidence, the photographs, the film footage, and the scientific findings. By the end of the meeting, the decision had been made. On August 14, ITV would broadcast the story in full: the poisoning allegations, images of the patients filmed in July, exclusive interviews with the scientists, and the results of the laboratory tests.

To ensure that the impact was immediate and amplified, I organised a press conference at 2:00 p.m. on August 14 for Gwyn Roberts, John Foran, and Alistair Hay. The timing was deliberate. The conference was designed to coincide with the ITV broadcast so that the story would be carried simultaneously by newspapers and television channels around the world, leaving no room for quiet dismissal or delay.

We held the press conference at the Quaker International Centre in central London. Journalists and cameramen attended from a wide range of international outlets, including Turkish newspapers such as *Hürriyet* and *Daily News*, as well as the Associated Press, *Agence France-Presse* (AFP), and *The Daily Telegraph*. In fact, the Associated Press and AFP had already begun broadcasting the story at one o'clock, an hour before the conference began, meaning that many of the journalists who arrived had already heard the news.

That same day, Turkish radio and television picked up the story and broadcast it domestically. The Turkish government immediately denied "the allegations". Its spokesperson claimed that only a small number of people had suffered from ordinary food poisoning, that the figures were exaggerated, and that those affected had recovered quickly.

The following day, August 15, British newspapers, including *The Independent* and *The Daily Telegraph*, published more detailed reports, intensifying pressure on both the Turkish and Iraqi governments. What had begun as a risky attempt to obtain evidence had now become an international story, impossible to ignore.

We subsequently published the findings in the international medical journal *The Lancet (3 Feb 1990, vol. 335, p287-8)*. Publication in *The Lancet* is exceptionally demanding, labour-intensive, time-consuming, and subject to the highest standards of scientific scrutiny. The journal does not publish evidence unless it is methodologically sound, independently verified, and scientifically robust. Precisely for that reason, the effort was worthwhile: publication conferred authority, credibility, and permanence.

Poisoning of Kurdish refugees in Turkey

SIR,—Poisoning by an unknown agent was reported in June, 1989,[1] to have affected some 2070 Kurdish refugees (667 children, 740 women, 663 men) living in Mardin camp in Turkey (total population 15 157). The refugees had fled from Iraq in 1988 to escape government forces harrying them with chemical and conventional weapons. The symptoms were diarrhoea, abdominal cramps, vomiting, disturbance of speech, disorientation, inability to walk on a straight line, general weakness, and temporary paralysis of the limbs; recovery was slow. The symptoms suggested some neurotoxic agent(s). Samples of blood and bread (thought to have been the vehicle for the poison) were brought back to the UK by J. F. and by Mr Gwynne Roberts, a television journalist.

Blood was taken from 20 very sick men, women, and children (aged 2–50) five days after the occurrence of symptoms. Only 8 samples could be transported to the UK. Blood was put in sterile heparinised plastic tubes and kept at ambient temperatures for five days before analysis. Qualitative analysis for neurotoxic heavy metals was done in the clinical biochemistry departments of the University of Southampton, St Luke's Hospital, Guildford, and in the poison unit, Guy's Hospital Medical School. Thallium, mercury, lead, copper, and barium were sought by inductively coupled plasma-source mass spectrometry. One laboratory reported lead, mercury, and barium in one sample of bread and in two blood samples; the other two laboratories could not confirm those findings in the same, or other, samples. Screening for trichothecene mycotoxins in bread was done after extraction and elution on charcoal-aluminium columns.[2] No mycotoxins were detected. Screening for nitrogen/phosphorus compounds was done by gas chromatography and gas chromatography/mass spectrometry.

Cholinesterase activity was assessed in two blood samples by measuring the changes in absorbence at 405 nm (EPOS 5060 analyser) resulting when the chromogen 5,5'-dithiobis(4-nitrobenzoic acid) reacts with the thiocholine iodide produced by the action of the enzyme on a highly diluted sample of acetylthiocholine iodide. The assay was calibrated with acetylcholinesterase of known activity. The two samples evinced severe inhibition, the lower limit of normal for cholinesterase being about 9·0 kU/l:

	Cholinesterase activity (kU/l) in blood:		
Sample	*Untreated*	*Treated with prallidoxime*	*Treated with bread extracts*
Test 1	7·0	17·0	..
Test 2	4·8	15·4	..
Control 1	20·4	25·8	..
Control 2	15·1	..	15·2
Control 3	25·6	..	23·0

To ensure that high ambient temperatures had not reduced the cholinesterase activity a standard solution of pure enzyme was kept at 25°C for five days. The enzyme activity in this sample did not differ from that of a freshly thawed standard. To exclude genetic or nutritional causes for the low enzyme activity, a cholinesterase reactivator, prallidoxime (4 µg per 500 ml blood), was introduced to reactivate the cholinesterase in the two samples and in the controls. Prallidoxime will also remove organophosphates attached to the activity site of the cholinesterase causing an increase in enzyme activity. A three-fold increase in activity was recorded in the samples whereas the increase was only 20% for the controls.

Gas chromatography of the test blood samples revealed only one significant peak, indicating a nitrogen/phosphorus compound. This was identified as 2-hydroxyethylbenzthiazol, a product of ethylene oxide (a sterilising agent) and benzthiazol (a vulcanising agent), and was almost certainly present in the syringes used to collect the samples. In control samples a large concentration of 2-hydroxyethylbenzthiazol (200 µg/ml) had no detectable effect on cholinesterase activity either immediately or after five days' incubation at room temperature.

A sample of bread was extracted into diethyl ether and the solvent was evaporated to dryness. Some of the residue was then added to two reference blood samples. There was only a very small and not significant decrease in cholinesterase activity.

We would have liked to have had more blood samples but the 8 analysed were smuggled out at great risk, and the Turkish authorities would not allow independent medical investigators into the camps.

The symptoms reported were consistent with poisoning by a neurotoxic agent, but there were very many possibilities so the three laboratories were asked to look for particular agents. The finding of heavy metals in some samples by one laboratory could not be repeated by the other two, which suggested that metals, if present, were not at concentrations sufficient to cause the symptoms. Valuable material was used up in the screening process, and it was only as a last resort that the two remaining specimens were tested for cholinesterase inhibition. The findings point to a potent nerve agent (organophosphorus) as the cause of the poisoning.

Commercially available organophosphorus pesticides are an improbable source of the poisoning because of their low toxicity. Their foul smell and taste would make it difficult for anyone to consume sufficient to cause the symptoms reported. Organophosphorus pesticide metabolites are quite easy to detect but none were found by the UK National Poison Unit. Nerve gases cannot be ruled out. They would cause some of the symptoms

reported, but some equally toxic organophosphate may have been responsible. Organosphosphorus chemical warfare agents inhibit acetylcholinesterase and do so rapidly. The rate of recovery is determined by the degree of poisoning and by what caused it, and enzyme activity can remain depressed for weeks.

Inhibition of acetylcholinesterase would explain the symptoms reported by most of the patients in Mardin, and the rate of recovery. The fact that no traces of an organophosphate agent were found might be explained by the time delay between poisoning and blood collection. Bread had been singled out as the most likely source of the poisoning but we can find no evidence to support this claim. The bread sample we received may not have been representative or a toxic organophosphate originally present in the bread may have been inactivated. No detailed investigation in the camp was done and the source of the cholinesterase inhibiting agent remains unknown.

These refugees had fled from chemical attacks on their homes in northern Iraq in August, 1988. They now claim to have been the victims of another mass-poisoning attempt. The evidence available does suggest something very sinister. It is unlikely that we are talking about a common commercially available chemical, so the chance of accidental poisoning is remote. Most of the victims have recovered, and the UN High Commission for Refugees now has access to Kurdish refugee camps in Turkey. If this poisoning was, as we strongly suspect, deliberate, it has serious implications for the international community.

We thank Dr J. Henry and Dr B. Widdop (National Poison Unit, Guy's Hospital); Dr A. Walker and Dr A. Taylor (St Luke's Hospital, Guildford); and Dr T. Delves and Mr C. Fellows (Southampton University) for help and advice.

Kurdish Scientific and Medical Association, London WC1
DLAWER ALA'ALDEEN
JOHN FORAN

Poison Unit, New Cross Hospital, London
IVON HOUSE

Department of Chemical Pathology, Old Medical School, University of Leeds, Leeds LS2 9JT, UK
ALASTAIR HAY

1. *Independent* June 2, 1989.
2. Thomas R, Romer J. The use of small charcoal/alumina clean-up columns in the detection of tricothecene mycotoxins in foods and feeds. *J Assoc Off Analyt Chem* 1986; **69**: 699–703.

When the paper appeared in *The Lancet* on February 3, 1990, it was widely regarded as one of our greatest achievements. It gave the issue global resonance and transformed our campaign from accusation to documented fact. The findings were subsequently reported by major newspapers, including *The Guardian*, *The Times*, *The Independent*, *The International Herald Tribune*, and several European outlets.

THE INDEPENDENT Saturday 3 February 1990

Iraqis accused of poisoning Kurds

By Hugh Pope in Ankara and **Harvey Morris**

PANIC spread through the crowded tenements where 11,500 Iraqi Kurdish refugees live outside the south-eastern Turkish town of Diyarbakir as hundreds fell ill after eating contaminated bread with their evening meal late on Thursday night. Turkish officials blamed bad yeast for the mass poisoning, but Kurdish groups said the bread was deliberately spiked.

The incident coincides with a letter in today's *Lancet* in which a group of toxicologists who studied a similar mass poisoning in the Turkish camps last year said there was strong suspicion that the earlier case had been deliberate.

In Diyarbakir, about 2,000 refugees, most of them women and children, were ferried to hospitals, vomiting, fainting and complaining of stomach cramps and swelling limbs. By late on Friday, 150 were still being treated, although few serious cases remained.

Although the Turkish officials blamed yeast contamination, Ekrem Mayis, the Diyarbakir Kurds' leader, accused Iraqi agents of putting toxic chemicals into the bread at the camp's bakery. Refugees said there had been unusual yellow spots in the bread as in a similar poisoning incidents in another Kurdish camp at Mardin last year.

Mr Mayis said Baghdad wanted to force refugee Kurds to disperse or to take the road back south to Iraq, where a steady stream of refugees has headed in recent months, despairing of an improvement of their lot in Turkey.

Today's letter to *The Lancet* was signed, among others, by Dr John Foran, who together with the British journalist, Gwynne Roberts, visited the heavily-patrolled Mardin camp where 2,070 refugees were poisoned last year, and smuggled out blood and bread samples. Intensive examination of the samples by a number of specialist establishments in Britain, using gas chromatography and mass spectrometry, pointed to the "a potent nerve agent (organophosphorus) as the cause of the poisoning".

The letter, which is also signed by Dlawer Ala'aldeen of the Kurdish Scientific and Medical Association, Ivon House of the Poison Unit at New Cross Hospital in London and Alistair Hay of the Leeds Department of Chemical Pathology, concludes: "The evidence available does suggest something very sinister.

"It is unlikely that we are talking about a common commercially available chemical, so the chance of accidental poisoning is remote . . . If this poisoning was, as we strongly suspect, deliberate, it has serious implications for the international community."

One detail was especially significant. *The Lancet* circulated freely to Iraqi libraries, hospitals, and universities, beyond the effective reach of Iraqi censorship. As a result, many inside Iraq, doctors, academics, and students, became aware of the evidence. In the same period, *Middle East Health*, which published a summary of the *Lancet* article, interviewed me and ran additional coverage of the tragedy. That publication, too, reached Iraqi medical professionals and helped spread the truth about what was happening inside the country.

Middle East HEALTH

MARCH 1990

VOLUME 14 NUMBER 3

Doctors back refugees' chemical attack claims

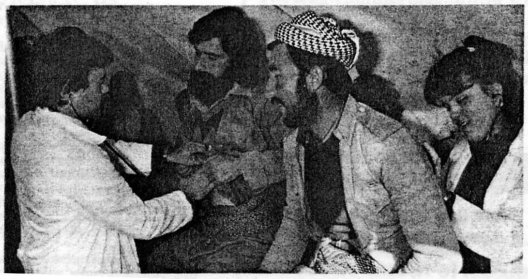
KURDISH refugees who fled to Turkey in fear of chemical attacks in Iraq, appear to be victims of deliberate mass poisoning.

Last June over 2000 Kurdish refugees at the Mardin refugee camp in Turkey suffered mysterious poisoning. Blood samples from eight affected people have been analysed at three laboratories in the UK.

In a letter to *The Lancet* (February 3 p287-8) doctors who analysed the samples say the results strongly indicate that some form of nerve agent was involved, possibly as a contaminant of food. They 'strongly suspect' that the poisoning was deliberate.

Symptoms included diarrhoea, vomiting, stomach cramps, speech disturbances, disorientation, weakness and temporary paralysis. Those worst affected took many weeks to recover.

Kurdish refugees seek medical help in Turkey.



The samples were first screened for heavy metals and for mycotoxins but with negative results. Then the remaining samples were tested for cholinesterase activity and both showed severe inhibition of the enzyme, pointing to a nerve agent of some kind.

Iraq used nerve gases in conditions of open warfare in The Gulf War. Now, it seems, they have found a new use:to contaminate the food of unprotected civilians.

Doctors faced with people affected by these agents may use atropine and oximes to treat the symptoms, according to Dr Dlawar Ala'Aldeen of the Kurdish Scientific and Medical Association and one of the authors of the *Lancet* paper.

As a first line of treatment and if symptoms are severe, involving convulsions, large doses of atropine should be given up to 2mg intravenously every five minutes until the effects begin to subside.

But is should never be used in the absence of such poisoning as it can have fatal side-effects.

A second line of treatment is to try to reactivate the enzyme by giving an oxime. But this has only limited effect. The enzyme inhibition caused by nerve agents is usually irreversible. Moreover, they can have serious side-effects.

In some cases valium has proved helpful given as 5mg intravenously every 10 minutes up to a total of 15 mg. But treatment is mainly supportive, providing artificial ventilation where possible and removing secretions from the bronchial tubes when necessary. Symptoms disappear slowly as the body makes new enzyme,which can take several weeks.

But since the decision to use atropine and oxime rests on knowing beyond reasonable doubt that a nerve agent is responsible it is important to establish this as soon as possible.

Doctors faced with this situation should take as many blood samples as possible, says Dr Alastair Hay of Leeds University Chemical Pathology Department, another of the *Lancet* authors. Whole blood or serum can be used but it should be frozen or kept as cool as possible until cholinesterase activity can be measured.

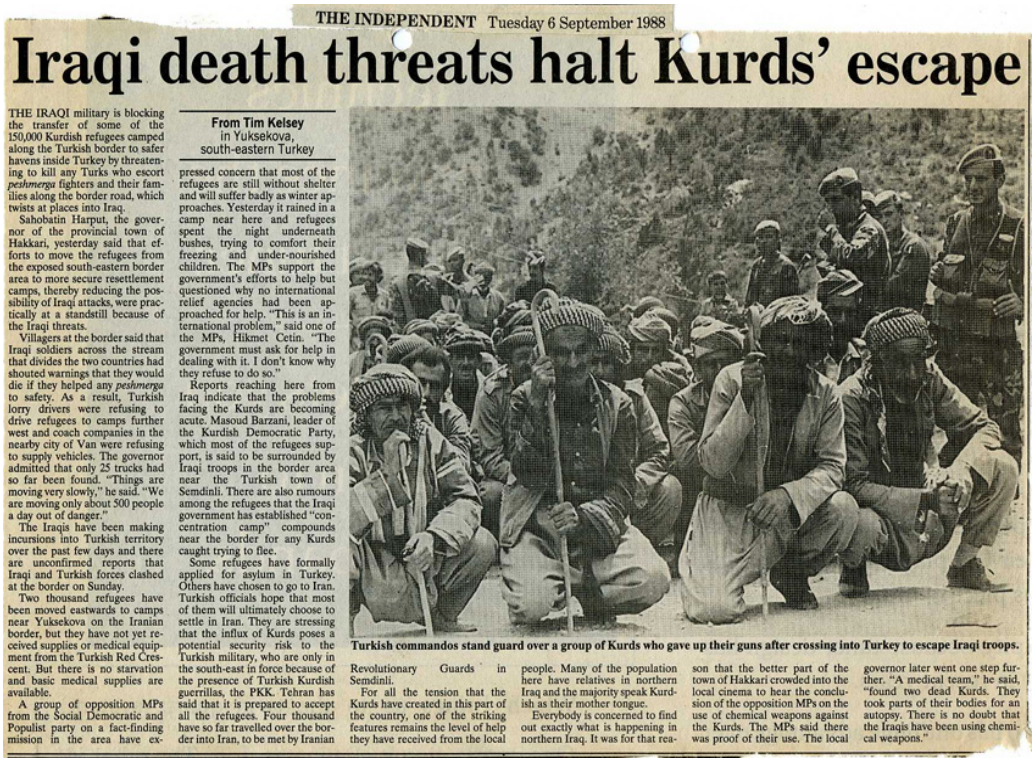
Dr Hay also suggests that doctors try to obtain samples of the agent itself if the food or other substance used to introduce it can be identified.

Continuing the Lobby:

Sustaining Attention Through News & Pressure

Maintaining sustained awareness, among the public and governments alike, of a nation's crisis is never easy. Attention fades; outrage cools. Politicians often rely on time itself to erase embarrassment, assuming that once the headlines disappear, violations against an oppressed people will be quietly forgotten.

We understood this dynamic well. For that reason, our lobbying strategy was relentless. We seized every opportunity, large or small, to keep the Kurdish voice alive and pressure constant, among both allies and adversaries. When one story faded, we found another. When silence threatened, we created noise. And more often than not, we succeeded in forcing the issue back into public view, refusing to allow forgetting to become a form of complicity.



THE INDEPENDENT Tuesday 6 September 1988

Iraqi death threats halt Kurds' escape

THE IRAQI military is blocking the transfer of some of the 150,000 Kurdish refugees camped along the Turkish border to safer havens inside Turkey by threatening to kill any Turks who escort *peshmerga* fighters and their families along the border road, which twists at places into Iraq.

Sahobatin Harput, the governor of the provincial town of Hakkari, yesterday said that efforts to move the refugees from the exposed south-eastern border area to more secure resettlement camps, thereby reducing the possibility of Iraqi attacks, were practically at a standstill because of the Iraqi threats.

Villagers at the border said that Iraqi soldiers across the stream that divides the two countries had shouted warnings that they would die if they helped any *peshmerga* to safety. As a result, Turkish lorry drivers were refusing to drive refugees to camps further west and coach companies in the nearby city of Van were refusing to supply vehicles. The governor admitted that only 25 trucks had so far been found. "Things are moving very slowly," he said. "We are moving only about 500 people a day out of danger."

The Iraqis have been making incursions into Turkish territory over the past few days and there are unconfirmed reports that Iraqi and Turkish forces clashed at the border on Sunday.

Two thousand refugees have been moved eastwards to camps near Yuksekova on the Iranian border, but they have not yet received supplies or medical equipment from the Turkish Red Crescent. But there is no starvation and basic medical supplies are available.

A group of opposition MPs from the Social Democratic and Populist party on a fact-finding mission in the area have expressed concern that most of the refugees are still without shelter and will suffer badly as winter approaches. Yesterday it rained in a camp near here and refugees spent the night underneath bushes, trying to comfort their freezing and under-nourished children. The MPs support the government's efforts to help but questioned why no international relief agencies had been approached for help. "This is an international problem," said one of the MPs, Hikmet Cetin. "The government must ask for help in dealing with it. I don't know why they refuse to do so."

Reports reaching here from Iraq indicate that the problems facing the Kurds are becoming acute. Masoud Barzani, leader of the Kurdish Democratic Party, which most of the refugees support, is said to be surrounded by Iraqi troops in the border area near the Turkish town of Semdinli. There are also rumours among the refugees that the Iraqi government has established "concentration camp" compounds near the border for any Kurds caught trying to flee.

Some refugees have formally applied for asylum in Turkey. Others have chosen to go to Iran. Turkish officials hope that most of them will ultimately choose to settle in Iran. They are stressing that the influx of Kurds poses a potential security risk to the Turkish military, who are only in the south-east in force because of the presence of Turkish Kurdish guerrillas, the PKK. Tehran has said that it is prepared to accept all the refugees. Four thousand have so far travelled over the border into Iran, to be met by Iranian Revolutionary Guards in Semdinli.

From Tim Kelsey
in Yuksekova,
south-eastern Turkey

Turkish commandos stand guard over a group of Kurds who gave up their guns after crossing into Turkey to escape Iraqi troops.

For all the tension that the Kurds have created in this part of the country, one of the striking features remains the level of help they have received from the local people. Many of the population here have relatives in northern Iraq and the majority speak Kurdish as their mother tongue.

Everybody is concerned to find out exactly what is happening in northern Iraq. It was for that reason that the better part of the town of Hakkari crowded into the local cinema to hear the conclusion of the opposition MPs on the use of chemical weapons against the Kurds. The MPs said there was proof of their use. The local governor later went one step further. "A medical team," he said, "found two dead Kurds. They took parts of their bodies for an autopsy. There is no doubt that the Iraqis have been using chemical weapons."

Whenever we received negative medical or scientific news in Kurdistan or Iraq, we tried to use it in the best and most effective way to discredit the regime. Of course, the newspapers were an important platform and had considerable influence; however, if the news itself, its source, or the way it was written lacked honesty, newspapers were unlikely to pay attention to it or publish it. If a medical news item were published in the language of an individual or a Kurdish politician, it would not be seen as very honest. But when the news was published

New Scientist 22 September 1988

Kurds claim Iraq bombed city with typhoid

Hundreds died in this gas attack on Halabja last March

IRAQ may be using biological weapons in its attempt to reassert control over rebel Kurdish areas in the north of the country, according to Kurdish doctors. Dr Dlawer Alaaldeen of the Kurdish British Medical and Scientific Support Group (SMSK) says that an uncontrollable outbreak of typhoid fever in the city of Sulaimaniya may be caused by bacteria that have been cultured in the laboratory.

Normally, any major outbreak of typhoid arising from contaminated water will involve several different strains of the bacteria, and often other organisms such as cholera. But in Sulaimaniya, all the bacteria isolated so far have been of a single typhoid strain, Alaaldeen said last week.

Typhoid has long been included in the world's biological arsenals. Although it can be controlled by vaccination and antibiotics, it may still be effective against communities without sophisticated facilities for health care.

The organism, *Salmonella typhi*, grows rapidly on simple media and can be prepared easily. Just one kilogram of freeze-dried typhoid culture would contaminate a city's water supply.

Iraq has used chemical weapons regularly against the Kurds, who have been demanding autonomy from Iraqi rule for almost 30 years. The most horrifying instance was in Halabja last March when around 6000 people were killed, probably by a nerve gas called tabun.

The gas acted rapidly, leaving no marks on bodies. Some reports said hydrogen cyanide was used, but it is more likely that hydrogen cyanide was produced by a reaction between impurities in the tabun and ground water.

In April 1987 and again last April, several Kurdish villages in the regions of Sulaimaniya and Irbil were bombarded with mustard gas. After the attacks in 1987, 368 Kurdish civilians sought medical help in the main hospitals of the major cities—Sulaimaniya, Kirkuk and Irbil. The authorities instructed the hospitals to refuse treatment, unless the victims first signed a statement to say that it was Iran that had attacked them with gas. Later, all 368 were arrested and sent to prison in Irbil where they were executed, say the Kurds.

Last December, according to Kurdish sources, Iraq put thallium into food destined for Kurdistan. Several Kurds have been treated recently in London for thallium poisoning.

Iraq's main chemical weapons plant is at Samarra, 60 kilometres northwest of Baghdad. It occupies 25 square kilometres inside a 160-square-kilometre exclusion zone. The equipment, designed for a pesticide plant, was bought mainly from firms in West Germany (Quast and Karl Kolbe), the Netherlands (KBS and Melchennie) and Italy (Montedison).

At first, Iraq bought the chemicals required as feedstock for the weapons plant from Europe through its State Enterprise for Pesticide Production (SEPP). But when European countries imposed export restrictions in 1985, Iraq built its own plant at Falluja on the banks of the Euphrates. A new research complex to develop more sophisticated chemical weapons has also been built at Salman Pak, southeast of Baghdad.

At Samarra, Iraq is believed to produce around 60 tonnes a month of sulphur and nitrogen mustard, 4 tonnes of tabun and 4 tonnes of the more deadly nerve gas, sarin. Records of chemical purchases by SEPP suggest that Iraq is also planning to produce the nerve gas VX, which is several times more toxic than sarin and much less degradable.

Iraq's development and use of this substantial chemical arsenal has met with relatively little censure, despite its direct violation of the 1925 Geneva Protocol, which bans the use of gases in war. Iraq has signed and ratified the protocol.

Iraq has not signed the 1972 treaty banning the production of biological weapons. Now that the Gulf war is over, the Kurdish population fears that Iraq will use it increasingly as a testing ground for any new chemical and biological weaponry. □

Sunday Telegraph on 25 September 1989

New evidence of Iraqi germ war

by Con Coughlin

NEW EVIDENCE has emerged that Iraq is using biological weapons in its attempts to crush rebel Kurdish areas in the north of the country.

Relief workers believe an uncontrollable outbreak of typhoid fever in the Kurdish city of Sulaimaniya has been caused by a special bacteria cultured by Iraqi scientists in laboratory conditions.

Scores of Kurds have died from typhoid in north Kurdistan since Iraq launched its offensive against Kurdish guerrilla groups and relief workers fear the virus could soon reach epidemic proportions.

Iraq has repeatedly denied using chemical weapons against the Kurds despite the fact that hundreds of Kurdish refugees who have fled to Turkey have been treated for injuries consistent with being attacked by chemical gas.

Now Kurdish doctors, mounting a relief operation in Sulaimaniya, are convinced Iraq has introduced biological weapons into its arsenal of banned weapons.

Major outbreaks of typhoid from contaminated water usually involve several different strains of bacteria, and usually include other organisms, such as cholera.

But according to Dr Dlawer Alaaldeen of the Kurdish British Medical and Scientific Support Group, quoted in this week's edition of *New Scientist*, all the bacteria so far isolated in Sulaimaniya are from a single typhoid strain.

If Iraq is using biological weapons it will be the latest in a long line of banned weapons it has used to curb the Kurdish rebellion.

Kurdish villages in the Sulaimaniya and Irbil regions have been bombarded with mustard gas since April 1987 and the Iraqis also put thallium into food

in a respected international journal with evidence and scientific language, it would have a greater resonance and impact. For example, we received reports that many people in the liberated areas of Kurdistan had suddenly contracted **typhoid fever**. The large numbers they mentioned rarely occurred naturally. Peshmergas and doctors in the area suspected the Iraqi regime of deliberately contaminating the water with typhoid. To use the news in lobbying, I tried to publish it in the public newspapers, but none of them took the news seriously. I told journalist Judith Parera about it, and she published it in the prestigious scientific journal ***New Scientist*** **on September 22, 1989**. The news caused a stir, and the mainstream newspapers picked it up and published it themselves, as did the *Sunday Telegraph* on 25 September 1989.

When an important scientific conference or meeting was held, newspapers and media often paid attention to it, and these were a reason or opportunity to raise public awareness. In May 1989, as a representative of KSMA and an expert on Kurdistan's chemical weapons, I was invited to an **international conference in Geneva** (at the UN campus). Representatives of dozens of countries and scientific organisations participated in the conference and published new scientific data on the effects of chemicals and treatment, and prevention of diseases. There, I presented data on the chemical attacks, injuries and casualties, including deaths of the victims. It was important to present the data from the perspective of a Kurdish scientist. Our view was documented in the proceedings

and publications following the conference. I then published the report of the conference in the journal Medicine and War.

On February 4, 1990, I read in the Guardian newspaper that the Iraqi Minister of Health, Dr Saeedi, had visited the UK to exchange contacts and buy British goods. I saw this as an opportunity to create a lobbying story and use it to put pressure on Iraq and to embarrass the British government.

First, I wrote the **letter to William Waldgrave**, the former British Minister of Foreign Affairs, and mailed it to him. I expressed the Kurdish society's dissatisfaction with how a minister of a government that had used chemical weapons against civilians should be welcomed by a British minister. To put more pressure on Waldgrave and not to ignore my letter, I sent the same letter to the ***Independent*** **newspaper on 7 February 1990**, and it was published on 9 February. I used a false name (Zanyar Pizishk, meaning Scientist Doctor) in the newspaper because, at that time, I could not reveal my name in the newspaper due to the risk of being killed or to protect the safety of my relatives inside Iraq, although I used the middle name in my original letter to Waldgrave.

THE INDEPENDENT Friday 9 February 1990

Visit of the Iraqi health minister

From Mr Zanyar Pizishk

Sir: The Iraqi Minister for Health has come to Britain as a guest of the Department of Health and is being escorted on an official tour of some of Britain's hospitals and nursing colleges. He will be meeting ministers and officials including Mr William Waldegrave, Minister of State at the Foreign Office. We cannot but express a sense of outrage that an emissary of the Iraqi regime, with its proven record of violation of human rights and its documented use of chemical weapons against its own people, should be accorded an official welcome in this country.

Only last Saturday you carried a report of the mass poisoning of 2,000 Kurdish refugees in south-east Turkey allegedly at the hands of Iraqi agents who contaminated the bread supply at the Diyarbakir camp. This incident represents the latest in a succession of horrific attacks on Iraqi Kurds, beginning with the use of chemical weapons against the population of Halabja in Iraqi Kurdistan in March, 1988.

Rather than extend the hand of friendship to the Iraqi minister, the British government and health organisations should officially demand that the regime cease the production and barbaric use of such weapons against the Kurdish minority.

Yours faithfully,
ZANYAR PIZISHK
Kurdish Scientific and
Medical Association
London, WC1
7 February

Waldgrave's reply, dated 13 February 1990, states that Dr Saeedi, the Iraqi Minister of Health, visited the UK at the request of David Miller, the British Minister of Health. In May 1989, Miller visited Iraq and extended the invitation. "I don't think there is anything to be gained from trying to isolate Iraq. It is only by maintaining a dialogue with the Iraqis, and by building upon the positive elements in our relationship, that we can hope to have some influence on their behaviour." He then went on to state that "Britain has consistently deplored Iraq's human rights record, particularly its treatment of the Kurdish population"

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

From The Minister of State

13 February 1990

Dear Mr Ala'Aldeen,

Thank you for your letter of 6 February about the visit to Britain by the Iraqi Minister of Health, Dr Sa'id. David Mellor, then Minister of Health, invited Dr Sa'id to come to Britain during his visit to Iraq in May 1989.

I do not think there is anything to be gained from trying to isolate Iraq. It is only by maintaining a dialogue with the Iraqis, and by building upon the positive elements in our relationship, that we can hope to have some influence on their behaviour. Contact at Ministerial level enables us to raise frankly our concerns about various issues, including Iraq's human rights record. I did so when I saw Dr Sa'id on 8 February.

Britain has consistently deplored Iraq's human rights record, particularly its treatment of the Kurdish population and use of chemical weapons. We played a leading role in the adoption of UN Security Council Resolutions 612 and 620, which condemned Iraq's use of chemical weapons. We co-sponsored last year a Resolution critical of Iraq's human rights abuses at the UN Commission on Human Rights. The Iraqis can be in no doubt that there is very real concern in this country about the need for a sustained improvement in their human rights records.

The Rt Hon William Waldegrave

Dlawer Ala'Aldeen Esq
Secretary
Kurdish Scientific and Medical Association
BCM Box 5952
LONDON
WC1N 3XX

Chapter Three

From the Kuwait War to the Uprising

The Turn of Fate

The year 1990 marked a decisive turning point in the fate of Saddam's regime, just as 1991 would prove to be a turning point in the fate of the Kurds. From the late 1960s through the late 1980s, the Ba'ath Party, Saddam's family, and Saddam himself accumulated power with relentless determination. Their authority expanded steadily, both inside Iraq and beyond its borders, bolstered by support from powers in both the East and the West.

By the early 1970s, Saddam was playing a calculated- and brutal- game to consolidate his grip over the Ba'ath Party and the Iraqi state. Each phase of this struggle against real and imagined rivals ended with the liquidation of a party, a faction, or a political group. Power was not merely taken; it was cleansed of competition.

In 1970, Saddam initiated a four-year ceasefire and negotiation process with the Kurds, temporarily elevating the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) to the status of a quasi-partner in governance. This period of apparent compromise was, in reality, a time for settling internal scores. While extending a hand to the Kurds, Saddam focused on putting his own house in order. Within the Ba'ath Party, blood was shed, and old accounts were settled, until he emerged as the undisputed leader.

Between 1971 and 1972, he strengthened ties with the Soviet Union and drew the Iraqi Communist Party into his orbit. Under the banner of a Ba'athist-Communist front, he moved to crush political opposition across Iraq, only then turning once again against the Kurdish national movement. During these years, several prominent Kurdish figures were killed, and multiple attempts were made on the life of the KDP leader, Mullah Mustafa Barzani.

By 1974-1975, the regime committed itself fully to the Kurdish war. That conflict ultimately ended not through military victory, but through sweeping political compromises with Iran, Saddam's regional adversary at the time. The

price of those compromises was the collapse of the Kurdish armed revolution, a moment that would leave scars long after the guns fell silent.

In the late 1970s, Saddam turned decisively on the communists with calculated ferocity. Having first courted them and relied on them, he moved to destroy them almost to the point of extermination. From that point onward, the communist movement never recovered its footing in Iraq.

With that chapter closed, Saddam turned his attention to preparing for a long and brutal war against Iran. As part of that preparation, he began dismantling Shiite political and religious organisations, forcing their leaders into exile and stripping them of influence inside the country. As the war dragged on, the regime did not fracture as many had expected. Instead, it succeeded in containing and controlling much of the Arab opposition.

Sunni society, in particular, never harboured real opposition and remained loyal to Saddam and to the regime. The Shiites, by contrast, were marginalised, dispersed, and stripped of their influence inside Iraq. The Kurds, however, followed a different trajectory. Despite repeated defeats, the Kurdish movement resurfaced once again in the late 1970s and early 1980s. It adapted, regrouped, and continued to grow over time, proving far more difficult to erase than Saddam had imagined.

The reasons were clear. The Kurdish mountains, the enduring spirit of resistance, the manifest injustice of Saddam's war against Iran, and the relative ease with which young men could evade military service all combined to make Kurdistan difficult to subdue by conventional means. Traditional weapons and methods were insufficient to break the Kurdish movement or to impose lasting control over the region. But once Saddam was permitted to develop chemical weapons and to deploy them openly against Iran before the eyes of the world, a new and terrifying possibility emerged: that he might strike the Kurdish movement with a level of destruction never previously inflicted.

The Iran-Iraq War had not yet ended when King Fahd of Saudi Arabia advised Saddam to find a solution to what he called the "Kurdish problem." Saddam replied with chilling confidence: "Do not worry. I will find a permanent solution." The years 1987-1988 were the fulfilment of that promise. They marked the Anfal campaign and the systematic use of chemical weapons, operations that devastated the villages and mountains of Kurdistan, destroyed the sources of life, buried more than 100,000 Kurds, and drove the Peshmerga and countless civilians across the borders.

Those were the darkest days in Kurdish history. Kurds inside Kurdistan and in exile lived in conditions of extreme despair. Many came to believe that Saddam's

grip on power was unbreakable, that his rule, and that of his sons, was guaranteed for the remainder of their lifetimes.

And yet, despite financial bankruptcy, the collapse of state institutions, and the displacement of millions of Iraqis, Saddam celebrated what he called victory. His regime continued to project strength. He pursued nuclear weapons, convinced that they would secure the future of his rule, elevate him to the leadership of the Arab *Ummah*, and earn him a seat among the permanent powers of the United Nations. Drunk on survival and impunity, Saddam spoke with arrogance, preaching, threatening, and displaying open ingratitude toward Arab states, Israel, and the West alike. In retrospect, this was not the confidence of stability, but the bravado of a regime racing against time.

1990 - Year of conspiracies & consequential decisions

In the 1990s, Saddam felt an international conspiracy, allegedly conspired by Israel, Britain and the United States. A gap appeared in his protective fence, and his palace was undermined. The first gap began with the execution of Farzad Bazoft.

Farzad Bazorft

Farzad Bazoft was a journalist of Persian descent, working for the British newspaper *The Observer*. He had not yet become British and was carrying an asylum pass (travel document). Bazoft had a strong journalistic ambition and was looking for high-impact story materials. He and a group of British journalists went to Iraq in September 1989 at the invitation of the Iraqi government. There, with the knowledge of the Iraqis, he went to Hilla, accompanied by Daphne Parish, a British nurse of Irish descent, to visit a rocket-making factory. Israeli mercenaries were accused of blowing up the factory previously, killing 700 Iraqis and contaminating the surrounding area with nuclear material.

Then, on September 15, Bazoft was arrested at Baghdad airport, with 34 photographs of the factory and several samples of dust near the factory in his possession. In November, Bazoft was brought on television and confessed to "spying for Israel". Despite endless international efforts, on March 10, 1990, in a closed room, Bazoft was tried and sentenced to death, and at 6:30 am on March 15, his sentence was handed down, and he was executed. The British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher was furious, immediately withdrew the British ambassador to Iraq and cancelled all ministerial visits to Iraq. Several European governments expressed their outrage at the inhuman act. After the liberation of Iraq, *The Observer* searched for Bazoft's file and interviewed the intelligence colonel (Kazim Askar), who participated in Bazoft's interrogation. Kazim Askar admitted that Bazoft was not guilty, but we were powerless because Saddam had already made up his mind about executing Bazoft.

Oaths and Threats

On March 28, 1990, just two weeks after the execution of Farzad Bazoft, British authorities arrested five Iraqis for attempting to smuggle American-made krytron switches into Iraq. These devices were widely known to be used as triggers in nuclear detonators. Three days later, on March 31, *The Washington Post* revealed that the United States government had intercepted a similar smuggling attempt the previous year, but had chosen not to publicise it at the time.

For Saddam, the exposure was deeply humiliating. On April 2, 1990, he appeared on Iraqi television holding a krytron switch in his hand, laughing dismissively. "They have a device," he mocked, "that we can make ourselves." What followed, however, was no laughter. In the same appearance, Saddam launched into a ferocious and unrestrained attack on Israel. He boasted that Iraq's chemical weapons rivalled those of the United States and the Soviet Union, and then swore "by Allah" that if Israel took any hostile action against Iraq, Iraq would retaliate by burning half of Israel. In doing so, he explicitly referred to Iraq's most advanced chemical agents, including binary weapons such as VX.

These unbalanced threats sent shockwaves through the region and beyond. Instead of projecting strength, Saddam exposed the recklessness of a regime increasingly intoxicated by its own survival and impunity. International criticism intensified, and concern over Iraq's weapons programs deepened.

Tensions escalated further on April 5, 1990, when the United States expelled an Iraqi diplomat from Washington, accusing him of plotting to assassinate several Iraqi refugees. Two days later, Saddam responded in kind, expelling an American diplomat from Baghdad. He used the occasion to launch an open and bitter attack on President George H. W. Bush, signalling that confrontation, rather than restraint, had become his chosen path.

Bull and the Super Gun

As these events unfolded, another shadowy affair came violently into the open: the killing of Gerald Bull and the exposure of the so-called *Babylon Project*. Bull was a Canadian artillery scientist who had worked clandestinely with the Iraqi regime since the early years of the Iran-Iraq War, helping to develop a series of increasingly sophisticated long-range cannons. He was brilliant, ambitious, and deeply driven by scientific obsession, personal recognition, and money. Each project pushed further than the last, producing larger, more powerful weapons. His final and most audacious undertaking was the construction of the "Supergun," known inside Iraq as the Babylon Project.

According to available descriptions, the main cannon barrel was to be approximately 150 meters long, weighing some 2,100 tons, with a calibre of around one meter. In theory, it could fire a 600-kilogram projectile over a distance of nearly 1,000 kilometres, or even launch a two-ton payload beyond the Earth's atmosphere. As a proof of concept, Bull successfully constructed a smaller prototype, which was installed in the hills of Mount Hamrin. Much of the equipment was manufactured in England, Sheffield Forgemasters and Walter Somers, with additional components sourced from Spain and Switzerland.

Encouraged by this progress, the Iraqi leadership then asked Bull to expand his work into missile development, specifically to advance Iraq's modified Scud program. Bull agreed and began preliminary work. He did not live to see it completed. In March 1990, outside his home in Brussels, Israeli agents approached him and shot him five times in the back of the head, killing him instantly.

After his death, Iraqi engineers and members of Bull's company attempted to continue the project. But by November 1990, the British government intervened, seizing the massive gun barrels and related components before they could be delivered. With that decision, Bull's programs came to an abrupt end. His associates did not return, and the Babylon Project, like so many of Saddam's grand ambitions, collapsed under the weight of exposure, fear, and impending war.

Debt to the Debtors

After two decades of expansion and domination, Saddam's world was contracting. He did not believe that the era had changed, and he raced against time to secure what he saw as the ultimate guarantee of survival: the atomic bomb. In his mind, Arab political and financial support for his self-proclaimed *Qadisiyyah*, and for Iraq's nuclear ambitions, was not a matter of choice or favour, but a duty owed by his "Arab brothers."

During the war with Iran, Saddam's regime borrowed an estimated fifteen billion dollars annually from Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, accumulating roughly one hundred and twenty billion dollars in total debt. Of this, approximately eighty billion came from Saudi Arabia, while forty billion was extended by Kuwait, much of it in the form of oil. Saudi Arabia was prepared to write off its share as a "gift" to the Iraqi people. Kuwait, however, demanded repayment.

Publicly, Saddam claimed that Iraq's annual budget, about thirteen billion dollars, would be divided between reconstruction and loans: nine billion for rebuilding shattered infrastructure, and four billion to service debts. In reality, the numbers told a different story. Official figures showed that in 1989 alone, Iraq's expenditures reached twenty-four billion dollars, while outstanding debts

stood at around eighty billion. Saddam rejected the very notion that these sums were loans in the conventional sense. In his view, Iraq had not borrowed from Saudi Arabia or Kuwait; it had been paid in exchange for Iraqi blood. He believed he had fought the "*Majusi Persians*," as he described the Iranians, on behalf of the entire Arab nation. The debts, therefore, were not obligations to be honoured, but dues already settled on the battlefield.

The Wolf's Recipe for the Fox

Saddam was convinced that an international conspiracy was closing in around him and that his enemies were only waiting for a pretext to strike. He believed Israel was preparing to attack Iraq, that the Americans and the British were paving the way by blocking access to advanced technology, and that neighbouring Arab states, especially Kuwait, were deliberately undermining the Iraqi economy. In his mind, time was no longer on his side. He therefore chose initiative over restraint, seeking to manufacture a crisis that would force his neighbours to accept less and yield more.

At the Arab summit held in Baghdad in May 1990, Arab leaders openly acknowledged that Kuwait had exceeded its oil production quota, driving prices down and effectively halving Iraq's revenues. Kuwait showed no willingness to assist Iraq financially. Saddam hoped to win the sympathy of some Arab leaders and to isolate Kuwait diplomatically. Instead, he concluded that the American-aligned Arab states were themselves part of a broader international plot against him. "The declaration of war," he warned in one of his messages, "is not carried out only by armies, killing and destruction, but also through the economy."

Kuwait, meanwhile, was quietly improving its relations with Iran, an act Saddam interpreted as betrayal. In June, Iraq's Supreme Leadership Council decided to demand 2.4 billion dollars from Kuwait as compensation for what Baghdad claimed was "stolen Iraqi oil" from the Rumaila field. The argument was simple and dangerous: Rumaila belonged to Iraq, and Kuwait had been siphoning its resources for years. Such a demand threatened not only Kuwait's stability but also the fragile balance of the Arab world.

From that moment on, Kuwaiti leaders resolved not to assist Iraq under any circumstances. Saudi Arabia, in turn, moved decisively to support Kuwait's position against Saddam. On July 9, King Fahd and the Emir of Qatar (Sheikh Khalifa Bin Hamad Al Thani) warned Saddam in a telephone conversation that his conduct was reckless and risked dragging the region toward war, possibly even opening the door to conflict with Israel.

Saddam, however, escalated rather than retreated. Each day brought a new message, a new threat, a new manoeuvre. After demanding compensation for Rumaila oil, he raised the stakes further, demanding territory instead, Rumaila

land in exchange for the oil he claimed Iraq had lost. On July 17, marking the anniversary of the Ba'athist coup, Saddam delivered a thinly veiled ultimatum: "If we cannot defend ourselves through words," he declared, "we will take our rights by doing what is necessary."

The meaning was unmistakable. Military action was no longer hypothetical. Saddam appeared ready to seize not only Rumaila, but also the islands of Bubiyan and Warba, territories Iraq had long claimed. The following day, July 18, the Kuwaiti government responded with calm defiance, declaring that Kuwait was confident and unafraid of such threats.

The table had been set. What remained was for the wolf to decide when to strike, and for the foxes around him to discover, too late, that they were already part of the meal.

Show of Force to Increase Oil Prices

Between July 17 and July 21, Saddam moved nearly 30,000 troops to the Kuwaiti border, sharply escalating the crisis. To many observers, the manoeuvre appeared calculated rather than impulsive, a signal aimed at the international community ahead of the July 27 meeting of OPEC in Geneva. The objective was clear: to force an increase in oil prices through intimidation rather than negotiation.

At the Geneva meeting, the Iraqi delegation pressed aggressively for a rise in oil prices from eighteen to twenty-five dollars per barrel. After intense debate, a compromise was reached. The price was set at twenty-one dollars per barrel, largely because Saudi Arabia refused to endorse a higher figure. It was also agreed that total production would not exceed 22.5 million barrels per day. On paper, Saddam had achieved what he claimed to want and what he said he had mobilised for. Logic dictated that Iraq should now step back, de-escalate, and withdraw its forces from Kuwait's borders.

But logic was no longer guiding events. According to satellite imagery monitored by the United States, Iraqi troops did not withdraw. On the contrary, their numbers continued to grow. The standoff hardened, and tension thickened by the day.

Several Arab leaders attempted to mediate between Baghdad and Kuwait, hoping to defuse the crisis before it crossed the point of no return. Their efforts failed. Saddam outmanoeuvred them all, not because his position was stronger, but because he had already moved beyond compromise. The troop deployments were no longer leveraged. They were preparing.

By then, the invasion was no longer a question of oil prices alone. It had become something far more dangerous: a test of will, pride, and miscalculation, one that would soon engulf the region.

Deceiving the Arab Brothers

Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak travelled to Baghdad and asked Saddam directly whether he intended to invade Kuwait. Saddam replied calmly, almost casually: "No, but do not tell the Kuwaitis that." He added that as long as diplomacy was working and problems could be resolved through political channels, there would be no need for military action. Reassured, Mubarak went on to Kuwait and conveyed Saddam's words verbatim.

Neither Britain nor the United States, however, truly believed that Saddam would dare to follow through on such extreme threats. Still, caution prevailed. Margaret Thatcher advised the Emir of Kuwait (Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah) not to appear weak, urging restraint but firmness. Kuwait, she said, was "not without friends."

As so often in Arab crises, Yasser Arafat stepped forward to mediate. He travelled to Kuwait despite knowing that the Emir was reluctant to receive him. Yet the Crown Prince, Saad Abdullah, was an old friend. Their shared history weighed heavily. In 1970, when Arafat had been surrounded by Jordanian forces and faced almost certain death, Saad Abdullah had arranged for diplomats disguised in women's clothing to smuggle him out and save his life. That debt had not been forgotten.

During this visit, Arafat met privately with Saad Abdullah and appeared close to persuading Kuwait to soften its position and reach a compromise with Saddam. The conversation was unfolding carefully when a palace aide entered and quietly asked the Crown Prince to step aside to take an urgent telephone call.

It was Margaret Thatcher.

On the line, she warned him bluntly not to be deceived by Arafat's words and not to show weakness. Saddam, she insisted, could not reach Kuwait. Britain and the United States stood firmly behind it.

Saad Abdullah returned to the room and relayed Thatcher's message to Arafat. The meeting ended shortly thereafter. Arafat left Kuwait empty-handed and returned to Baghdad with nothing to offer.

In that moment, the last meaningful Arab mediation collapsed. Brotherhood gave way to calculation, gratitude to strategic assurance. The road to catastrophe was no longer blocked, not by diplomacy, not by history, and not by memory.

Saddam's Game with the United States

Saddam was convinced that the United States would intervene militarily in Kuwait in August, just as Britain had done in 1961 when it dispatched troops to deter Abdul Karim Qassim. This belief was reinforced, he thought, by information he had received from Benazir Bhutto, Prime Minister of Pakistan. Bhutto had visited both Iraq and Kuwait two weeks earlier in an attempt to mediate between them, and she reportedly conveyed to Saddam that American forces would soon move into Kuwait.

When Washington learned of Bhutto's remarks, its reaction was swift and unforgiving. On August 8, the United States dispatched Robert Oakley to Islamabad to meet with Ghulam Ishaq Khan, President of Pakistan. The message was unambiguous: Benazir Bhutto had to go. Barely five hours after the ambassador's visit, Bhutto was dismissed from office as prime minister. The speed of her removal sent a signal that did not go unnoticed in Baghdad.

Earlier, on July 25, 1990, April Glaspie (the US Ambassador to Iraq) had gone alone to Saddam's palace for a private meeting. In that closed room, she told him (according to The New York Times of 23 Sept 1990): "But we have no opinion on the Arab-Arab conflicts, like your border disagreement with Kuwait. I was in the American Embassy in Kuwait during the late 1960s. The instruction we had during this period was that we should express no opinion on this issue and that the issue is not associated with America. James Baker has directed our official spokesmen to emphasise this instruction."

Those words, carefully chosen or dangerously vague, brought a smile to Saddam's face. In hindsight, it became clear that he interpreted them as a green light.

At that stage, it appears Saddam had not yet fully conceived the idea of occupying all of Kuwait. Rather, he seems to have viewed it as an easy prize, something to be seized, leveraged, and traded. Kuwait could be exchanged, in his thinking, for international concessions: tolerance of Iraq's weapons programs, relief from pressure, and protection against what he believed were foreign conspiracies aimed at his removal.

For its part, the United States may not have objected to a confrontation. A war could serve multiple purposes: the destruction of Iraq's military machine, the elimination of its chemical and strategic capabilities, and, if circumstances allowed, the replacement of Saddam with another, more manageable strongman. What followed was not a misunderstanding between naïve actors, but a perilous game of signals, assumptions, and calculated ambiguity. Both sides believed they understood the other. Both were wrong.

The Insult That Unleashed War

Talks between Iraqi and Kuwaiti delegations were originally scheduled to take place in Jeddah on July 28. Saddam never expected these negotiations to succeed, nor did he believe they would alter the course of events. He postponed the meeting to July 31 and, in the meantime, increased Iraqi troop deployments along the Kuwaiti border to nearly 100,000. By then, he was almost certain that sheer pressure would force Kuwait to capitulate.

Iraq's demands were sweeping and uncompromising: Kuwait was to halt excess oil production, cancel all Iraqi debts, return the Rumaila oil wells to Iraq, and pay 2.5 billion dollars in compensation for alleged past losses.

When the talks finally convened on July 31, Saddam dispatched a three-man delegation led by Izzat Ibrahim al-Douri, accompanied by Saadoun Hammadi and Ali Hassan al-Majid. Kuwait was represented by Saad Abdullah Al-Salim Al-Sabah.

Despite the notorious reputations of its members, the Iraqi delegation initially adopted a surprisingly restrained tone, suggesting that Saddam had instructed them to explore the possibility of an agreement. Izzat al-Douri formally requested debt forgiveness and an increase in oil prices, then waited for Kuwait's response.

The response came cold and dismissive. Saad Abdullah replied bluntly that Kuwait has the backing of the United States, Britain, and Saudi Arabia, and that it would not yield to Iraqi pressure or intimidation. Only Ali Hassan al-Majid reacted angrily; without him, the Iraqi delegation might have appeared almost conciliatory. The first day ended without progress.

On the morning of August 1, negotiations resumed and quickly unravelled. Ali Hassan al-Majid declared that Iraq had defended Kuwait from the Iranian threat and was therefore entitled to compensation. Saad Abdullah responded with contempt: "Why don't you go and drink from the sea?" The exchange escalated into shouting, then into a physical confrontation as members of both delegations rose from their seats. Saudi officials and guards intervened to separate them.

In the heat of the argument, Ali Hassan complained bitterly that Iraq had been impoverished by wars fought on behalf of the Arab nation and could no longer even feed its people. Saad Abdullah replied with a remark that stunned the room: "Why don't they send their wives into the streets to earn money?" Those present immediately understood the insult; it alluded to long-circulated rumours about Saddam's mother and was perceived as a deeply personal humiliation.

The talks collapsed. The Iraqi delegation returned to Baghdad and reported the encounter in full. Saddam listened in silence. Then he said quietly, "The Emir must not sleep in his bed tonight."

At that moment, the final decision was made. Saddam chose war, but not the limited operation many had anticipated. Instead of seizing the Rumaila oil fields or the disputed islands of Bubiyan and Warba, he ordered his forces to advance straight toward the Emir's palace. Only four men knew of this decision in advance: Saddam himself, Ali Hassan al-Majid, Hussein Kamel al-Majid, and Sab'awi Ibrahim al-Tikriti. Even Iraq's Minister of Defence was kept in the dark until after the invasion had begun.

What followed was no longer brinkmanship or pressure politics. It was irrevocable. The insult had sealed the fate of Kuwait and, ultimately, Saddam himself.

The Occupation of Kuwait

The next morning, at two o'clock in the morning on August 2, 1990, Kuwait and the rest of the world woke up to the news of the arrival of Saddam's ground and air forces in the city. One hundred thousand soldiers and three hundred tanks rushed to the capital, Kuwait, and within three hours reached the Emir's palace, which he had fled minutes earlier. The Emir, his entire family and ministers fled to Saudi Arabia in their limousines, including servants and drivers, except for the Emir's brother-in-law Fahd al-Ahmad al-Sabah, who was in the Dasman palace. He defended himself and was killed there. Kuwait's 16,000 troops were unable to defend themselves, and within hours the whole of Kuwait fell under Saddam's rule, and its people fell at the mercy of the regime's oppression. Their property was plundered by plunderers.

The Emir of Kuwait, as a refugee, sought help from his American, British and Arab supporters. He and the Saudi king promised to cover the cost of the military campaign and the liberation of Kuwait. That's when President Bush came to the rescue of Kuwait and was able to form a 950,000 strong coalition force from 34 allied nations. Most of them were former Arab brothers, former supporters and former fans of Saddam. Only the Palestinians, Jordanians and Yemenis sided with the loser; the others jumped on President Bush's convoy. US Secretary of State James Baker played a major role in forming the coalition. As a lawyer and as a businessman, he engaged in negotiations and was able to bring several traditional enemies of the United States to the line, promising them rewards in exchange for their participation. Some were paid (Egypt and most poor countries), others were promised contracts to rebuild Kuwait (most industrialised countries). Some (eg Egypt) benefited from the open doors of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia to send hundreds of thousands of workers to replace Palestinian, Jordanian and Yemeni workers. [After the liberation of Kuwait, 400,000 Iraqis

and Palestinians were expelled from Kuwait and replaced by Egyptians and Asian foreigners.] The coalition also included states that the United States had long accused of serious human rights violations against ethnic minorities - such as China, the Soviet Union, and other authoritarian regimes - yet these concerns were set aside for the duration of the campaign.

January to March 1991

Liberation of Kuwait

and the Encouragement of Uprising

On January 16, 1991 (US Time, January 17 Iraqi Time), George H. W. Bush announced the launch of Operation Desert Storm, declaring that the objective was to expel Saddam's forces from occupied Kuwait. In his subsequent address on 15 February 1991, President Bush spoke directly to the Iraqi military and the Iraqi people "to take matters into their own hands and force Saddam Hussein, the dictator, to step aside". The three months that followed were filled with decisive events and profound tragedies for all Iraqis, including the Kurds of the south.

On the afternoon of January 16, a B-52 bomber took off from Barksdale Air Force Base in Louisiana, USA, on a 14,000-mile mission and reached Baghdad at 2:30 a.m. on January 17, Baghdad time and fired its first cruise missile. That moment marked the official beginning of the war. From then on, the international coalition launched a sustained campaign of air strikes, systematically targeting Iraq's military and strategic infrastructure. For weeks, Iraq was pounded from the air.

On February 24, coalition forces began the ground offensive. In a swift and devastating operation, Kuwait was liberated in a matter of days (by March 1st). Within the first 100 hours, some 170,000 Iraqi soldiers were taken prisoner. Coalition units pushed deep into Iraqi territory, at times without Saddam even realising how far they had advanced. A heavy curtain of censorship was imposed on the news, concealing the reality of the battlefield. Saddam ordered his troops to withdraw and called for a ceasefire at the United Nations, yet the coalition forces under Norman Schwarzkopf's leadership continued to pursue and strike the retreating Iraqi army deep inside Iraq.

The shattered and disoriented Iraqi forces fled in chaos, chased by the overwhelming firepower of coalition air forces and artillery, while ahead of them stood a brutal, suspicious, and enraged regime. At the time, many believed that U.S. forces would advance all the way to Baghdad and topple Saddam's government. Simultaneously, it was widely expected that popular uprisings in Shiite and Kurdish cities would erupt, seizing the moment of regime weakness to rescue Iraq from dictatorship.

President Bush's statement and American propaganda reinforced this expectation. They strongly suggested that Washington supported the overthrow of Saddam. Saddam himself believed this to be true even before the war began. As he once told the Palestinian George Habash, "I know they are not after Kuwait, but after me. I will not wait for them to eat me, I will eat them before they eat me."

On February 24, 1991, as the ground assault commenced, Salah Omar al-Ali, a former officer of the Iraqi Republican Army, delivered a fiery appeal on the Voice of Free Iraq radio: "O sons of the Tigris and Euphrates, the only way to escape death and foreign attack, and to defend the territory of the homeland, is to rise up against the dictator and the criminals."

The Voice of Free Iraq broadcast from Saudi Arabia and was funded and directly supervised by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). Its calls reflected the will of the CIA and the U.S. Administration. Such messages further primed the ground for rebellion. The fire was ready; only the spark was missing.

Raperîn - The Uprising

The wick of the uprising was finally lit on March 1, 1991, the day after the ceasefire between Iraq and the coalition was signed. It began in Basra, sparked by a Shiite soldier riding a T-72 tank. Overcome by rage and humiliation at the defeat of his army, he fired at statues and symbols of the regime. The soldiers around him, acting on instinct rather than calculation, began to applaud and chant slogans against Saddam and his rule. In that instant, fear gave way to defiance.

Within hours, Basra erupted. People poured into the streets, chanting, storming prisons, attacking security headquarters, and overrunning Ba'ath Party offices. Prisoners were freed; weapons and ammunition were seized. What followed was a fierce and chaotic struggle between armed civilians, defecting soldiers, and Ba'athist fighters loyal to the regime. Basra fell into rebel hands, and the news spread like wildfire.

In Najaf, intense fighting broke out around the shrine of Imam Ali, which soon fell under the control of the insurgents. Within days, the uprising engulfed the Shiite south. Cities such as Nasiriyah, Kut, Amarah, Samawah, Karbala, Hillah,

and Diwaniyah, along with their surrounding towns and villages, slipped from the regime's grasp. For a brief moment, it seemed as though Saddam's State had collapsed from within.

The Kurdish uprising, Raperîn in Kurdish, began shortly thereafter. On March 4, unrest spread to Ranya, and on March 6, its people stormed the Ba'ath Party headquarters, openly igniting the revolt. What followed was astonishing in its speed. Within ten days, by March 14, nearly all the major cities of what is now the Kurdistan Region, including Duhok, Erbil, and Sulaymaniyah, had been liberated.

In each city, ordinary people - children, women, youths, and the elderly - took part, stunned by the sudden collapse of regime authority and the fierce but disorganised resistance of armed Ba'athists. Contrary to later narratives, the role of the Peshmerga and the Kurdish political parties was initially limited. Their contribution lay more in coordination and encouragement than in initiating the uprising itself. Compared to the south, the fighting in most Kurdish cities was relatively light and, in many places, nearly bloodless.

One major exception was Kirkuk. There, fierce fighting erupted, and the city was liberated only after bloody clashes on March 20-21, led largely by the Peshmerga. When victory finally came, the streets filled with celebration. Regime bases were looted, symbols of fear were torn down, and for the first time in years, people spoke openly and without whispers.

For a fleeting moment, across the country, Iraq tasted the possibility of freedom.

The Turban of the Uprising

The rapid victories of the uprisings and the sudden collapse of state authority in the liberated cities astonished both the Iraqi people and American observers. Yet it was the character of the Shiite uprising in the south, not its success, that proved most unsettling. That development, more than anything else, prompted President Bush and his Arab allies to reconsider their position.

At the outset, the uprising in the Shiite south was spontaneous, chaotic, and largely unstructured. Over time, however, leadership began to shift. Elements of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), fighters from the Badr Corps, and Iranian-aligned Iraqi organisations gradually took control of the battlefield and the political direction of the revolt. Images of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, Mohammad Baqir al-Hakim, Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr, and other religious figures were raised across the south. The uprising was no longer merely political or national in appearance; it now wore a turban, unmistakably Iranian in style.

For Washington, this was a shock. American policymakers feared that Iraq, liberated at immense cost, was on the verge of being handed wholesale to an ideologically hostile, anti-American Iran. Saddam's regime appeared close to collapse before the United States had prepared a "pro-American" alternative capable of governing Iraq. The resulting hesitation ran directly against the will of the Iraqi people, yet from the perspective of American strategic interests, the concern was not unfounded.

10-12 March 1991

The Beirut Conference

On March 9, some eighty Iraqi opposition figures, party-affiliated and independent alike, flew from London to Beirut aboard a charter aircraft. The trip was funded by Saudi Arabia and organised with Syrian facilitation, under the broad objective of "finding an alternative regime." Other private flights brought Iraqi politicians, tribal leaders, and public figures from Tehran, Damascus, Ankara, and Riyadh.

Before boarding, most of us in London were dressed in Western clothing; only four wore clerical turbans. Among the organisers were Omar Dababa, a senior figure in the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, and Abu Ghassan of the Syrian Ba'ath Party. They had made a specific request to the Shiite participants: do not wear turbans, so as not to alarm the Americans. The request was politely ignored.

During the five-hour flight, and before landing, more than twenty-five participants changed their attire, donning black or white Shiite turbans. When we disembarked, international media crews were already waiting. Cameras immediately focused on the turbaned figures. Inside the conference hall, the scale of the transformation became even clearer: of the more than four hundred attendees, over one hundred wore turbans.

Abdul Aziz al-Hakim arrived late from Iran, accompanied by several clerics. His entrance drew the full attention of the cameras. At that moment, I turned to Muafaq al-Rubaie, a member of the Da'wa Party's political bureau, and asked why they had not committed to presenting a more reassuring image to American and European audiences. He answered candidly: "It is true our friends should not have done this, but this is the reality of Iraq. If they do not see it today, they will see it tomorrow. The Americans must accept it and deal with it."

Many Shiite clerics spoke Persian among themselves, and Persian influence was evident even in their Arabic. The Iranian orientation of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq was unmistakable. Tensions surfaced openly.

Even before departure from London, Omar Dababa had clashed with some participants who insisted that Hazhir Taymourian should neither board the plane nor attend the conference. Taymourian, an Iranian Kurd and well-known journalist (BBC Persian and *The Times*), had publicly criticised the Iranian regime on British television and radio and in *The Times*. His presence, they argued, was unacceptable.

By the time the conference ended, the message to Washington was clear and deeply unsettling: Saddam might be gone, but the Iraq emerging from the ruins would not be the Iraq America had imagined.

The Conference Under Occupation

Saudi Arabia allocated large sums of money for the conference and transferred the funds to Syria to organise it. Real authority over the arrangements rested with Abdul Halim Khaddam, who decided, deliberately, not to hold the meeting in Britain (as intended originally). Instead, he moved it to Beirut, then a battered and impoverished city living under the heavy hand of Syrian military occupation.

Lebanon at the time was tense and exhausted. Beirut was perhaps the worst possible venue. Buildings still bore the scars of civil war, pockmarked by bullets and shells. Syrian troops were stationed on nearly every street, their camps embedded deep in the city. From the airport, we were escorted directly to the Bristol Hotel, itself encircled by Syrian soldiers. From the outset, it was clear that Syria, and soon Iran, had effectively commandeered the conference. From the opening session to the final meeting, the atmosphere was one of argument, confrontation, and barely concealed hostility.

Participants were organised into four so-called “movements.” The first was the Kurdish movement, representing the Kurdistan Front without the Islamic parties. The second was the nationalist movement, including Ba‘athists, Nasserists, and similar Arab groups. The third was the Islamic movement, comprising Arab and Kurdish Islamist parties. The fourth was the democratic movement, led by the Communist Party of Iraq and other secular Arab organisations. Later, Saudi-backed groups joined, among them the Free Iraq Assembly, the Tribal Community, and the Islamic Movement in Kurdistan.

On March 11, Jalal Talabani arrived from Ankara, bringing with him the Turkmen Party and the Turkmen Islamic Party, at Turkey’s request.

The Joint Working Committee, which formally supervised the conference, consisted of representatives from seventeen organisations. When the speakers’ panel was formed, seventeen men sat on the stage. Almost invariably, the turbaned clerics occupied the centre and dominated the scene. In the opening session, Aziz Muhammad, the leader of the Communist Party of Iraq, found

himself seated between Abdul Aziz al-Hakim and another Shiite cleric from the Ummah. He looked visibly uncomfortable, almost bewildered by the symbolism of the moment.

One speaker from the Islamic Supreme Council declared, "I came yesterday from Iraq to Iran, and from Iran to Lebanon." He spoke triumphantly of the uprising stretching from Basra to Najaf and Karbala, celebrating Shiite heroism, without a single mention of the Kurdish uprising. He ended with a religious flourish: "The people of Iraq love Ali, Hassan, and Hussein, and they refuse to submit to those who covet Iraq from outside and to the occupiers." Whenever he invoked the Prophet's name, the whole hall was filled with the voices of more than a hundred other Shiites, singing together in an Iranian tone: "*Allahumma salli ala Muhammad wa ala ali Mohammad* - O Allah, send blessings upon our master Muhammad and the family of Muhammad."

The Shiite participants were confident, assertive, and unyielding. They showed little inclination toward compromise and little gratitude toward the non-Shiites or secularists. The secular Arab forces, meanwhile, were fragmented and disoriented. Their most vocal counterweights were Saad Saleh Jabr, the Syrian Ba'athists, and the Communist Party.

What was unfolding in Beirut was not merely a conference to imagine a post-Saddam Iraq. It was a preview of the struggle to define Iraq itself, its identity, its power centres, and the forces that would claim ownership of its future.

At the Beirut Conference, I spent a moment with the great poet Mohammed Mahdi al-Jawahiri. Noticing the klaw *- the Kurdish cap - he was wearing, embroidered with the word* Kurdistan*, I asked him teasingly whether it was true that all the* klaws *he wore had come from Mam Jalal. Jawahiri laughed and replied, without missing a beat, "Yes, these are all Jalal Talabani's* klawat*... (his bullshit!)". It was classic Jawahiri: affectionate and mocking at once, a joke sharpened by politics, friendship, and shared struggle.*

With Aziz Mohammed and Nejad Ahmed at the Beirut Conference, March 11

Order, Imbalance, and Fracture

The Kurds were the most disciplined contingent at the conference. Yet even this relative order was close to unravelling. The problem lay largely with Omar Dababa, who was responsible for inviting Kurdish participants. His selections leaned heavily toward his friends and political allies within the PUK, along with a handful of representatives from other Kurdistan Front parties and several independent figures. Members of the KDP, however, were almost entirely excluded until the very last moment. Only on the day before departure did Fuad Masum intervene, informing Dababa of his objection to the omission and providing him with several KDP names. He agreed, but still, KDP representation at the conference was minimal compared to other Kurdish factions, a distortion that was noticed immediately and quietly criticised.

Both in the conference hall and behind closed doors, tension was constant. On the second day, a private meeting took place involving Abdul Halim Khaddam, Jalal Talabani (Mam Jalal), Saad Saleh Jabr, and two others. During the discussion, Saad Saleh Jabr, widely understood to be aligned with Saudi Arabia and openly representing the Saudi position, made a serious miscalculation. He launched a blunt attack on what he called "the Iranian parties." Mam Jalal reacted instantly and with fury. "I know exactly who you mean," he said. "You mean the Kurdistan Democratic Party, the Supreme Islamic Assembly, and the Da'wa Party. These are fighters, patriotic and have given martyrs, and even their shoes are more honourable than people like you in Saudi Arabia." Faced with this outburst, Saad Saleh Jabr hastily retreated, insisting that he had not meant the KDP. The damage, however, was already done.

That evening, I found myself standing with Muafaq al-Rubaie, Saad Saleh Jabr, and Aziz Muhammad. Saad Saleh had a small bag slung over his shoulder. Muafaq al-Rubaie glanced at it and remarked casually that it looked elegant, an expensive brand. Saad Saleh smiled in sarcasm and replied, half-joking and half-provocative, "Yes, it's full of Saudi money. I brought it to distribute to you."

The remark hung in the air, revealing more than perhaps he intended. Money, influence, loyalties, and foreign hands were everywhere at that conference. What was being negotiated was not merely a political alternative to Saddam, but the ownership of Iraq's future, and everyone knew it.

Suppression of the Uprising

Faced with a stark choice, the United States opted for what it considered the lesser evil: a weakened and defeated Saddam rather than the emergence of an extremist Shiite Islamic regime backed by Iran. While the coalition offensive was still underway and the uprisings were spreading, President George H. W. Bush intervened directly. He telephoned General Norman Schwarzkopf and

ordered a halt to the advance. Coalition forces were instructed not to move toward Baghdad.

In effect, an air corridor was opened for the regime. Under the ceasefire agreement signed in Safwan, Schwarzkopf permitted Iraq to continue operating its helicopters. That decision proved decisive. The Republican Guard was allowed to redeploy its tanks and gunships against the rebels. Saddam needed no further signal. Within less than two weeks, he extinguished the uprising across Iraq, retaking every liberated city in the south.

What followed was slaughter. Hundreds of thousands of Shiite Arabs were killed. Poorly armed and loosely organised, the local resistance stood no chance against the regime's brutal counteroffensive. Government forces stormed cities, dragged people from their homes, hospitals, and mosques, and executed them without trial or inquiry. Entire neighbourhoods were erased under shellfire and helicopter attacks.

End of March 1991

The Fall of Kurdistan's Cities

In Kurdistan, the shock of President Bush's decisions was profound. Ordinary people waited anxiously for their fate. Kurdish leaders, however, still believed that the Peshmerga could withstand the regime's assault and defend the cities, that Kurdistan would not fall as easily as the south.

That hope was short-lived.

On March 26 and 27, regime forces launched heavy attacks and bombardments on Kirkuk. Baghdad announced the city's capture on Thursday, March 28, though fighting continued for several more days. The Peshmerga resisted fiercely, engaging in bloody battles, but the defence collapsed under overwhelming force. Losses were heavy, and the fall of Kirkuk opened the door to a wider campaign of terror.

From there, the regime turned mercilessly on other Kurdish cities. Within a single week, most major urban centres were recaptured. Erbil and Duhok fell on March 30-31, Zakho on April 1, and Sulaymaniyah on April 2-3.

Each capture followed the same grim pattern. Panic spread as artillery fire, helicopter gunships, and shelling drove civilians into the streets. Families fled in confusion. Regime troops entered the cities, conducting house-to-house searches

for weapons and suspected fighters. Young men were dragged from their homes, work or hospital beds. Those deemed suspicious were shot on the spot.

Thus began the great flight. Nearly two million people poured out of cities and towns, streaming toward plains, mountains, and borders in a desperate search for safety. What had begun as a moment of liberation ended as one of the greatest humanitarian catastrophes in modern Kurdish and Iraqi history.

The March of Flight

On the road of exile, civilians were left at the mercy of the regime's helicopters and the relentless pursuit of its army. Every parent carried a child, a little food, and whatever savings or valuables they could salvage. Some walked; others rode in cars until fuel ran out, then continued on foot. Those who strayed into the mountains scattered in every direction, seeking any path that might offer escape. Some families halted in the plains and hills, but most pressed on toward the Iranian and Turkish borders.

Along the way, hundreds of elderly people, children, and the sick perished from hunger, fear, exhaustion, and exposure. Bodies were buried hastily along the roadside or in village graveyards, without washing, without prayer, without ceremony. Rain, mud, cold winds, and sudden mountain storms compounded the suffering, turning flight into an ordeal. Morale collapsed. Many Peshmerga fighters abandoned their units, some even relinquishing leadership roles, not out of cowardice, but to save their families. Within days, unprecedented numbers of refugees reached the borders with Iran and Turkey.

The scale of the crisis quickly overwhelmed both States. Tehran and Ankara appealed to the international community for urgent assistance, acknowledging that the numbers and needs exceeded their capacity. Turkey closed its border, refusing entry to the refugees. The closure intensified the crisis and magnified the disaster, trapping families between mountains, minefields, and advancing forces.

U.S. and British Positions

Relief was slow and contested because the United States Administration was determined not to disrupt Iraq's internal political balance and not to assume responsibility for a renewed war between the regime and the opposition. Kurdish self-defence, let alone Kurdish self-rule, was treated as a red line. As before, the Kurds remained marginalised in American strategic thinking.

Neither Washington nor the United Kingdom wanted the Kurds to gain power abruptly or to lay the foundations of an independent state. Throughout the Cold War, policy had centred on preserving Iraq's territorial unity and Sunni Arab rule

in Baghdad. That approach had yielded enduring economic, political, and military advantages for Western governments and their regional partners, often at the Kurds' expense.

As a result, there were no direct channels to Kurdish leaders at that time. No Member of Parliament and no Conservative government official was willing to recognise the Kurds as a political interlocutor. In those days, even as families froze on the mountains and buried their dead by the roadside, Kurdish existence remained peripheral to the calculations of power.

Witnessed by the World

During the exodus, Western media outlets performed an unparalleled humanitarian and professional service. Without delay, major television networks dispatched correspondents to the Turkish-Iraqi border. Live broadcasts showed endless columns of civilians - children in their parents' arms, the elderly stumbling forward - marching through mud and cold toward uncertainty. Newspapers and television screens across Europe and North America carried images that could not be ignored. Under this relentless exposure, both George H. W. Bush and John Major found themselves under mounting pressure, visibly embarrassed by Saddam's brutality and by their own inaction.

"I Will Not Shed American Blood for the Kurds"

President Bush repeatedly denied that he had ever called on the Iraqi people to rise up against Saddam, insisting that his words had been misunderstood. The Kurds, however, asked for only one thing from the United States: to prevent Iraqi helicopters from being used against civilians. Washington refused. American officials feared that such a step would entangle the United States in a renewed conflict in Iraq, beyond the liberation of Kuwait.

The Bush administration was focused on celebrating victory in Kuwait and closing the chapter on the war. They were determined not to allow the Kurdish uprising to overshadow that moment or reopen the ghosts of Vietnam. Bush believed that intervention in Kurdistan would be extraordinarily complex, requiring coalition consensus and the deployment of ground forces deep inside Iraq. In a private meeting, he reportedly stated bluntly that he was not prepared to shed American military blood for the Kurds.

John Major echoed a similar sentiment. Britain, he said, had hoped that the Iraqi Army itself would overthrow Saddam, not that civilians would rise up and pay the price. Neither leader was willing to revise his position. Faced with growing media scrutiny, Bush and Major chose a different course: disengagement. Both retreated into silence, taking cover behind the Easter recess and temporarily removing themselves from public view.

End of March to Early April 1991

The Kurdish Uprising Abroad

In the diaspora, Kurds followed events at home minute by minute. Wherever they lived, they mobilised whatever influence they could, pressuring journalists, editors, and broadcasters to show the unfolding catastrophe. The aim was clear: to force coalition leaders, especially President Bush, to stop watching the massacre as distant observers and to intervene to prevent the destruction of an entire people.

In London, the Kurdish Cultural Centre (KCC) had long planned a Newroz celebration for Sunday, March 31, at Hammersmith Palais. Every year, hundreds of Kurds, including families gathered there to mark the new year. That day, the celebration turned into something else entirely, a collective vigil.

News from Kurdistan cast a heavy shadow over the hall. The atmosphere was dark, tense, and grief-stricken. While we were still gathered inside, reports of the first mass flight reached us. According to the Kurdistan Front and the BBC, Erbil and Duhok had been evacuated that very morning. Under artillery fire and helicopter attacks, entire populations were fleeing toward the plains and the mountains.

In that moment, celebration became mourning, and distance offered no protection from the weight of what was unfolding at home.

From Vigil to Resolve

The audience decided to march to the Embassy of the United States, London, in Grosvenor Square, to stage a demonstration and hold an overnight vigil outside the Embassy. Even before we arrived, journalists and reporters had been alerted from multiple directions. By the time we reached the square, cameras from most major channels were already waiting.

Men, women, and children were dressed in Kurdish traditional and ceremonial clothing. Each carried a lit candle. The scene was visually powerful, but emotionally improvised. There was no clear plan, no agreed strategy, and no shared understanding of what the demonstration was meant to achieve beyond expressing grief and anger. After a few hours, the crowd gradually dispersed. Before leaving, however, there was a collective agreement: we would reconvene on Monday, April 1, at the KCC, on Stannary Street in Lambeth.

On Monday afternoon, around sixty-five people gathered at the KCC. This time, the mood was different. Calm replaced shock. People began to calculate, debate, and plan. After a long discussion, it was agreed that a group of healthy young

volunteers would begin a hunger strike in front of the U.S. Embassy under the slogan: *"On strike to the death."* Forty-four individuals stepped forward immediately and registered their names.

The hunger strike was coordinated by Farhad Abdulaziz Ala'Aldeen and Salar Bapir. From the outset, there was a clear and deliberate decision to prevent political parties from taking control of the initiative. Several parties attempted to do so, but their efforts were firmly rejected during the meeting. The consensus was unequivocal: the strikes, demonstrations, and lobbying must not be partisan. They had to belong to Kurdish society as a whole.

As a result, party representatives played no meaningful role in directing these activities, from the first day of the hunger strike to its conclusion. What was unfolding was not a party campaign, but a collective act carried out in the name of a people whose voices had been ignored, whose suffering had been televised, and whose fate still hung in the balance.

Fourteen Days at the Embassy

That same afternoon, most of the people turned up in front of the Embassy of the United States, London. From the moment they arrived, they did not leave. For fourteen consecutive days, nearly 360 hours, the hunger strike of forty-four people continued without interruption. The pavement in front of the embassy became more than a protest site; it turned into a command post. Plans were drafted there, decisions were taken, press interviews were conducted, and coordination with Kurdish communities across Europe was maintained.

The strikers wore placards identifying their cause. They consumed nothing but water and sweet tea. After several days, signs of physical collapse began to appear. Some participants grew visibly weak; two were eventually taken by ambulance to the hospital. Alongside Fuad Hanari and other members of the Kurdish Scientific and Medical Association (KSMA), I monitored the health of the strikers, carrying out basic medical examinations and assessing who could safely continue.

This hunger strike proved to be the single most effective instrument of our lobbying campaign. On one level, it created a fixed point, a living nerve centre from which everything else radiated. Journalists and camera crews were constantly present, arriving and departing with updates, interviews, and footage. News from Kurdistan and from Kurdish communities across Europe flowed through that space daily. The strike gave the media a human story that could not be ignored.

British public sympathy followed. Ordinary people stopped, asked questions, and donated money. The KCC opened a dedicated account under the name *Kurdish*


DR DLAWAR ALA'ALDEEN
Kurdish Exile

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HUNGER STRIKE TO THE DEATH

Disaster Fund. During those fourteen days, thousands of pounds were collected directly on the streets. The strike did not fade; it accumulated pressure. It continued until concrete assurances of U.S. engagement were finally obtained.

On April 14, Farhad Ala'Aldeen, Salar Bapir, and Shafiq Qazaz formally submitted a letter to the U.S. Consul. He promised to transmit the Kurdish message directly to Washington and, in return, asked that the hunger strike be brought to an end.

By then, the objective had been achieved. The bodies of forty-four young people had done what diplomacy alone could not: they had forced the world to listen.

The strike site, opposite the US Embassy became the focal point where we planned our work and conducted interviews

Chapter Four

In Aid of the Mass Exodus

Engaging Margaret Thatcher and

Turning the Tide

The night I got home from Hammersmith Hall and the US Embassy - Sunday, March 31 - I couldn't sleep at all. My mind refused to rest; I was still immersed in calculations, strategies, and planning for the hours and days ahead. I kept thinking about what could be done on a day so dark, under the pressure of an emergency, with time slipping away. Every bit of experience, every relationship I had built over the years, felt suddenly vital.

That night, I drafted four letters. I hoped to fax them the next day to President Bush, his wife Barbara, Prime Minister John Major, and former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. In those letters, I made three urgent and clear requests. First, that Saddam be prevented from bombing Kurdish cities and intimidating the refugees. Second, that the refugees be reassured and provided with food, medicine, and shelter. And third, that the Iraqi people be freed from Saddam's brutal rule.

Monday, 1 April 1991

Early in the morning, I reached out to three experienced friends for help: John Foran, president of International Medical Relief; Oliver Morse, an English journalist; and Dennis Cameron, an American journalist. John had long been involved with Kurds and Iraqis and had assisted us in many ways over the years. I had only recently met Oliver and Dennis. A few days earlier, they had approached me for help to get to Kurdistan to conduct journalistic work and research on chemical weapons. They knew my name from my previous publications on the chemical attacks in Kurdistan and had interviewed me for that work. The night before, all three - John, Oliver, and Dennis -had come to Hammersmith Hall (Nawroz Party) to join us and meet our community network.

Initially, I asked the three friends to help me develop a plan, to quickly reach out to British leaders - and, if possible, to take several Kurdish political figures to

get to meet the Foreign Secretary, the Defence Secretary, or the Prime Minister himself. The goal was to break through the barriers of bureaucracy and reach the very source of decision-making in Britain. We knew several Labour MPs in the opposition who had supported us in the past, but their assistance alone could not exert the kind of pressure needed to change the government's stance.

On the same day, April 1, we held a meeting with representatives of the Kurdistan Front (which includes all the main political parties) and agreed on several steps. Yet it quickly became clear that our focus, the journalists' and mine, was not aligned with that of the Kurdish politicians. Many of the leaders were attending Kurdistan Front's internal meetings, speaking to Kurdish communities, while others, their English-speaking representatives, moved from one satellite TV studio to another, hoping that media exposure would pressure the British and US governments to change their stance. In fact, on that day, the world's journalists and their cameramen were already broadcasting vivid images of the tragic mass exodus, and they were themselves seeking Kurdish representatives. Kurdish leaders, therefore, did not need to spend time searching for news cameras; their energy would have been better spent lobbying Parliament and Government officials. Of course, this was far from easy, given the complex Governance systems and the difficult conditions we faced. Moreover, most Kurdish leaders in Britain did not speak English or understand the UK's lobbying routes. Those who were capable linguists were few, often not party leaders, and some key lobbyists operated outside the political parties, often through civil society organisations.

I myself was lobbying on behalf of the Kurdish Scientific and Medical Association (KSMA), while striving to coordinate with the Kurdistan Front and other civil society organisations. Without coordination, lobbying efforts risked being fragmented, ineffective or even counterproductive. Aligning our approach with the positions of the Kurdistan Front was essential to ensure our efforts had an impact.

Together with Oliver Morse and Dennis Cameron, we set out to obtain the telephone and fax numbers for John Major, so we could send them letters on my behalf as secretary of the Kurdish Scientific and Medical Association or on behalf of one of the political leaders of the Kurdistan Front, and ask for an urgent meeting. Our first success came when we reached David Howell, a Conservative MP and former cabinet minister under Margaret Thatcher. I immediately called him (it was mid-afternoon) while he was in the House of Commons and asked for his help in conveying our message to his party leadership and arranging an opportunity to meet John Major.

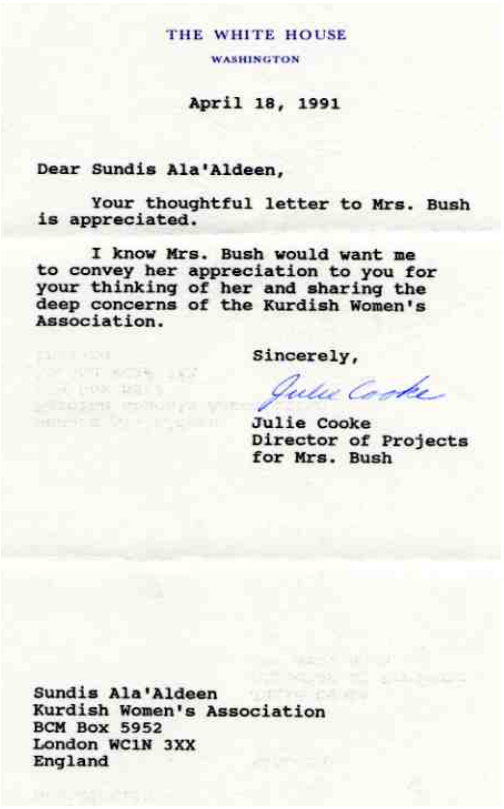
Howell expressed deep sympathy for the victims of the uprising and spoke critically of Saddam's regime and the policies of the allies. He explained that seeing the Prime Minister directly would be impossible, as Major was on Easter

vacation, but he agreed to arrange a meeting for representatives of the Kurdistan Front with him, to discuss the situation and explore a pathway to meet the Foreign Secretary and the Minister of Defence. He set the meeting for April 5 in the Parliament building. I relayed the appointment to the Kurdistan Front members (via Dr Fuad Masum of PUK) and urged them to attend punctually, explaining that I would not accompany them, as I was neither a member of their political parties nor formally involved in the Front in Kurdistan.

A Letter to Barbara Bush

I passed the draft of the letter I had written to Barbara Bush the night before by John Foran, Oliver Morse, and Dennis Cameron for consultation and editing. I asked Dennis to help obtain the phone and fax numbers for President and Mrs Bush through his extensive US press contacts. He provided me with the private numbers of the chief editors of the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times*, explaining that they were connected to the President's private office and that, if I could persuade them, I might reach George and Barbara Bush directly.

Right there, I picked up the phone and began trying. Despite my persistence, however, I could not get past the editors' secretaries at either newspaper; in both cases, I was told that they were in meetings and unavailable. I left messages and my phone number and waited. Two hours later, the editorial secretary of the *Washington Post* called me back and provided the fax number for Barbara Bush's office, explaining that they could not share a private phone number.



THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

April 18, 1991

Dear Sundis Ala'Aldeen,

Your thoughtful letter to Mrs. Bush is appreciated.

I know Mrs. Bush would want me to convey her appreciation to you for your thinking of her and sharing the deep concerns of the Kurdish Women's Association.

Sincerely,

Julie Cooke

Julie Cooke
Director of Projects
for Mrs. Bush

Sundis Ala'Aldeen
Kurdish Women's Association
BCM Box 5952
London WC1N 3XX
England

Without delay, Oliver Morse took the letter I had prepared, made a few editorial refinements, printed it, and faxed it to Barbara Bush under my wife's name, Sundis Ala'Aldeen. In the letter, we asked for an urgent response. I was not optimistic. She (Barbara Bush) was on vacation, and I did not expect her to intervene in a manner that might place her at odds with her husband's Administration. My intuition proved correct. It took nearly three weeks before we received a reply, which came not directly from Barbara Bush but from her project manager, Julie Cook. The letter was signed on her behalf in April.

Contacting John Major and Margaret Thatcher

I was under no illusion about the difficulty of reaching George H. W. Bush or John Major directly. Beyond the fact that both were away on Easter holiday, it was clear that neither was prepared, at that moment, to contemplate a fundamental shift in policy toward Iraq or to consider regime change. We didn't want to waste our efforts and precious time. What we needed, urgently, was an individual with sufficient stature and personal influence to shape the thinking of both the American president and the British prime minister. In that context, no figure loomed larger than Margaret Thatcher.

Even though I was chasing Thatcher with persistence, and had optimistically prepared a letter addressed to her. Yet, my journalist colleagues and I harboured serious reservations about her likely response. Her record as prime minister, until November 22, 1990, had been marked by hard-line, right-wing policies, and there was little reason to expect an easy or sympathetic shift in her position. Thatcher had maintained strong ties with Saddam Hussein's regime, supported Iraq during the war with Iran, and consistently prioritised Britain's economic and political interests over Kurdish human rights. Even after the chemical bombing of Halabja, she refused to defend the Kurds or openly challenge Saddam. On more than one occasion, she had personally obstructed efforts by Kurdish groups to expose or embarrass his regime. These realities weighed heavily on our calculations, even as we recognised that her voice, if moved, could prove decisive.

Despite all this, I came to see Margaret Thatcher as the only viable key to success, and I concentrated my efforts accordingly. I allowed myself a measure of hope that she might speak out, for several reasons. After Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, when Thatcher was still prime minister, she and Saddam Hussein had engaged in a bitter war of words. Thatcher accused Saddam of "hiding behind women's skirts," referring to his use of foreign civilians, including women and children, as human shields near factories and military installations. Saddam responded in kind, dismissing her as a "crazy old woman."

Moreover, Thatcher's departure from office had not been voluntary. She was forced out through internal party manoeuvring, and John Major, a relatively young member of her cabinet, was elevated to the premiership. One of Major's first moves was to roll back several of Thatcher's policies. Overnight, Thatcher fell from the pinnacle of power into the uncomfortable role of side-lined observer. Yet she retained immense moral and political authority and was widely regarded as a "back-seat driver." She embraced that role, intervening from time to time in Major's affairs and, not infrequently, placing him and his government in awkward and embarrassing positions.

At our meeting with my journalist friends, I asked Oliver Morse to try, by any means available, to obtain Margaret Thatcher's personal telephone number. Oliver was an intelligent and articulate young man with a wide network of contacts, but he had never worked in British domestic politics and was unfamiliar with the inner circles of government. Even so, he assured me that he would make a serious effort to track down Thatcher's contact details and report back as soon as possible. He had already helped me in drafting the letter addressed to her; we revised it once more together, after which Oliver took the letter with him and left.

Shortly thereafter, through Dale Campbell-Savours, an old friend and a Labour MP, I was able, quite easily, to obtain the telephone and fax numbers of John Major's office. When I called, the line was answered by Steve Wall, Major's Special Secretary for Foreign Affairs. Wall expressed genuine sympathy and a willingness to help, but he was clear that the British Government could not adopt a position that ran counter to U.S. policy. Nevertheless, he promised to pass my letter directly to the Prime Minister. Because of the urgency of the situation, I was advised not to rely on postal delivery. Acting on John Foran's advice, I immediately drafted and printed a revised letter reflecting the latest developments and prepared it for hand delivery to John Major's office at 10 Downing Street on Tuesday, April 2.

Tuesday, April 2nd

That morning, I went directly from my home in Hern Hill to Downing Street. At 8:15 a.m., I met with Steve Wall and handed him the letter. He promised to ensure it reached the Prime Minister as quickly as possible and to keep me informed of any response. Wall emphasised the delicacy of their position, noting that although John Major was on vacation, he remained closely attuned to current events and deeply concerned about the Kurdish tragedy. He assured me that, within the constraints of his role, he would do everything possible to avoid any delay.

Thatcher's Reply

Oliver Morse managed to obtain Margaret Thatcher's phone and fax numbers, and before sending my letter, he called me one last time to ensure we would not change our plans hastily in response to recent events. I thanked him and asked him to fax the letter immediately. That same day, Thatcher's press secretary, Abel Haden, replied with professionalism and courtesy, assuring us that a response from Thatcher, either yes or no, would be provided in due course. It was clear that Thatcher was either busy or wanted time to consider the matter, so no immediate reply came.

I began to worry that Thatcher might remain aloof or hesitate, given her limited familiarity with the Kurds and the concern that we might misrepresent her or the situation. I decided to call Haden again and spent twenty minutes on the phone explaining the full background, our intentions, and emphasising that our requests were consistent with the principles outlined in the letter, adhering strictly to ethical and political standards. Haden's question was direct: "What exactly do you want Thatcher to do for you?" I explained that we wanted her to publicly encourage the British and American governments to stop Saddam Hussein and protect the Kurdish populations. Additionally, she should contact John Major and George W. Bush directly, urging them to pay special attention to the Kurdish plight and engage seriously with the Kurdish representatives. Haden appeared convinced and promised to convey this reinforced message to Thatcher, encouraging her to support the Kurds without hesitation.

That day passed without a response, and I was anxious. I had placed high hopes on Thatcher's influence and knew that few, if anyone, could exert as much impact as she could. I had done everything in my power to bring her into the effort, and now all that remained was to wait.

Wednesday, April 3rd

At seven o'clock in the morning, I found myself facing the British Foreign Minister (eq. Deputy Foreign Secretary), Douglas Hogg, in a live interview on Sky News. He argued that "the problem between the Kurds and Saddam is an internal matter, and it is not for Britain to interfere in the internal affairs of a sovereign country." I responded with anger and clarity, placing responsibility for Saddam's crimes and the unfolding tragedy squarely on the Allies and on the negligence of the British government. "This is a man-made disaster," I said, "the direct consequence of the Kuwait war, President Bush's call, and John Major's policy."

Following the interview, I was offered another appearance, this time with the BBC, later that afternoon. I immediately called Oliver Morse and told him that if Thatcher did not respond, I would go on the BBC and state that Margaret Thatcher supported Kurdish human rights and was deeply disturbed by the inhumane policies of John Major and George Bush. I did not care if Thatcher later denied it or, at worst, she would appear on television to contradict me. I was convinced she could not publicly side with the British government's harsh stance on such a sensitive day, when British public opinion overwhelmingly sympathised with the refugees, nor openly refute someone speaking on behalf of a suffering people.

With that confidence, I asked Oliver to convey this message, indirectly, to Abel Haden, to increase the pressure on Thatcher. Oliver was uneasy. He feared that such pressure might backfire and jeopardise the trust he had built with Haden. But I told him plainly that we were drowning and had no time for caution or delicacy. I reminded him that Sulaymaniyah was under immediate pressure from the regime, and that within hours its people, like those of Kirkuk, Erbil, and Duhok, would be driven into the cold plains and mountains. Under such circumstances, I believed my stance was justified. If necessary, I was prepared to take that risk.

It was half past twelve when Oliver Morse called. He told me, "I conveyed your threat to Haden, and shortly afterwards, he called back to say that Thatcher has agreed to see you, but she does not know what you are coming to her with." Thatcher had made it clear that she did not wish to meet a Kurdish political leader. She was no longer in government, had relinquished formal political authority, and believed that meeting a foreign political figure or taking an explicit political position could be interpreted as interference, potentially embarrassing both herself and John Major's government.

I immediately suggested that we visit her not as political representatives, but on behalf of a delegation from the Kurdish Scientific and Medical Association, together with a delegation of 'Kurdish Women Association' (created and named on paper on the day). Oliver relayed this proposal to Haden, and shortly thereafter returned with encouraging news: Thatcher had agreed to receive the delegation and was expecting us at 3:30 p.m. To reinforce the legitimacy of the meeting, Haden asked that our letter be resent, bearing the stamp of the head of the Kurdish delegation. Acting quickly, I revised the earlier letter and faxed it under the name of the Kurdish Scientific and Medical Association, affixing my own signature as head of the delegation, and my wife Sundis' signature representing Kurdish Women Association. I placed the originals in an envelope, intending to hand them to Thatcher personally during the meeting.

Then I began thinking carefully about whom to bring with me. Thatcher had specifically requested that no political leaders be present, and at that time, there was no women's political organisation in Britain that could officially represent the Kurdish cause. We needed people who could speak English and also convey the human side of the Kurdish tragedy in front of the cameras. I decided to invite several young women and children dressed in traditional Kurdish attire, so that their presence would reflect both the human face and cultural identity of our people.

Within half an hour, I had arranged for five women, family friends and relatives, and three children to join us. They were my sister-in-law, Shahla Omar, with her son Ranj Kasim Ala'Aldeen; Dilkesh Khan with her two children, Banu and Miran Bakhtiar; and Hazha, Asterah, and Naz, daughters of Bakir Reza.

Although the letters bore my wife's signature, she could not attend due to illness. I instructed the women to gather at the Kurdish Cultural Centre (KCC) at 2:30 p.m., without delay, and to wear bright, colourful Kurdish clothing to ensure their presence would leave a strong impression.

In the meantime, I contacted most of the major television stations and newspapers, while asking Oliver Morse, Dennis Cameron, and John Foran to do the same and ensure coverage near Thatcher's residence. I went to the designated meeting point at KCC at the appointed time to gather the delegation of women and children, but only Shahla and Ranj had arrived; the others were delayed due to the distance and heavy traffic. I called them and urged them to proceed immediately to Thatcher's house at 17 Great College Street in Victoria. I also sent a message to Mrs Thatcher to let her know we might be about fifteen minutes late.

When we finally arrived, cameras from most channels and newspapers were already waiting outside Thatcher's residence. The Kurdish women and children arrived by taxi at 3:40 p.m. The delay disrupted the live broadcast plans, but the media quickly adapted. Thatcher's interview was expedited so that footage could be sent to the stations for the 5:40 pm news on ITV and the 6:00 p.m. broadcast on the BBC.

Meeting Thatcher

Upon our arrival, Margaret Thatcher opened the door and greeted us, looking at each of us carefully. She immediately addressed the cameras, urging the media to do everything possible to help the Kurds. She said, "It is not the first time that these things have happened to the Kurds. What do they want? They want warmth, they want food, they want shelter, they want medicines. They are right up near the Turkish border. It should not be beyond the wit of man to get planes there with tents, with food, with warm blankets and warm clothes. The people want it, and they need it. And I think we should take very firm steps. It is not a question of standing on legal niceties. This is a real mercy mission. They need help, and they need it now". Turning to several journalists, she added, "Go and work to help them. They need bread, water, warmth, and shelter."

Thatcher then gestured toward Ranj, Banu, and Mirani, inviting them to take chocolates from a nearby bowl inside. She welcomed us into her living room and immediately engaged with the women, asking if they had relatives among the refugees and when they had arrived. One of the women (Dilkash) explained that they were forced to flee two years earlier and came from Halabja, the town bombarded with chemical weapons. Thatcher nodded knowingly. "Yes, I know. It was in 1988, wasn't it?" she said, showing her awareness of the tragic bombing that had marked the city.

Then I handed her the letter that had been faxed earlier and explained, "Sundis could not come, but asked me to deliver this on behalf of both organisations." She read it carefully, pausing thoughtfully. "This is a tragedy, and we must not remain silent about it," she said. "I feel deeply for the children shivering in the cold, without fire, bread, or water in the snow. We must all help them."

Oliver Morse, who had accompanied us, spoke up, identifying himself as British and outlining some of our specific requests. Thatcher then turned to me, inviting the Kurdish perspective.

I began: "The Iraqi people were seeking an opportunity to rid themselves of Saddam's regime, so the uprising erupted spontaneously, without detailed planning or external intervention. In Kurdistan, the Peshmerga and political parties observed events closely. During the regime's military attacks, the Peshmerga deliberately separated themselves from the civilians to protect unarmed people, but it was futile. The regime still bombed women, children, and the elderly."

Thatcher nodded solemnly. "Yes, I know. Saddam only dares to strike the weak," she said.

I continued, my voice firm but measured:

"What Saddam did to Kuwait in seven months, he has done to the Iraqi people for twenty-three years. We Kurds have endured oppression for so long, not to secede from Iraq, contrary to what some claim, but to claim our freedom and dignity. We do not seek to divide Iraq; we only ask for our rights, whether within Iraq or elsewhere. We do not deserve the torture, the killings, the forced expulsions that a dictator imposes on a peaceful nation, in full view of the world."

Thatcher regarded me thoughtfully, then asked, "To what extent are the Kurds Iraqis?"

I replied, "To the same extent that a Scot is British. Kurdish loyalty for Iraq is no less than a Scot's loyalty for Britain, provided he is treated as a first-class citizen."

She laughed lightly. "I hadn't thought about it that way before!" she said.

I continued, my words deliberate and urgent:

"We are not asking you to overthrow Saddam, nor are we seeking military assistance. We are not asking for the impossible or a miracle. We are not asking you to act against the British policies or national interests. Our requests are entirely within the framework of international law and legitimate agreements: to

stop the killing of civilians - families, women, children, and the elderly - and to ensure that any government actions, such as helicopter strikes, comply with the ceasefire agreements signed between Iraq and its allies after the liberation of Kuwait, as well as established human rights and civilian protection laws.

I added:

“You must contact Prime Minister John Major and President Bush directly. Unfortunately, the Easter holiday complicates matters, and both gentlemen are avoiding the media and usual channels of communication. We need your direct intervention. If not for a dignitary of your stature, our pleas will likely be ignored. Pressure must also be applied to Turkey and Iran to open their borders to refugees, who should then be provided with food, medicine, and eventually returned safely to their homes.

“We also seek your guidance, based on your experience, for Kurdish leaders on long-term solutions to the Kurdish issue in the Middle East. What should they do to make sure the British and American policy- and decision-makers understand them? Can you help our Kurdish leaders meet the leaders of the Conservative Party and the British government? Can you arrange a private interview with the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary for the Kurdish delegation?

Thatcher replied with a clear sense of purpose:

“Your people, the refugees, must return to their homes. It is good that you are not demanding secession from Iraq, and that your aim is simply freedom and prosperity, nothing more. After you leave, I will contact the government and the Prime Minister. I will ask them to send assistance and to impose strict ceasefire conditions on Saddam. Go see Secretary of State [for Overseas Development] Linda Chocker and seek her help, following the advice you have given me. Continue to meet with people and politicians face-to-face, and make your case clearly and openly.”

Despite my repeated urging, Thatcher did not promise to contact George W. Bush directly, though she said she would do what she could and see how matters unfolded. She then escorted us warmly to the door. As we walked down the corridor, Thatcher suddenly asked me, “Why is it that people think the Kurds seek self-determination or separation from Baghdad?” I looked at her and replied, “Mrs Thatcher, if you were married to someone who treated you as badly as Saddam treated the Kurds, wouldn’t you ask for a divorce?” She laughed, tilted her head toward the kitchen, and said with a wry smile, “I never thought of Dennis that way!”

As we approached the door, Thatcher wanted to address the press again, but Abel Haden stopped her, suggesting it was better for only the Kurds to appear before the cameras. At the door, I spoke to the press, relaying our discussion, emphasising Mrs Thatcher's efforts, and stressing the urgent need for British and U.S. government intervention.

After the journalists and cameras departed, I asked to speak privately with Abel Haden. Thatcher was on the phone and gestured for me to wait while she spoke with John Major. Once she finished, we gathered at the door with John Foran, Oliver Morse, and Dennis Cameron, interpreting her words and clarifying the next steps.

Less than ten minutes later, Abel Haden returned with news: Mrs Thatcher had reached John Major and conveyed most of our requests. It was late Wednesday afternoon, and Major was on his way to Chelsea Stadium to watch his favourite team play football. During the call, Thatcher and Major agreed that the British government would act without delay, sending relief aid to Turkey that very evening. Thatcher warned Major that the man-made disaster would damage the Conservatives in the upcoming May elections, urging the government to demonstrate its humanity. She stressed that by doing so, the Conservatives could attain moral high ground and take pride in it during the election.

In that same conversation, John Major made two key promises to Thatcher. First, he pledged to provide £20 million in aid, through Secretary Linda Chocker, with blankets and medicine worth one million pounds to be sent immediately that very night on a military plane to the Iraqi-Turkish border. Second, he promised to pursue a fundamental solution to the Kurdish uprising, acknowledging the constraints posed by the negative stance of the United States and assuring that he would discuss the matter directly with George W. Bush.

Immediate and Lasting Impact

Before leaving Thatcher's house, I asked Abel Haden to provide me with George W. Bush's contact information on our behalf. I then drove the children and women back to the Kurdish Cultural Centre and returned to the US Embassy to share the news with my friends. By the time I arrived, they had already heard, and television and satellite channels were broadcasting images of Thatcher with our delegation. The global response was immediate, sparking optimism among Kurds worldwide. That evening, I was interviewed by ITV, the BBC, and Sky News.

By coincidence, I again encountered Douglas Hogg on BBC Newsnight. This time, I did not need to defend Kurdish rights; Hogg himself was addressing the human tragedy, emphasising the responsibility of governments, and declaring, "Saddam is a bad man!"

Margaret Thatcher's appearance and words were widely broadcast across the media, bringing the Kurdish plight to international attention. The children: Ranj Kasim Ala'Aldeen, Bano Bakhtiar, and Miran Bakhtiar, were symbols of the human cost of the tragedy.

The Guardian Thursday April 4 1991

Iraqi regime's systematic slaughter of Kurdish and Shi'ite rebels

Thatcher urges 'mercy mission' of tents and food to fleeing Kurds

Michael Simmons

MARGARET Thatcher led forceful calls in Britain yesterday for immediate international action to help the Kurds. After receiving a deputation of Kurdish exiles at her home in Belgravia, she said it was not the time for "legal niceties".

The Kurds had appealed to her as "a mother and a grandmother" to use her influence with the Prime Minister and President Bush, but she carefully avoided any hint of conflict with the policies being outlined by her successor.

She declined to mention any need for renewed military intervention by the allied forces, or by anyone else.

"It should not be beyond the wit of man to get planes there with tents, with food, and with warm blankets," she said. "I think we should take very firm steps. We should go now — it is a real mercy mission."

Dr Dalwer Ala-Aldeen of the Kurdish Scientific and Medical Association said Mrs Thatcher had promised to do all she could to help. "She was very sympathetic, she was very understanding and she has been very well informed about the situation."

Mrs Thatcher said later that she had agreed to meet the Kurdish deputation after hearing radio reports describing the "pitiful state" of refugees in the mountains bordering Turkey.

Chapter Five

Lobbying to Aid the Mass Exodus

Meeting the Archbishop of Canterbury and The Seizure of the Iraqi Embassy

Thursday, April 4, 1991

The Turning of the Tide

By the morning of April 4, the political atmosphere had unmistakably shifted. John Major had issued a new statement, and members of his Cabinet were suddenly, and conspicuously, enthusiastic about Kurdish human rights. The change was palpable.

That morning, I drafted a letter of thanks to Margaret Thatcher, writing on behalf of myself, the Kurdish Scientific and Medical Association, and Kurdish women. In it, I emphasised that the Kurds would be steadfast friends in the years to come, and that this relationship, newly awakened, must not be allowed to lapse. I also asked her to facilitate direct meetings between Kurdish representatives and British political leaders, believing that personal engagement was now both possible and necessary.

Later that same day, John Major saw the letter I had sent, which reached him through Steve Wall. Major asked Wall to respond to me personally, and in light of the rapidly evolving developments. Wall's reply, dated April 5. It transpired, in his letter, it was the European Community that had collectively pledged £21.5 million for humanitarian assistance in the Gulf region, of which the UK's contribution was just over £4 million. In the letter, he also refers to the Prime Minister's communication with European leaders to "ensure a full discussion at the European Council meeting on 8 April" and had spoken to President GW Bush "about our concerns".

10 DOWNING STREET
LONDON SW1A 2AA

From the Private Secretary

5 April 1991

Dear Dr Ala'Aldeen,

Thank you for your letter of 2 April to the Prime Minister about the situation of the Kurdish peoples in Iraq. I have been asked to reply.

We are deeply concerned about the position of the Kurdish minorities in Iraq, who are now being forced to flee from the brutal repression of government forces. We are taking action to meet the urgent humanitarian needs of the Kurdish peoples and are seeking to ensure pressure is brought to bear to stop the Iraqi regime's action against them.

The United Kingdom has already contributed some $6 million via the ICRC and UNDRO to meet humanitarian needs in the Gulf region. Yesterday, the Prime Minister announced that a further £0.5 million has been contributed to the ICRC's operations in Iraq and, also, we received the agreement of the Turkish authorities to permit the rapid dispatch of two British aircraft carrying humanitarian relief for the Kurdish refugees. The European Community has pledged some £21.5 million for humanitarian assistance in the Gulf, of which the UK's contribution is over £4 million. We will continue to play our full part in helping to meet the humanitarian needs of the Kurdish peoples.

In addition, we have taken further steps to ensure this urgent issue receives the attention it deserves. The Prime Minister has written to his European colleagues to ensure a full discussion at the European Council meeting on 8 April. He has also spoken to President Bush about our concerns. We have been in touch with the Turkish authorities in London and Ankara pressing them to open the Turkish border for Iraqi refugees.

We also played a leading role in the adoption of Security Council Resolution 687 on a formal ceasefire to the Gulf conflict. The terms we require Iraq to accept are stringent - and rightly so. Amongst other conditions, the Resolution provides for the elimination of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction. It imposes a strict embargo on the sale of arms. The terms are designed not only to ensure that Iraq cannot threaten its neighbours again, but also to prevent a repetition of the appalling events at Halabja.

Following the adoption of that Resolution, the Security Council is now urgently considering what action it can take over the position of the Kurdish peoples. We are working for the very strongest consensus in condemnation of Iraq's brutality towards its own people. We will demand that Iraq should cease its actions against civilians and help the dispatch of humanitarian relief to all parts of Iraq.

We are conscious of the need to do all we can to help the Kurdish people. We have explained why the coalition forces cannot interfere in Iraq's internal affairs. But we have also made clear that we will not shed any tears for Saddam Hussain should he fall from power and that we look forward to welcoming into the international community a democratic Iraq which respects the political and human rights of all its peoples.

Yours sincerely,
Stephen Wall

(J. S. WALL)

Communication with the Archbishop of Canterbury

After our successful meeting with Margaret Thatcher, my sense of relief was tempered by unease. I feared that the British government might still hesitate to offer meaningful political assistance, particularly given the uncertainty surrounding Washington's position and the possibility that the Americans might yet undermine John Major. At the same time, there were faint but discernible signs that pressure was easing, partly as a result of the previous day's developments. Still, experience had taught me not to rely on momentum alone.

As I had done before, I began to think of someone whose moral and spiritual authority might carry weight with John Major himself. My thoughts turned naturally to Dr George Carey, the Archbishop of Canterbury.

I telephoned Lambeth Palace and asked to speak with John Little, the Archbishop's press secretary. Little, a seasoned man in his sixties, had previously worked in the office of the Labour Party leader and later served as secretary to the former Archbishop. Even after Archbishop Robert Runcie's retirement, he had remained in post. He was well acquainted with the political climate and the unfolding crisis, so I needed little preamble to persuade him to convey my message to his superior.

Little cautioned me that the Archbishop's schedule was exceptionally full and that all interviews were booked four weeks in advance. He suggested that it might not be possible for the Archbishop to see me. I told him that I would take whatever time could be spared, however brief. All I was asking, I explained, was for the Archbishop to appear on camera and urge the British government and the public to halt the killing, acknowledge the crime being committed, assist the refugees, send humanitarian aid, and approach the Kurdish question with justice and compassion.

Little asked that I put my requests in writing so that he could present them directly to the Archbishop. Within the hour, I drafted the letter, clearly listing my appeals and assuring him that we would not, under any circumstances, exploit or misrepresent the Archbishop's position. I faxed it immediately.

Less than an hour later, John Little called back. His voice carried a note of urgency and, to my surprise, warmth. His Grace, he said, was prepared to see me on the next day, Friday, April 5, at 2:30 in the afternoon.

That evening, April 4, and throughout the morning of April 5, I contacted newspapers and broadcast media outlets, informing them of the timing of my visit. If the Archbishop was prepared to listen, the world, I felt, should be prepared to hear.

Friday, April 5, 1991

The Occupation of the Iraqi Embassy

At 9:30 am, events escalated with sudden force. A group of forty-five Kurdish loyalists and community activists stormed the Iraqi Embassy in London. In the initial confrontation, they overpowered four British police officers guarding the premises, as well as four Iraqi embassy employees, and swiftly took control of the entire building.

Two of the police officers were armed, yet neither drew a weapon. Instead, through physical restraint alone, they prevented roughly thirty Kurds from entering the embassy. Others forced their way inside and began smashing doors, windows, tables, and cabinets, including those in the ambassador's office. From the upstairs balcony, the occupiers burned the Iraqi flag and threw papers and files from the balcony into the street below, documents said to contain sensitive material belonging to the regime.

From that same ageing balcony, Kurdish voices carried into the street. Demonstrators shouted slogans condemning Saddam Hussein's rule and appealed urgently for international help and protection for Kurdish refugees. Those unable to enter the building gathered outside, transforming the street into a protest site as supporters and bystanders gradually joined them.

Within half an hour, armed police had sealed off the area, surrounded the embassy, and initiated negotiations to end the standoff. Kawa Fatah Besarani emerged as the group's spokesman, speaking by telephone to television channels and calling for public and international support. The police then asked Kasim Abdulaziz Ala'Aldeen, one of the organisers of the occupation, to act as an intermediary. Accompanied by the police commander, Kasim entered the embassy to urge the occupiers to surrender.

The Kurds agreed on a single condition: they must be allowed to face the media and publicly articulate their message. The police accepted this demand. At 1:00 p.m., officers entered the embassy, brought the occupation to an end, and arrested the demonstrators. Despite the physical force used during the arrests, the agreement was respected. The police removed handcuffs from the detainees inside the vans and treated them as political prisoners rather than common criminals. They were then taken in the same vans and remained in custody overnight. The following day, they were acquitted, following the intervention of Simon Hughes, a Liberal Democrat Member of Parliament. In ordering their release, the judge spoke with notable sympathy and compassion. The entire episode had unfolded live on television and was replayed repeatedly across all major channels.

The impact was immediate. What began in London quickly reverberated across Europe, inspiring similar actions in Sofia, Prague, Berlin, and Ankara. Tragically, in Turkey, one demonstrator was shot and killed.

Several friends from the community and I arrived near the Iraqi embassy while events were still unfolding. We watched from a distance and attempted to move closer, hoping at least to retrieve some of the files scattered on the street, but the police prevented anyone from approaching.

In the days that followed, British authorities retained control of the embassy, conducting extensive searches for explosives. The building was not returned to the Iraqi government. The shattered windows, damaged grounds, and broken gates were eventually locked and chained, and, remarkably, they have never been fully repaired. Since 1991, the Iraqi government had never formally reinstated its Ambassador in London. Relations between the two countries failed to normalise, and the regime neither reclaimed the property nor spent its funds to restore it.

The occupation of the Iraqi Embassy was carried live across all major news channels. Those Kurds who succeeded in breaking into the building burned the Iraqi flag, tore down portraits of Saddam Hussein, and hurled confidential regime files from the embassy windows into the street below.

Those inside the embassy appeared at the upstairs windows, shouting through handheld megaphones and speaking live by telephone with television channels.

Those who were denied entry to the embassy gathered outside and began demonstrating, with Samir Faily serving as their spokesman.

Kasim Ala'Aldeen, one of the organisers, went inside the embassy to mediate between the occupiers and the police.

Diyari, Kawa Fatah, and another participant were arrested by the police while shouting slogans against Saddam Hussein, as embassy files lay scattered across the sidewalk.

From the Embassy to Lambeth Palace

Before the demonstration in front of the embassy had concluded, my wife, Sundis, and I left the scene and arrived at Lambeth Palace at two o'clock in the afternoon. We spent about fifteen minutes with John Little in his office. During that meeting, I realised that both Little and the Archbishop had been hesitant, unsure of how I might use an on-camera interview or whether I would frame it in a political context. I reassured them that I had no intention of embarrassing them, nor did I want them to take a stand against their government or jeopardise their relationship with John Major. My only request was that the Archbishop appear on camera to demonstrate his humanitarian concern. Off-camera, I explained, I will have other requests from him, and it is up to him how he wishes to respond. Little was reassured.

Afterwards, we were escorted to see Archbishop George Carey. He received us on foot in his study, greeting us warmly with a smile and enthusiasm. His first words acknowledged the uniqueness of the encounter: my wife and I were the first Kurds he had met in person. "I would like to understand more about the nations and religions of your region through you," he said. He then expressed his sympathy in relation to the tragic mass exodus and said, "As you know, I have only recently been appointed Archbishop, and I do not have much experience with such global interventions. But in front of the cameras… I can do it for you." He then gestured toward the next room, where journalists and television cameras awaited our interview, emphasising the importance and immediacy of the moment.

I said to the Archbishop, "In front of the cameras, I only ask that you, as the spiritual leader of the Anglican Church, encourage citizens to pray for the people of Kurdistan and not to withhold aid. Off-camera, however, I have another request." He looked at me with surprise and asked what that might be.

I explained, "I am asking you to reach out to organisations such as Christian Aid and Save the Children Fund, urging them to send assistance to Kurds on the Iranian and Turkish borders. I also ask that you contact Prime Minister John Major directly to persuade his government to engage with Kurdish political leaders and gain a deeper understanding of their plight. At that moment, it was crucial that the British government reassure the Kurds that supporting them and protecting their human rights was in everyone's interest". I also emphasised that "the UK should take a leading role in creating an international mechanism to prevent the Kurds from suffering genocide again. The British government's policy toward Kurdistan and the Kurds must be reconsidered and modernised."

"I believe your words with conviction," said the Archbishop, "and therefore I agree with them. I have a personal friendship with John Major, and I promise to

speak to him tomorrow. I cannot promise that every detail will be followed, as the church must not appear to interfere in politics, but I will do what I can."

He then noted that he would not see us again after the press conference due to prior commitments. Sundis, the Archbishop, and I moved into the next room, where the cameras were waiting. On-camera, the Archbishop voiced his support for the protection of Kurdish human rights and called for aid - funds, medicine, food, blankets, and tents. He urged the British government to approach the humanitarian crisis with urgency and compassion. I then spoke as a Kurd, expressing gratitude for his support and prayers. I asked the British faithful to include the Kurdish people in their prayers, particularly at the upcoming Sunday prayer. I stressed that aiding the Kurds in their time of suffering was a historical good deed that would never be forgotten.

After the press conference, the Archbishop surprised us by inviting us for coffee, saying he wanted to continue our conversation for another half hour. I realised that he liked the encounter and wanted to engage us more. We returned to his study, where I briefly outlined Kurdish history, language, and culture. I explained how Kurds had suffered under misguided Western policies and emphasised that our nation sought nothing beyond freedom and human rights. I informed him of the Christian population and culture in Kurdistan and Iraq and promised to provide updates in the future. I also told him of my plan to travel to Kurdistan via Iran with the British organisation Save the Children Fund to assist refugees, and assured him that I would visit him again upon my return. The Archbishop expressed pleasure and eagerness to see me again.

By the time Sundis and I left Lambeth Palace, it was 3:30 p.m. That evening, the Archbishop's message was broadcast across all channels, amplifying spiritual and moral pressure on the British government and the international community.

Anglican Archbishop George Carey voiced his support for the victims of Saddam Hussein's aggression and urged the British public to provide aid to the displaced and affected migrants.

After the situation had settled, in the summer of 1991, Sundis and I visited the Archbishop once more. We presented his wife with a traditional Kurdish dress as a gift. With Sundis' assistance, the Mrs Carey donned the dress for a photograph. John Little, the Archbishop's private secretary, stood with us in the picture. Tragically, John passed away just a month later.

Saturday and Sunday, April 6–7, 1991

In the days following the interventions of Margaret Thatcher and the Archbishop of Canterbury George Carey, positive events accelerated dramatically. John Major's government shifted its stance almost overnight, exerting continuous pressure on the U.S. Administration. Through Haden, we learned that both Thatcher and Major had personally contacted President George H. W. Bush, emphasising the need to protect the Kurdish people and arguing that they should not be left alone in the same way as the Shiite Arabs in southern Iraq.

On April 6, a civilian Anglo Airlines plane delivered 40 tonnes of blankets and clothing to Manston Airport in Ramsgate, Kent. The aid was handed over to the Turkish Red Crescent Society for distribution at the border. That same plane returned to Gatwick later that day, carrying another 40 tonnes of aid. Meanwhile, Turkish Prime Minister Turgut Ozal had intermittently closed the border, prompting repeated calls for international assistance and visits from officials. Approximately 20,000 refugees crossed into Turkey, yet more than half a million remained without bread, tents, or blankets. Global news cameras continuously broadcast their plight. More than 1.5 million additional refugees fled toward Iran, which, in contrast to Turkey, kept its border open.

> On April 7, U.S. Secretary of State James Baker, returning from Saudi Arabia after a Middle East tour, focused on post-war stability, visited Turkey at the request of President Turgut Özal and on the instructions of President George H. W. Bush. Accompanied by Özal, Baker toured the Iraqi border region, where he witnessed the humanitarian catastrophe first-hand and met Kurdish civilians fleeing Iraqi forces. Visibly shaken by the scale of human suffering, Baker telephoned Bush from the border to warn of impending mass death, Turkish instability, and serious damage to U.S. credibility, should the United States fail to act. His emotional appeal, reinforced by a public pledge of U.S. assistance, helped catalyse a rapid shift in U.S. policy.

Change of U.S. Attitude and Establishment of a Safe Haven

From April 6 to 9, John Major and his cabinet deliberated on several proposals and concluded that the refugee crisis extended far beyond immediate needs for food, medicine, and blankets. They resolved to take action to return refugees to their homes under the supervision and protection of coalition forces. On June 6 and 7, British, American, Russian, and French ambassadors drafted a statement calling on the United Nations to halt the genocide of the Kurdish people and facilitate their safe return to towns and villages. From the outset, the French government, particularly Foreign Minister Roland Dumas and Danielle Mitterrand, the wife of President François Mitterrand, had actively advocated for intervention to assist the Kurds.

Prime Minister John Major proposed the establishment of a no-fly zone, framed as a humanitarian "safe haven", in Iraqi Kurdistan to protect Kurdish civilians and to compel compliance from Saddam Hussein's regime. The proposal generated intense debate in the international media and among European policymakers, reflecting broader uncertainty over the scope, legality, and consequences of post–Gulf War intervention. While several European governments viewed the initiative as a necessary response to mass displacement and state repression, others questioned its legal foundation and feared long-term military entanglement. The United States initially responded with caution, arguing that enforcing a no-fly zone inside Iraq could require a large-scale and open-ended military commitment, potentially amounting to the opening of a new front against Baghdad. Moreover, U.S. officials noted that neither American nor international armed forces had previously been deployed explicitly for humanitarian protection or refugee assistance, leaving no clear United Nations precedent to legitimize such an intervention and reinforcing concerns about sovereignty, escalation, and mission creep.

At a meeting of European Community leaders in Brussels on 8 April 1991, John Major received a notably warm reception, which he leveraged to project leadership despite his status as a young and recently selected head of government. As the humanitarian situation deteriorated rapidly, Major used the forum to press forcefully for urgent action. He was keen both to consolidate his personal authority on the international stage and to demonstrate Britain's capacity for independent strategic judgment rather than automatic alignment with Washington. Framing U.S. hesitation as politically and morally untenable, Major argued that Europe could not afford to wait for American indecision in the face of mass displacement and human suffering, insisting that the scale and immediacy of the crisis required prompt action, even if Britain were compelled to proceed unilaterally or within a European-led framework. This stance not only reinforced Britain's claim to leadership in post-Cold War crisis management but also contributed to mounting diplomatic pressure on the United States, helping to generate the momentum that ultimately shaped allied responses and the establishment of a protected safe haven in northern Iraq.

On that same day, April 8, President George H. W. Bush called John Major to express U.S. support for the plan and readiness to participate. Overnight, American policy shifted dramatically, from reluctance to proactive engagement, as if the project, long stalled, had finally gained momentum and President Bush had moved to lead it from the front. This joint action culminated in UN Security Council Resolution 688 and the launch of Operation Provide Comfort, which established a protected safe haven and no-fly zone in Iraqi Kurdistan, enabling large-scale humanitarian relief, return of refugees to their homes and laying the groundwork for the Kurds' eventual de facto self-rule.

Chapter Six

Aid on the Iranian Side

April 1991

Visit to Kurdistan via Iran

Iran, like Turkey, was overwhelmed by the sudden influx of refugees. Unlike Turkey, however, it kept its borders open. People crossed from the Iraqi side at multiple points, from Khanaqin to Sanandaj and Kermanshah. As they arrived, the people of Eastern Kurdistan responded with remarkable courage and generosity. They welcomed the refugees, offered them bread and water, helped them find shelter, and opened their homes to them free of charge.

The scale of displacement quickly exceeded the capacity of the Kurdish border towns. Faced with this humanitarian burden, the Iranian government appealed for international assistance. Yet the response from the United States and other Western governments was hesitant, constrained by Iran's strained foreign relations and political isolation. At the same time, Iran itself remained wary of the outside world. The authorities distrusted foreigners, visas were difficult to obtain, and contacts with international media, aid agencies, and humanitarian organisations were minimal. Those working with such organisations were often viewed with suspicion, sometimes even labelled as spies or mercenaries. This atmosphere of isolation complicated relief efforts, even as millions of refugees continued to pour across the border in search of safety.

From Political Pressure to Humanitarian Aid

Once the British government and other international actors became directly involved, our lobbying campaign inevitably shifted in character. Political pressure gave way to the urgent demands of humanitarian relief. As a result, my role and that of my fellow lobbyists in the United Kingdom began to diminish. Decisions were now being taken at governmental and institutional levels.

Together with friends and much of the Kurdish community, we turned our attention to encouraging international aid organisations to move quickly and deliver assistance directly to Kurdistan. Most experienced agencies planned to operate from the Turkish side. Yet almost none were prepared to reach the majority of refugees stranded on the Iranian side of the border, where estimates suggested that more than one million Kurds had fled.

Early in the crisis, I contacted the British Save the Children Fund through my friend David McDowell, a writer on Kurdish history. I urged them to focus on Iran. They, however, wanted me to accompany them to Turkey instead. I declined. I insisted that the Iranian side could not be ignored, warning that refugees there risked becoming victims of Iran's political isolation, forgotten by Western allies. John Seaman, a senior administrator at the Save the Children Fund, told me frankly that they had no one in Iran to guide or protect them. If I agreed to go with them, they would send aid to the Iranian side; if not, they would proceed blindly or withdraw altogether, as they did not trust the Iranian system.

I decided to go. I believed that opening one door would allow many others to follow.

Saturday, April 6

I contacted the Iranian embassy and informed them that a group of British citizens and I were prepared to deliver humanitarian aid, provided visas and travel were facilitated. The Iranian response was unexpectedly positive. Despite my refugee passport, visas were issued within two days for me and ten others. Among them were Peter Sharp of ITV, Charles Wheeler of the BBC, David McDowell, and seven additional participants.

Sunday, April 7

Today, Anne Clwyd, a Labour Member of Parliament and Shadow Minister for Overseas Development, called me. "I hear you're going to Iran," she said. "Let's go together." Anne and I had been friends for many years. She was a steadfast supporter of both Kurdish and Southern (Shiite) Arab Iraqi causes, and through her, we enjoyed strong backing within the Labour Party.

She brought forward her travel plans so that she could join us on the same flight. Anne intended to reach Kurdish Front leaders inside Iraq by secretly crossing the border from Iran. She was understandably cautious of Iranian authorities and had no linguist or regional specialist accompanying her. Hence, she asked me to stay with her during the first days of the journey and assist her until she could safely reach the Kurdish leadership on the Iraqi side.

With Anne Clwyd, in Karaj.

Tuesday, April 9-10

In the late morning of April 9, I went to Heathrow Airport with five representatives from the British Save the Children Fund, where BBC and ITV crews were already waiting. They interviewed us before departure, aware that this journey marked a shift from advocacy to direct engagement. Once aboard the Iranian aircraft, we realised that we were not alone. At least fifteen others were travelling with the same destination and purpose in mind.

Upon arrival in Tehran, we were met by government officials, representatives of the Ministry of Health, and the Iranian Red Crescent. Formalities were waived. There were no prolonged checks, only a courteous and respectful reception. We were taken directly to the Inter-Continental Hotel.

The Iranian authorities were eager for engagement. They wanted meetings with their officials, discussions on coordination and assistance, and joint press conferences. Their intention was clear: to demonstrate cooperation and visibility. Our own priority, however, was different. We wanted to avoid a prolonged

protocol and reach the border as quickly as possible, where the refugees were crossing.

For two days, we were escorted from one engagement to another, brought and taken, delayed and redirected, while time passed and the urgency at the frontier weighed heavily on all of us.

Thursday, April 11

Today we held two extended meetings with Dr Haqi Saidy and Mr Ali Zarghami, the President and Vice President of the Iranian Red Crescent Society, respectively. Mr Zarghami was particularly interested in understanding how much funding the Save the Children Fund had allocated, how it was being spent, and how aid was reaching the refugee communities.

According to Zarghami, by that point, approximately 700,000 refugees had crossed into Iran. Of these, around 500,000 had already been provided with accommodation, while the State itself had prepared for nearly one million refugees, an estimated 200,000 families. President Hashemi Rafsanjani had issued direct orders to facilitate flights, customs clearance, and the movement of humanitarian aid at every level.

The Iranian people, we were told, had donated generously, and many refugees had brought whatever money they could carry with them. The most urgent needs were not medical supplies but shelter, tents and blankets, and food. Prices in Iranian markets had risen by nearly 40 percent, placing additional strain on an already burdened population and complicating relief efforts for everyone involved.

After continued pressure on our part, and in the face of mounting delays, the Iranian authorities finally agreed to take us to the border by private aircraft.

Friday, April 12

We boarded a plane bound for Sanandaj. While in the air, news reached us that severe thunderstorms and heavy rain had hit the area. The plan was altered mid-flight: we would land in Urmia instead and continue onward to Khan (Piranshahr) by road.

Upon landing at Urmia airport, the entire delegation was taken to a restaurant for lunch. It was Ramadan, and all the Iranian officials and guards accompanying us were fasting. Still, they remained with us until we had finished eating, insisting on hospitality before formality. Later, the Governor of Urmia, Mr Saadat,

addressed us, speaking at length about politics, responsibility, and human dignity.

He then introduced three Iraqi Kurdish refugee doctors, Hama Najm Jaff, Latifah Mohammed Rashad, and Osman Hama Murad, whom he had invited to speak as both refugees and witnesses. They described the dire conditions facing the displaced population, the strain on health services, and the urgent humanitarian needs they were encountering daily.

Afterwards, our delegation was transported back to the airport in five buses. A helicopter was waiting to take us to the border so that we could see the refugees directly and document their conditions. One of our companions, a German lady from an aid organisation, was delayed, and because of this, our bus failed to reach the helicopter in time. Instead, we continued by road, passing through Naghadeh and reaching Khana (Piranshahr) after three and a half hours.

It was 4:30 in the afternoon when we finally arrived at the border crossing. There, in mud and rain, families with children and the elderly were crossing into Iran, exhausted, soaked, and carrying what little they had left. The reality of the crisis, which had until then been mediated through meetings and statistics, now stood unmistakably before us.

One in a Million

At the border, the sight of the refugees' suffering was deeply distressing. With heavy hearts, we took a few photographs, aware that no image could fully capture the scale of their misery. After about fifteen minutes, and because time was running late, our guard and driver asked us to return to the vehicle and head back to Urmia without further delay.

In Khana, at the request of one of the passengers (the same German lady who caused our delay in Urmia), the bus stopped at the terminal. Two or three people went to the public toilet, while the rest of us, myself included, got off the bus and waited. A short while later, as we were boarding again, I had just stepped onto the bus when someone shouted my name loudly from behind. I turned around and, to my astonishment, saw my sister Najat and her husband Abdul Majid. Over the previous seven days, they had walked from Erbil to the border with their three small children (Triska, Daban and Chra). That very day, they, together with three other families from our relatives, including children, crossed into Iran. They had been referred to a host family in Naghadeh and were on their way to stay with them.

The few journalists accompanying me could hardly believe what they were witnessing. When I was still in the United Kingdom, before boarding the plane, one of them had conducted a short interview and asked whether I had relatives

among the refugees, whether I planned to look for them, and what the chances were of seeing them. My honest answer at the time had been, "I don't know." No one outside had any contact with family members, and none of us could have imagined such a coincidence. That said, my father made a special request and said do not return without finding your sister!

Had our plane landed in Sanandaj, or had we arrived by helicopter as originally planned, I might never have found my sister. Encounters like this are truly one in a million, something you expect to see only in Indian or Egyptian films.

At Piranshahr's 'terminal' where I met Najat (in the middle, holding her daughter Chra) along with her family and several relatives

Najat and her baby daughter (Chra) after their stay in Naghadeh

Helping hand for stranded botanist

By Jenny Rees

THE Royal Society is rushing through an application for a fellowship from a Kurdish assistant professor of botany waiting to take up a post at Sheffield University. He is stranded on the Iraqi-Turkish border.

Dr Riadh Dinha, 38, his wife and two children were found on Monday by a Channel 4 News reporter, Andrew Veitch, with other Kurdish refugees at a camp in northern Iraq.

Mr Veitch approached Dr Dinha and was told: "I am a professor of botany and I graduated from Sheffield University. I am trying to get back there and I am waiting to hear from the Royal Society."

The television report was seen on Monday by Mr Terry Croft, manager of the Department of Animal and Plant Sciences at the university.

Mr Stephen Cox, of the Royal Society, said: "We received Dr Dinha's application before Christmas, but were not able to assess it because of the problem of communication with Iraq due to the war. Now that we have heard of his plight, we are rushing it through."

● Tim Butcher writes: Dr Dlawer Ala'Aldeen, 30, working in Iran with the British Save the Children charity, saw a familiar face in one refugee camp — his sister, who had walked more than 50 miles from Iraqi Kurdistan. He had not seen her since he left Iraq six years ago.

Tim Butcher was one of the witnesses to my reunion with my sister and relatives, and he published the news in the Daily Telegraph

Aid Projects

Most of those who arrived with us remained in Iran for varying periods, each committed to a specific humanitarian project. During that same journey, after returning to Urmia, I stayed on with the officials of the Save the Children Fund to help establish its first operational base on the Iranian side of the border and to begin delivering assistance to the refugees as quickly as possible.

Together with David McDowell (writer & historian on minorities), John Seaman (administrator), John Hicks (logistics), Anthony Castello (Consultant Paediatrician), Adam Smith (aid worker), and two others, we rented several rooms in a hotel in Urmia and began organising our work. During this period, we held multiple meetings with officials of the Iranian Red Crescent Society in Urmia. They provided us with detailed information on the locations of refugee populations, their numbers, and the kinds of assistance they had already received, or were still urgently lacking.

Over the following weeks, I travelled extensively, visiting most of the border towns and refugee camps: from Zêveh and Khana to the cities of Sardasht, Baneh, Mahabad, Bukan, Saqqez, and Mariwan, as well as camps near Kermanshah and Sanandaj. Geography and road networks determined the paths of displacement. Because of terrain and access routes, people from Duhok moved toward the Turkish border. Those from Erbil crossed into Iran at Khana; refugees from Koya, Dukan, Ranya, and Qaladze passed through Sardasht; those from Sulaymaniyah crossed into Saqqez, Baneh, Mariwan, and Nawsood; and families from Garmian and Khanaqin moved toward Kermanshah, Qasr-e Shirin, Elam, and the southern parts of Bakhtaran and Kurdistan provinces. Many from Kirkuk first fled to Erbil, Koya, or Sulaymaniyah before following the same routes into Iran.

Some did not survive the journey. Here, a family burying a loved one, carrying their loss in silence amid the chaos.

What emerged from these journeys was a living map of displacement, entire communities reshaped by geography, fear, and necessity, each road telling a story of survival.

Refugee Shelter

According to statistics provided by Mr Pizishkiyan and Mr Ardi, the President and Executive Director of the Red Crescent Society in Urmia, respectively, by April 17, approximately 450,000 refugees had crossed into West Azerbaijan Province. Of these, only around 300,000 had been accommodated in twenty-two refugee camps. These included camps in Zeveh (Segirdkan), Naghadeh, Shinoye, Khana, Sardasht (Mergasar, Jihad Saman, Beshab), Mahabad, Miandoab, Bukan, Salmas, and Khoy. Eleven of these camps had existed since the Anfal campaign of 1988, while the remaining eleven were newly established in response to the current crisis.

The remaining 150,000 refugees were without shelter, and more were still arriving. In the Khana area alone, nearly 20,000 people were crossing the border each day, many of whom gradually moved on to other cities. From Khana, refugees were able to travel freely to Naghdeh, Urmia, and Shinoye. In other areas, however, the Iranian army restricted movement and prevented further dispersal.

Some people were left homeless, sleeping in streets, against walls, or inside abandoned shops. Because they were not formally registered, they struggled to access food and basic assistance, compounding their vulnerability.

The pattern of arrival and settlement was broadly similar across regions. After crossing the border, elderly refugees were typically assisted by the Red Crescent and the army, and transferred to temporary camps. After several days, and if space permitted, they were relocated to more established camps. These camps consisted of solid housing and reinforced military tents and provided water, food, and basic medical services. Medical staff included Iranian and Bangladeshi doctors, as well as Iraqi Kurdish refugee physicians.

In some locations, however, the authorities declined to relocate refugees. In Khana, for example, of an estimated 100,000 to 150,000 displaced people, only about 10,000 were transferred to temporary camps. The rest remained in the city or sought refuge elsewhere. These homeless families were forced to find their own solutions. Some rented accommodation at high cost; others were taken in temporarily, free of charge, by families in border towns.

What stood out most, even amid such hardship, was the generosity and courage of the Iranian Kurds. On those dark days, their humanity shone unmistakably. Refugees spoke repeatedly of how Kurdish families from border towns and remote villages sent representatives to the camps, taking as many people as they could into their homes. They offered bread, water, clothing, and temporary shelter, sometimes for only a few days, sometimes longer, until more permanent solutions could be found. It was a quiet but powerful reaffirmation of solidarity in the face of catastrophe.

Some of the homeless refugees tried to protect themselves from the cold by covering their bodies with plastic sheeting or thin, makeshift tents. Others sought refuge with their children in empty shops, under walls, or in any shelter they could find, waiting for a solution that often did not come. The cold was relentless, and the rain made many ill.

On April 18, I accompanied Nawzad Abdul Hamid to Sardasht, the busiest of the border towns, where the number of displaced people had swelled to nearly four times the town's original population. Heavy rain had fallen that day and throughout the night before, turning the area into deep mud. On the surrounding hills, snow continued to fall, landing on the nylon sheets and fragile tents under which refugees huddled, adding to their misery. Those living under plastic or on the streets were not registered by the Iranian authorities and, as a result, were excluded from bread and food distributions.

Cold was the refugees' greatest enemy. Snow still blanketed the mountains, while in the cities spring winds and persistent rain offered little relief. Food, by contrast, was somewhat more accessible. In some towns, bread, flat loaves and

simple rolls were distributed free of charge, though other food items were sold at high prices. At the time, the Iraqi dinar was worth only about twenty-two tomans, making basic goods prohibitively expensive for Iraqis. Prices in the border towns had risen sharply as demand surged with the arrival of hundreds of thousands of refugees.

Refugees who arrived in the makeshift camps were given bread, blankets and stoves

Conditions varied from place to place. When I reached Baneh and Saqqez, the situation was noticeably better than in other cities. Refugees there were not sleeping under plastic or in shops; instead, they were crowded into homes and mosques. Many expressed satisfaction with the Iranian government's conduct and the assistance provided in temporary camps. They received dates, cheese, potatoes, and fruit, though only two blankets per family. Some families were given stoves, yet complaints about the cold remained constant.

In one of the temporary camps in Saqqez, I encountered a particularly painful sight: 180 children under the age of fourteen had been separated from their parents and relatives and placed with other families in the camp. A representative of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, Mr Salar, was present and had registered the names of these children, broadcasting them on PUK radio in the hope of reuniting families. In the days preceding our visit, several children had already been reunited with their parents ،a small but vital measure of hope amid the overwhelming loss.

In Mahabad, on April 21, I met Mr Shalmashi, who told me that the city was hosting nearly 16,000 refugees. Only about half of them had been accommodated in camps; the rest were living in private homes and mosques. During that visit, I travelled in a truck as part of a relief convoy carrying one hundred tons of flour and twenty tons of food supplies. Mr Shalmashi accompanied us, and together we unloaded the aid at one of the camps in Mahabad.

The camp had been established only eight days earlier and was already serving not just its own residents but nearby camps as well. Several Iraqi Kurdish doctors were working there. Two of them, Dr Ardalan, a recent medical graduate, and Dr Salah, a more experienced physician, were themselves refugees. They told me that on that single day, they had treated 607 patients, and over the previous eight days had treated nearly 6,000. Ninety-five percent of the cases were diarrheal illnesses. There was a severe shortage of medicines to combat bacterial infections, and in the days leading up to our visit, more than twenty children had died as a result.

In Khana and Naghdeh, I met Dr Arsalan, the activist Sayed Omar, and Dr Salah Akreyi (an old friend of mine). Their accounts echoed what I had heard in Mahabad. Each day, they were seeing between 600 and 700 patients, most suffering from bacterial illnesses, diarrhoea, coughs, colds, and other common diseases such as measles, as well as chronic conditions including heart disease, high blood pressure, and diabetes. Because of the lack of medicine, between seven and ten people were dying every day.

Those who died inside the camps were issued death certificates. Those who died along the roads, in transit or in hiding received no such record. Their deaths passed uncounted, absorbed into the vast, silent toll of the crisis.

Delivering Aids

Conducting aid was not an easy task due to the difficulty of roads, lack of supplies, large number of refugees, lack of information, data and statistics, and others. But worst of all was the issue of bureaucracy, corruption and Iran's dealings with foreign aid organisations. These were expected, so it was normal for me, but it was worrying for most foreigners. During April and early May, I met with representatives of dozens of various foreign aid organisations who came to us for information and advice because none of them had worked there before and had very little experience. They did not trust the information of Iranian officials.

One of my assignments was to go to Urmia airport with a Persian interpreter and my aid assistant (John Hicks) to witness and welcome the arrival of the private planes which carried the Save the Children Fund's material. At the airport, things were often complicated because there were four authorities instead of one. When I got permission from the Airport Police, the Revolutionary Guards would block my way and not acknowledge the police. Then the Army officers would show their muscles, and then the Iranian Intelligence (Etilaat) would ask for documentary proof of the aid. In most cases, the planes arrived late at night, and we stayed at the airport until three or four o'clock in the morning. After unloading blankets, clothes, food and other aid at the airports, and finding other goods in the markets of Urmia, we had to find trucks and heavy machinery to transport them. To ensure that the aid reached the designated camps, we (the British members and I) often boarded the trucks and travelled with them. This was sometimes dangerous because the trucks transported the aid late at night or early in the morning, passing through dozens of checkpoints of the Revolutionary Guards, the Army, Intelligence and the Police. That's in addition to other unpredictable sources of danger.


16 FOREIGN ★★

ADAM SAG

The Independent was there when the plane was loaded

A plane carrying blankets, tents, and other aid to Urmia Airport caused internal disputes among Iranian authorities after I took these photos, leading to questions about which of the multiple authorities granted me permission to reach the aircraft and take photos

Chapter Seven

End of April and Early May, 1991

Return of Refugees to the Iraqi Side

From the beginning of April until its final days, the crossings never truly stopped. Refugees continued to move in both directions, forward into uncertainty, and back toward homes they no longer recognised. On the evening of Monday, April 22, I went to the border area at Khana. Despite ongoing negotiations between the Kurdistan Front and the Iraqi regime, the convoy of refugees heading toward Iran stretched for more than twenty kilometres.

The Iranian authorities had eased passage for pedestrians, but vehicle entry remained severely restricted. Only twelve cars were permitted to cross each day. At the same time, conversations everywhere revolved around return. Individual vehicles, families who had not yet crossed into Iran, were already turning back toward Iraq.

Soon afterwards, reports spread that a Kurdistan Front delegation had visited Baghdad and discussed what was being described as a "general amnesty" from the regime. Kurdish leaders were said to be encouraging people to take the amnesty seriously and return to their towns and villages. Unsurprisingly, many of those still stranded on the Iraqi side chose to do so, calculating that return, however risky, was preferable to indefinite exile.

After the regime recaptured the main cities, it continued advancing into other areas until April 13. On that day, the attacks stopped. Regions that had not yet fallen slipped beyond effective government control, and the army halted its advance. A wide, irregular zone of relative freedom emerged.

On the Duhok side, territory remained free from the Balinda area near Amedi, down through Bêlê and Barzan. In the Erbil province, the free zone stretched from Kore behind Pirmam to the Iranian border. It extended further from Shaqlawa through Hiran and Nazanin, reaching Ranya.

From there, it was possible to cross the main road toward Chwarqurna, though danger remained. A government checkpoint was stationed near Chinarok,

behind Haibat Sultan, and the road from Dukan to Sulaymaniyah was still under government control.

Even so, a vast area remained outside the regime's grasp, a fragile but vital refuge. For thousands of people, it offered something rare in those days: space to breathe, to hide, and to decide whether to risk return or endure displacement a little longer.

With the intervention of the coalition and the establishment of a protected zone in Duhok province, negotiations with the government began in earnest. At the same time, a large free zone remained under the control of the Kurdistan Front. For the displaced population, this created a stark choice: to return to cities once again under regime control, or to resettle in areas that lay beyond the state's reach. The regime actively encouraged return. State media broadcast photographs of returnees, portraying scenes of calm recovery, families receiving food, smiling faces, and a country supposedly back to normal.

On Thursday, April 25, I returned to Khana and was struck by the dramatic change in people's attitudes. Readiness to return had replaced fear. By the following day, nearly half the city was empty; refugees had already gone back.

On April 26, I travelled to Bukan. There, the atmosphere was entirely different. Hardly anyone spoke of returning, and no preparations were underway. It was as though news of negotiations between the Kurdistan Front and the regime had not reached the people at all. The contrast was telling. Those stranded along the harsh roads of Khana felt urgency; those in relatively stable conditions, such as in Bukan, felt no such pressure. Even in Khana and Naqadeh, families who had found decent shelter were in no hurry to go back.

On Saturday, April 27, I returned once more to Khana and went to the border, about five kilometres outside the city, accompanied by a German humanitarian, Alexander Sternberg. People were moving in both directions, but the majority were now heading toward Iraq. The psychological contrast was striking. Those entering Iran were often exhausted and nearly destitute, hoping for short-term shelter before returning. Those heading back to Iraq were determined, resigned, and focused. They would walk to Haji Omeran, then continue by vehicle to cities or free zones.

To cross into Iraq, refugees were required to obtain an Iranian "commander's card," a permit authorising passage. From that day onward, the flow gradually shifted toward return. On April 28, my uncle Abdulkhaliq Ala'Aldeen arrived in Iran, looking for his missing son. That same morning, he drove from Erbil, crossed the border without difficulty, and reached Naqadeh by lunchtime. Along the way, he saw long convoys of vehicles queuing patiently from Shaqlawa

toward Erbil, families returning one by one. Regime officials waved them through without questioning.

Inside the cities, life appeared to be normalising. Army units, security forces, and intelligence services had withdrawn from public view and abandoned their headquarters.

Iran's Shift

After this shift inside Iraq, the Iranian government rapidly altered its own position. From April 22 onward, the Iranian Ministry of Interior took control of all relief activities and sidelined the Red Crescent. Foreigners' travel or visiting camps became restricted. The arrived aid cargoes were seized, banking facilities frozen, and aid organisations openly criticised. These measures were widely understood as retaliation for the negotiations between Kurdistan Front leaders and Saddam's regime.

At the same time, Iranian President Hashemi Rafsanjani travelled to Turkey and Syria, where he reportedly concluded secret understandings aimed at limiting the Kurdish movement.

On the morning of April 28, I attended a funeral in Oshnavieh (Shino). There, I saw many people who had already received their commander's permits and were preparing to return. In nearby villages, similar preparations were underway. Mosques carried announcements from the Iranian authorities warning refugees that they could no longer remain in private homes: they must either move to camps or return to Iraq. In Naqadeh, several displaced families were reportedly evicted from their shelters and forcibly relocated to camps.

Assistance After Return

With these developments, the role of international charitable organisations began to diminish. The needs of the refugees, and the Iranian government's tolerance for foreign involvement, declined sharply. Aid agencies began considering operations inside Iraq, but most were blocked. They sought Iraqi visas through international channels or coalition authorities, aiming to reach areas affected by the ceasefire.

Yet the coalition's protection did not extend far enough. It stopped at Duhok province. Southern Erbil and all of Sulaymaniyah lay south of the 36th parallel and therefore outside formal coalition protection.

I tried to persuade Save the Children Fund and similar organisations to rethink their approach, to facilitate return rather than prolonged displacement. This meant providing transportation, food, and basic provisions; establishing medical

stations along return routes; and sending aid directly to free zones inside Iraq, beyond regime control and outside the ceasefire area. I also explored ways to encourage Kurdish civil initiatives to assume similar roles.

These efforts faced a fundamental obstacle. At the time, there were no genuinely independent Kurdish charities. Existing organisations were tied to political parties. As a result, vast areas of southern Kurdistan were left without assistance, caught between a retreating international presence, a calculating regional order, and a population forced once again to rely on itself.

Refugees returning to the Iraqi

Refugees returning to the Iraqi side

THE INDEPENDENT ON SUNDAY 28 APRIL 1991

Mercy mission to the frontiers of despair

Adam Sage flies with a planeload of Kurdish aid — into a deadly morass

AMANI lay in the dirt of a public park in Piranshahr, her left hand pawing at a pile of dust. Her mouth opened as if to scream, but there was no sound. She was one year old. Her mother, Sahar, looked on silently and dry-eyed. There were no tears, just depression and bewilderment. A man pointed at Amani. "Our children are dying. Where is the help that the world gives us?"

The Iranians answer that the world has given little, and point out that they have been responsible for almost all the 1.5 million refugees in the border region. Aid agencies agree, and praise the Iranian authorities for their efforts.

On 19 April, the Save the Children Fund wanted to send supplies to Urumiyeh, the capital of West Azerbaijan, where there are 500,000 refugees. Flash Airlines, a Nigerian company, was chartered for a flight that was due to leave Britain at 9.30pm on the Friday. A day later, the goods were still at Stansted airport. The plane had dropped off supplies in Azerbaijan en route to London, but Urumiyeh airport had run out of fuel. It took until Saturday morning for the crew to find enough to get to Istanbul, and it was evening before they reached London. They took off again with 32 tons of tents, blankets, children's clothes and plastic sheeting. Ground staff forced the cargo door shut with a fork-lift truck.

Five hours later, at 4am local time, the DC-8 landed at Urumiyeh. The airport was deserted except for an official standing on the tarmac. There was no one to unload the supplies, he said. "The army are tired. They work very hard."

Inside the terminal, John Hicks, Save the Children's field manager, held his head in frustration and cursed. Every hold-up meant more disease and more deaths. The charity tried again at daybreak, sending its Kurdish-speaking doctor, Dlawer Ala'-Adeen, to the airport. Four planes were on the tarmac. One, a DC-10, had been there since the previous night. Its passengers, from the US charity Americares, had arrived without visas, expecting a warm welcome. Police at Urumiyeh airport had other ideas. Seven hours and many phone calls later, the visas were issued.

Dr Ala'Adeen had more success, getting his plane unloaded by 2pm. One 15-ton truck carrying children's clothes headed for Piranshahr. Kurdish youngsters were given woollens knitted by Save the Children branches in Britain, coats and strong shoes.

The other goods were taken to the Iranian Red Crescent warehouse on the outskirts of the city. Some tents brought by Save the Children had been there for almost a week. For four days, there sleep six to eight. It was common to find 15 or 20 people crammed into one in West Azerbaijan.

In Urumiyeh, the interior ministry official reappeared on Wednesday morning, and the flour mill loaded 25 trucks, hired for about £30 a day. But there was talk of a strike at the drivers' commercial co-operative. Drivers complained that the Red Crescent was taking too long to load goods, preventing them from getting home until late. Again, Dr Ala'Adeen smoothed over the difficulties. The Red Crescent promised to speed up its loading and the food was taken to camps.

For Save the Children, it was a good week. All the supplies from Britain and much of the food bought locally had been distributed. But Mr Hicks had more plans. On Wednesday, he struck a deal with a local factory for 21,211 pots.

Other aid agencies faced bigger difficulties. The French Médecins du Monde was the only charity on the border above Piranshahr. It had four tents, 30 medical staff and about 800 patients a day. The seriously ill were sent to the town's general hospital or to a converted gymnasium run by the army. However, military doctors did not always agree with Médecins Du Monde on what constituted "seriously ill". Some were turned away. Others, like Sahar, simply did not realise the gymnasium was there.

Last Monday, there were 90 beds in the gymnasium, 53 of them empty. A Médecins du Monde nurse said: "We are going around the town simply telling people the hospital is here."

Most officials in West Azerbaijan agreed that the country could not cope on its own. And there were times when the power struggle in Tehran was felt in Urumiyeh. Doctors from a European aid agency travelling to Iraq were turned back at the border by Revolutionary Guards after getting civil permission.

Then 38 Belgian paratroopers trying to set up refugee camps around Urumiyeh were locked up for two days in a stadium after an immigration officer decided they did not have the right papers.

Mahmood Pezeshkian, direc-

THE RELIEF TIMETABLE

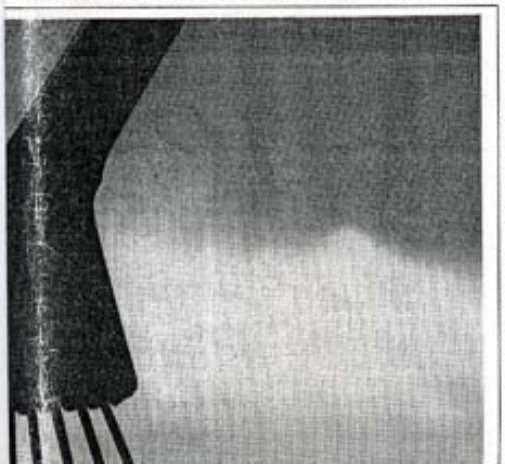
FRIDAY APRIL 19
9.30am: Flash Airlines flight FSH202 due to leave Stansted for Urumiyeh with 32 tons of relief supplies.

SATURDAY APRIL 20
6pm: Flash Airlines arrives in Stansted. Delay due to fuel shortage in Urumiyeh.
8pm: Flash Airlines departs for Urumiyeh.

SUNDAY APRIL 21
4am (local): Flash Airlines arrive Urumiyeh. Nobody to unload plane.
2pm: Iranian army unloads plane. One lorry drives to Piranshahr. Five lorries drive to Red Crescent warehouse in Urumiyeh city.

MONDAY APRIL 22
noon: Supplies sent to Piranshahr and Bukan.
4pm: Supplies arrive in Piranshahr.
6pm: Supplies arrive in Bukan.

TUESDAY APRIL 23
onwards: Supplies distributed to refugees



INTERNATIONAL HEALTH DEVELOPMENT; JOBS; COURSES

THE HEALTH EXCHANGE

Magazine of the Bureau for Overseas Medical Service

August/September 1991

Emergency Response

Ishikveren Kurdish refugee camp on the Turkish/Iraq border. Photo: Peter Poore/SCF.

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Health Needs in Iraqi Kurdistan

Dlawer Ala'Aldeen

Dr Ala'Aldeen is a Kurdish doctor specialising in infectious diseases. He has recently visited both Iraqi and Iranian Kurdistan.

Following the March to April crisis, nearly 1.2 million Iraqi Kurds crossed the border to Iran and more than half a million reached the border with Turkey. Towards the end of April, groups of refugees started to return from Iran back to Iraq. The numbers increased over the weeks and by the end of May, more than half a million had crossed the border towards Iraq.

A new situation was created by the presence of these displaced groups alongside the original inhabitants in the liberated areas of Iraqi Kurdistan. Liberated areas are those areas under the control of the Peshmargas (Kurdish guerilla forces), outside Allied or Iraqi control, and include several major towns, dozens of small towns and hundreds of villages. These areas have no form of comprehensive infrastructure and host more than a million people. The financial and political capabilities of the Peshmargas do not enable them to provide the infrastructure for proper management. The majority of the people have run out of money and there are very few jobs. The prices of basic foodstuffs are sky high. Malnutrition is now increasingly evident, especially among children.

The majority of the people in the Arbil area, which I visited, inhabit the heavily overcrowded larger towns which had not been destroyed during the village destruction period of 1986-1989. However, some of the formerly destroyed villages have been re-inhabited with people accommodated in half-ruined houses or newly erected tents. Transport is good and security is provided by the Peshmargas. Although there is no shortage of water (springs, small rivers, waterfalls) there is a serious problem of contamination.

The biggest health problem and most prevalent disease is typhoid fever (well over 30-40% of out-patient attendants). The disease is increasing every day and is caused by the lack of proper sanitation and sewage disposal systems. Public health measures including health education, chlorination of the water supply, provision of toilets and a vaccination programme are essential. Well-trained staff already exist to carry out a comprehensive vaccination programme. In Rania for instance, they had already set up a big tent to provide the triple vaccine.

Diarrhoea comes next. Children are the main victims and there have been scores of deaths from dehydration. Oral rehydration salts, cannulas and needles are in short supply, though in each of the main hospitals a large room has been allocated for ORS therapy. In these rooms mothers are taught how to feed their sick children. Each mother spends some time in the ORS unit every day and, after rehydrating her baby, continues the treatment at home.

The third major health problem are mines. Before liberation, these areas were controlled by the Iraqi government and were regarded as prohibited zones and thousands of mines were planted. People are scared of deviating from the main roads to the hills or to their farms. Dyanah hospital had treated 45 victims during the week before my arrival.

Except for the hospital in Dyanah, the other hospitals and the small clinics in the liberated areas were destroyed during the crisis in March and April. Groups of very talented young local health workers volunteered to re-build the hospitals and clinics, despite the difficulties. What they have achieved within such a short period can only be described as miraculous, and the service they provide is excellent.

The hospitals are running at half capacity due to lack of blankets, sheets, pillows and other equipment. Appropriate drugs are in short supply. Radiology equipment was fully functioning but the staff operating them were using expired films and chemicals. Since the invasion of Kuwait and the imposition of sanctions by the international community, Iraq has not imported new materials and the existing ones are mostly expired.

In summary, a combination of public health measures and medical supplies are required to control the outbreaks of infectious diseases. Health and medical expertise already exists in the local community and there is a high level of motivation. Above all, the Kurdish people in these areas need the chance to rebuild the social and economic infrastructure destroyed by Saddam Hussein.

Large amounts of money have been donated in the West and it is crucial that this money is now channelled into the rebuilding of villages and establishing the much needed services and supporting infrastructures.

NEWS FEATURE

Doctor warns of disaster facing exiled Kurds

Report by Judith Perera

Over a million Kurds who fled to Iran and Turkey in the spring have now returned to Iraq, but many of those from areas now under Iraqi or Allied control have not returned to their homes.

Instead they prefer to stay in areas controlled by the Kurdish peshmergas and the result, says Dr Dlawer Ala'Aldeen, who has just returned from the region, is a 'disaster in the making'.

Malnutrition and disease are already beginning to take their toll in the grossly overcrowded towns, he says. The major towns involved include Rawanduz, Dyanah, Sgaqlawa, Harir, Rania, Qala, Diza, Halabja, Penjuin, as well as dozens of smaller towns and villages. Similar problems are also beginning to affect the 'safe haven' areas from which Allied forces have withdrawn.

Public health and medical services are unable to cope with the huge influx of people, many of whom are living in tents or the ruins of villages destroyed over the past few years by the Iraqi army. The town of Dyanah, for instance, is currently hosting 10 times more people than normal.

Moreover, none of the aid which has been collected for the Kurds through international appeals is reaching these areas as it is being channelled mainly through UN agencies and the Iraqi government. Many hospitals and clinics were destroyed during the conflict last March and April, but Kurdish doctors, nurses and paramedics have rebuilt many of them in the past few months. 'What they have achieved in such a short time is miraculous,' says Dr Ala'Aldeen, 'and the service they provide is excellent.' But the problem is lack of equipment, medicines and specialists. 'Only half the capacity is used due to lack of blankets, sheets, pillows and other basic equipment,' he reports.

Although the hospital facilities exist, major surgery is out of the question because there are no specialist surgeons and no drugs for anaesthesia. Similarly, laboratory tests and X-rays are no longer possible because chemicals have run out and film stock has been used up.

Dentists cannot work properly because there are no temporary or permanent metal fillings and no local anaesthetics, so most problems have to be treated by extraction.

The major problem at present is typhoid, which accounts for most hospital admissions. Every hospital is receiving over 1,000 cases a week and beds in surgical and paediatric wards are being used for these patients. Isolation is no longer possible.

Treatment is by chloramphenicol, given intravenously for several days when it is available, and then capsules. The main cause is bad sanitation and contaminated water supplies made worse by overcrowding. Health workers would like to organise a vaccination programme, but they lack the vaccines.

Another growing problem is diarrhoea, caused mainly by amoebae and shigella. Children are the worst affected, with many dying from dehydration. There is a desperate need for cannulas, oral rehydration salts, intravenous fluids and antibiotics to cope with the situation. Doctors in the region fear a cholera outbreak which they would be unable to control.

Malnutrition is increasingly becoming a problem, especially among children suffering from chronic diarrhoea. There is no immunity and the result is a failure to thrive, which leaves them susceptible to other infections. The situation is exacerbated because food is becoming short and expensive in the region and most families have already used up all their savings.

The result is a general rise in infectious diseases, especially respiratory infections, as overall health declines. There is a desperate need for antibiotics of all kinds, especially tetracycline, penicillin, ampicillin and cotrimoxazol, as well as drugs for scabies, malaria and fungi.

Hospital are also having to deal with people injured by land mine explosions. Thousands of mines were planted in the area by Iraqi forces and the government now says it has lost the maps showing where they are located. Anyone straying from main roads is at risk and the major hospitals see around 50 cases a week.

As a result of overcrowding, poor sanitation and lack of food, the people of Kurdistan are already suffering from widespread disease and malnutrition. If something is not done soon to ensure supplies of basic medicine and food and to improve housing and public health they will be facing epidemic and starvation.

At present the weather is fine, but in a few months time it will be winter and many of those now living in tents and ruined villages who manage to survive illness and hunger will die of cold.

I provided detailed briefings on the situation in Kurdistan and its urgent needs, to journalist Judith Pereira of Middle East Health *magazine for publication. The journal was distributed widely across hospital libraries, universities, and medical colleges throughout the Middle East.*

Return, Reorientation, and

The Long Road Back

On the Iranian side, my efforts to persuade relief organisations came to nothing. After repeated failures, I concluded that the only viable option was to return to the United Kingdom and engage directly with the leadership and headquarters of major aid organisations. That required a different form of lobbying, more institutional, more persistent, and more public.

I returned to the UK on May 2 and quickly reconnected with several organisations. I wrote a series of articles and gave multiple interviews to public and humanitarian newspapers and magazines, warning of the dangers posed by hesitation and delay. I stressed, again and again, that access, crossing borders, bypassing political obstruction, was the central issue. Aid delayed was aid denied.

As promised, my wife and I visited George Carey once more. This time, I spoke to him in detail about the refugees, the situation in Kurdistan, and the particular vulnerability of Kurdistan's Christians. We brought his wife a traditional Kurdish dress as a gift. They received it warmly. With Sundis's help, the Archbishop's wife, Mrs Carey, put on the Kurdish clothes, and we took photographs together, small gestures, perhaps, but deeply symbolic in those days.

After securing commitments from several organisations, I agreed with two of them to return to the region and facilitate their field operations. On May 25, I travelled back via Tehran, then onward to Urmia, Naqadeh, and Khoy. By the time I arrived, the situation had changed dramatically.

At Tehran airport, it was immediately clear that people like us were no longer welcome. Most of the temporary refugee camps near the border had been emptied or shut down. Displaced families had returned, some voluntarily, many under pressure from the Iranian authorities. In several camps, bread and food supplies had been cut. Refugees were mistreated, foreign aid was obstructed, and a return to the Iraqi side was quietly encouraged.

At the same time, the Iraqi government had shifted tactics. It issued reassurances to the Kurdish population and announced the discharge of Kurdish youth from military service for those born up to 1962. Security was tightened only around Kirkuk. Elsewhere, the visible presence of the Army, police, and intelligence services receded, creating the impression, carefully managed, of normalisation.

In May 1991, I crossed the border between Khana and Haji Omeran. On the Duhok side, the so-called "peace zone" was calm. In the areas around

Erbil and Sulaymaniyah, outside the main urban centres, control remained in the hands of the Peshmerga, and the Kurdistan Front exercised authority.

These zones were overcrowded and desperately underserved. There were almost no public services and scarcely any medicine. Apart from smuggling, no formal trade existed. And yet, life persisted. Markets functioned. Shops opened. People adapted. Prices, however, were staggering. A sack of rice that had once cost twelve dinars now sold for two hundred.

It was a fragile, improvised existence, neither war nor peace, neither liberation nor defeat. But it was life, reclaimed inch by inch, under the weight of exhaustion and the stubborn refusal to disappear.

Hospitals still functioned, more or less. Doctors and staff were present, but resources were desperately thin. At the time, typhoid, Malta fever, and measles were widespread, while medicines were scarce. At Sidiq (Soran) Hospital alone, there were always around sixty patients lying in the courtyard, waiting to be treated for these common illnesses, in addition to surgical cases, landmine injuries, and road traffic accidents.

One of my main efforts during this period was to establish a channel for transporting medicines between the relatively secure zone in Duhok and the isolated areas of Erbil and Sulaymaniyah. We travelled to Amedi via Bêlê and Barzan. With the help of several friends and colleagues, including Dr Majid and Dr Salam, we were flown by helicopter by a British officer to Kani Masi, and from there continued by car to Bamerni.

In Bamerni, we met with representatives of several aid organisations and worked to connect them with medical personnel in the free zones on the Erbil side, particularly in Sidiq, Shaqlawa, and Ranya. They agreed to act on our recommendations. On the return journey, we carried several boxes filled with medicines, especially chloramphenicol injections, which were delivered through dedicated doctors, including doctors Majid, Kamaran, and Kawa. With the help of doctors Rafiq, Muzaffar, Barzan, Arif, and other staff, such as Rebwar, a medical assistant, the supplies were distributed to hospitals in Soran, Shaqlawa, and Ranya.

These doctors and hospital teams were performing acts of quiet heroism. Without pay and without expectation of recognition, they worked day and night, in exhausting shifts, saving lives under conditions few could endure. In Sidiq, staff prevented the hospital from being looted despite the chaos outside. In Shaqlawa, after waves of displacement toward the Iranian border, looters stripped what they could and smashed what remained. The hospital staff, among them doctors Kawa, Kamaran, Rebwar, and nineteen others, rebuilt the facility with their own hands and resumed work.

During this same trip, I visited other towns and villages across the Erbil and Sulaymaniyah regions, collecting data on the survivors of the Anfal genocide campaign. This documentation later became part of my lobbying efforts for humanitarian aid and international awareness.

Typhoid and other infectious diseases were prevalent while medicines were in short supply

Diarrhea was the largest and most deadly disease in the free zones of Kurdistan.

Doctors at Sidiq General Hospital in May 1991: The hospital was located on the main road, where the displaced people were passing by it. The staff received patients free of charge

Doctors and nurses of Shaqlawa Hospital
They saved people from death in the worst of circumstances

After the Aid

When I returned to the United Kingdom after my second trip, I resumed giving speeches, interviews, and seminars to sustain momentum for assistance and reconstruction. Events then moved quickly. By the autumn of 1991, the Iraqi government withdrew its administration entirely from the region it had labelled "autonomous areas." The parties of the Kurdistan Front rapidly filled the vacuum.

With the exception of the people of Kirkuk, many of whom remained displaced on both the Iranian and Iraqi sides, life in most Kurdish cities gradually stabilised. Markets reopened, institutions re-emerged, and a fragile sense of normality returned.

In my subsequent visits to Kurdistan, my work took on different forms. I became involved in a series of focused capacity-building initiatives: a Government Advisory Project on health system management, a comprehensive Health System Review, a University Support Project, and later the Kurdistan Reconstruction Project. In each case, my role was clearly defined, less about direct implementation, more about advising, shaping strategy, and liaising with the emerging Kurdistan authorities.

Looking back, those efforts were modest compared to the scale of need. Yet they were part of a broader, collective endeavour, one carried by doctors without salaries, families without homes, and a society rebuilding itself quietly, patiently, and without waiting for permission.

PUBLISHED RESEARCH AND REPORTS

Gathering evidence

Informing the Public

Impacting Policy

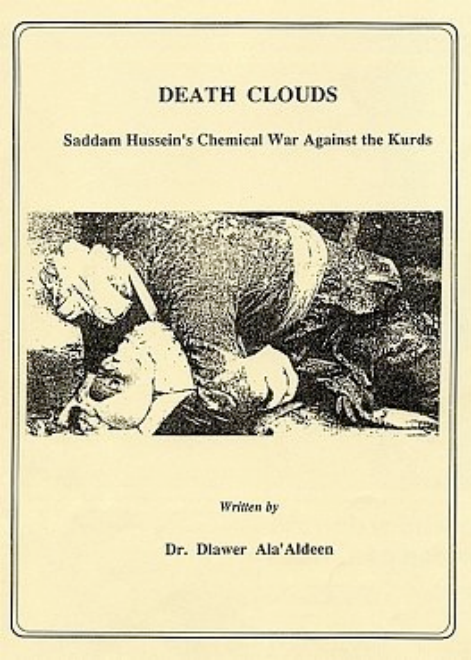
Chapter Eight

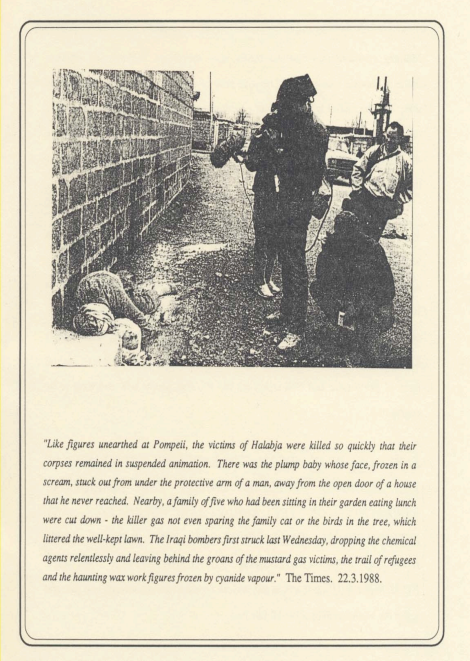
DEATH CLOUDS

SADDAM HUSSEIN'S CHEMICAL WAR AGAINST THE KURDS

3 January 1991

[This report was the first publication of solid data on the victims, places and dates of chemical attacks in Kurdistan. It is a product of more than two years of painstaking research. At the time (1987-1989), Iraq was sealed, Saddam was in full control and information or hard evidence was extremely difficult to obtain. To assist our lobbying campaign and avoid losing momentum, I published the data in the form of a booklet, self-financed. The data was subsequently extensively cited in publications, human rights investigations, pre-war preparations and indictment trials.]





Introduction

The Gulf War between Iraq and the United States-led coalition forces has highlighted, as never before, the potentially appalling destructive capability of a regime armed with chemical and biological weapons. Military commentators and the media have speculated endlessly on whether Saddam Hussein would use his massive arsenal of chemical weapons. Yet the reality is that Saddam's Ba'thist regime has already unleashed these terrible weapons time and time again, and with massive loss of life. The victims were the Kurdish people of Iraq, who have long fought for their plight to be recognised internationally and for the monstrous use of chemical weapons to be ended forever.

Modern Iraq emerged from the Ottoman provinces of Mesopotamia following Britain's military dominance of the region after the First World War. The British drew up the borders of the modern Iraqi state by annexing Kurdish lands to the north and, in the process, denying the Kurdish people any right to an independent Kurdish state. Since the 1920s, the Kurds in Iraq have suffered political dominance by a succession of Arab regimes based in the capital, Baghdad. After the overthrow of the Hashemite monarchy in 1958, Britain finally lost influence as an imperial power within Iraq and the fate of the Kurds was left entirely in the hands of a series of undemocratic, Arab nationalist governments. Without exception, these regimes refused to acknowledge the Kurds' right to full citizenship, far less the Kurdish demand for self-determination. In recent decades, the people of Iraqi Kurdistan have campaigned for political rights and have been forced to resort to armed struggle against the Baghdad government to secure civil rights. Their cause has contributed to the political instability of the Middle East, and therefore, the Kurds would argue, must also be accommodated in any solution to the region's problems.

Governments from East and West, including the two major superpowers, have consistently refused to address the Kurdish issue, in part because stability in the region has not always been in their political or economic interests. During the Cold War era, both sides were heavily engaged in supporting powerful, yet often dictatorial regimes in the region, particularly in strategically important countries such as Iraq. The driving motive of business and trade led the major powers to ride roughshod over fundamental principles of civil rights and to turn a blind eye to clear violations of human rights by their Middle Eastern trade partners. Moreover, companies trading with Iraq chose to violate international agreements by supplying plant and raw materials that enabled a vast arsenal of weapons of mass destruction to be accumulated.

This neglect by industrial nations has allowed the proliferation of chemical weapons and the production of these weapons across the globe. It is the urgent task of the United Nations to put an end, once and for all, to the production, proliferation and use of chemical and biological weapons. It would be made clear that the international community will not allow an arsenal of chemical weapons to be used against states or, indeed, against the minority populations of a particular nation.

In the Gulf War between Iraq and the US-led coalition forces, such an arsenal of chemical weapons was targeted against the Western powers, who were Saddam Hussein's former allies. The old Cold War order had broken down, and both antagonists seemed to have misunderstood the emerging order. Saddam over-reached himself and

perhaps misjudged his former allies by invading Kuwait, and the Western powers seemed suddenly to have rediscovered their long-forgotten allegiance to the principles of nationhood and autonomy in their defence of Kuwait - a moral cloak, cynics would say, for defending their economic interests. But a new political and economic imperative is sure to emerge from the ashes of war - the necessity for a stable Middle East that will not be vulnerable to the whims of dictatorship or the economic dictates of powerful nations outside the region. If such harmony is to be achieved, then it will surely be on the basis of independent, democratic states that have firmly grasped the ideal of self-determination and have finally secured that right, perhaps at the expense of the West's industrial/military superpowers. Moreover, if the establishment of democracy in the nation-states of the Middle East is to be the foundation of further peace and prosperity, then the fundamental issue of democratic and civil rights for the Kurdish people will also have to be confronted. There can be no negotiated, democratic settlement of the region's problems unless the democratic aspirations of the Kurds are fulfilled. Any international conference on the region must include the legitimate representatives of the Kurdish people if it is, in any way, to herald a new democratic and peaceful order for all the peoples of the Middle East.

Poison and Saddam Hussein

Iraq is not the only country to have used chemical weapons, and the Kurds are not the first victims of Iraq's poison gases. However, it’s the first time in history that these weapons of mass destruction have been used by a state against its own civilians, to suppress internal democratic opposition or as weapons of genocide to eradicate an ethnic minority.

The recent history of the Kurds in Iraq consists of a long series of tragedies, of which only the major ones have gained world public awareness and generated varying degrees of international concern. Only the holocausts of Halabja (March 1988) and Bahdinan (August 1988) became well publicised, but these are just two episodes in a long saga of tragedy. There have been numerous other chemical attacks which were not publicised or investigated by the international community despite consistent allegations and appeals by the Kurds. This report will focus on these less publicised but equally significant occasions when the Iraqi Government used various chemical weapons in Kurdistan against the Kurds between April 1987 and October 1988.

The record of the current Iraqi Ba'thist Party, which seized power through a coup d'etat in 1968 [1], reveals a long history of ruthlessness towards its opponents and national minorities. This includes physical and psychological harassment of people; unlawful extermination of individuals and members of the Kurdish and non-Kurdish pro-democracy opposition; violent suppression of mass unrest and, in the case of armed insurgency, bloody and exhaustive warfare on a massive scale regardless of cost.

Achieving these horrifying objectives involved the use of “poisons” of different kinds. Abdul-Karim Kasim, Iraq’s first president after the Hashemite monarchy [1], is said to have been physically dissolved by sulphuric acid and nitric acid by the Ba’thist party during their first coup in 1963. Saddam Hussein used thallium (a rat poison) to eliminate his opponents as early as 1970 and as recently as 1988 [2]. Doctors in the United Kingdom, where many of these victims were treated, began calling this particular

chemical the "Iraqi poison". I have personally examined and attempted to help two victims of deliberate thallium poisoning. One of these was Mr Shawkat Akrawi, formerly a known Kurdish political activist and, later, adviser to Iraq's Minister for Industry. Recently, in Guy's Hospital in London, three Kurdish victims, poisoned by thallium added to their meal, were treated [3]. In this particular incident, ten people shared the poisoned yoghurt drink, prepared by an Iraqi agent, Narmeen Hawez [4]. Three of the victims subsequently died. Dr Mahmoud Othman, a prominent figure in Kurdish politics, and Mr Sami Shorish, a Kurdish writer now living in the UK, were among the survivors. In 1988, an Iraqi-born publisher and journalist, Abdul-Rahim Sharif Ali, was found poisoned to death with the same agent in a London hotel, and all the evidence in the hands of Scotland Yard pointed to the Iraqi Embassy as the perpetrator [5]. Undoubtedly, the reports concerning these thallium victims are only the tip of the iceberg and inside Iraq, there must have been innumerable victims and endless cases of people who faced short detentions, were offered a coffee and then set free to suffer slowly deteriorating health and finally death.

Internationally-banned Napalm and Phosphorous bombs were dropped on heavily populated Kurdish towns during the 1974-1975 war between the Kurds and the Ba'athist government. The now infamous town of Halabja and the town of Qaladiza are examples of the tragic devastation and mass killing [6] inflicted by these poisonous bombs. In Qaladiza, 80 school children and young adults were among the 130 victims who died when crowded schools, education centres and other public buildings were targeted on April 24th 1974 [7]. During the four years of negotiation that preceded this war, the Ba'thist government made several failed attempts to assassinate the powerful Kurdish leader, Mala Mustafa Barzani. One of these attempts, in 1972, involved offering Barzani and his colleagues oranges that had been injected with deadly poisons.

Kurdish Fears

Rumours began to emerge in the early eighties about Iraq's development of a poison weapon capability. I remember when organophosphorus pesticides started to disappear from Iraqi shops at this time, supporting fears that chemical weapons were being produced. Concern grew that such a capability might enable the Government to gain the upper hand in its war against the Kurds as well as in the Gulf War against Iran. We had no reason to believe that Saddam Hussein would hesitate to use any weapons at his disposal to suppress the "trouble-making" Kurds, and once a chemical weapons capability was ready, then it would be only a matter of time before the Kurds were experimented on. However, many still believed that despite his previous record, Saddam Hussein would probably not go as far as using these internationally-banned and indiscriminate mass-destruction weapons against his own civilians. This probably played some part, in addition to financial and political difficulties, in people's lack of preparations for defence against chemical weapons.

Although chemical weapons were not used against them until April 1987, the Kurds had witnessed these weapons being used on Kurdish soil in Iranian Kurdistan in January 1982, and against Iranian troops in the fierce battles of Haji Omaran and Grdamand in Arbil province, late in 1983 [8]. Initially, suspicion that Saddam intended to use poison gases against the Kurdish democratic opposition was based on rumour and speculation on the Iraqi military psychology. Suspicions were subsequently confirmed when taped

communications, captured high-ranking military officers [9], and military documents revealed the Ba'thists' terrible plans.

Documents I and II, shown below, were captured by Peshmargas (freedom fighters) of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and clearly demonstrate the Iraqi military preparations for the use of chemical and biological weapons long before their eventual use. It is important to note that document I refers to the distribution and stocking of biological materials in addition to chemical ones. This was further evidence that Iraq had developed biological weapons early in the eighties and that it most probably had the means to deploy them. This evidence of biological weapons did not gain international publicity until late in 1988, when news of the use in Kurdistan of biological agents like Typhoid and other infectious microorganisms was reported [10, 11].

Events Prior to the First Use of Chemical Weapons in Kurdistan

It is important to look at the events prior to the use of chemical weapons in Kurdistan to enable the formation of a comprehensive picture of their deployment. Therefore, several relevant historical events will be mentioned before presenting the available data concerning actual attacks.

Kurds in Iraq had been fighting to win basic human and political rights from successive central governments in Iraq for many decades, and for more than twenty years against the current Ba'thist government [1,12]. Since 1975, the Ba'thists had never publicly admitted the existence of the unsolved Kurdish question or the presence of a significant Kurdish opposition, internally or externally. Suddenly, at the end of 1983, Saddam Hussein officially recognised the cause for which the Kurds had been fighting. The Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), one of the two major Kurdish political organisations in Iraqi Kurdistan, was approached for negotiations on a peaceful settlement of the Kurdish issue. This was probably a result of several factors, including Saddam's intention to use the PUK with its armed forces and followers to aid his efforts in the Gulf War. The PUK leaders, desperate for a respite after long years of hardship, struggle and isolation, welcomed the offer despite their awareness of the government's intentions and despite the lack of trust between the two sides. Thus, 13-month-long bilateral negotiations towards a mutual understanding began in December 1983.

The PUK saw a number of possible long-term achievements to be gained in these negotiations. For the first time since 1975, the Ba'thists officially recognised the Kurdish movement; they implicitly recognised the right of the Kurds to fight for their rights and confirmed that no genuine autonomy had been granted to them. In private, Saddam Hussein went as far as making a number of concessions to Talabani, the leader of PUK, promising a number of changes in Kurdistan toward a long-lasting peace [13]. This political game ended in January 1985 and led eventually to renewed fighting between the two sides. Once the PUK resumed fighting, it managed to inflict severe blows on government forces and exert more effective and crippling military pressure on the Iraqi army in the north than ever before, not only in the countryside but also in the government-controlled big towns and major cities. Liberated areas were expanding every day, and more than one quarter of Iraq's entire army was tied up again in the north to face the Kurds [12]. The moral, political and military strength of the Kurdish forces was boosted a great deal with the rapprochement of the PUK, KDP and the other main

Kurdish political groups and parties with the subsequent formation of the Iraqi Kurdistan Front. The latter was formed under the slogan of "the overthrow of Saddam Hussein and the establishment of a democratic Iraq and autonomous Kurdistan" [14].

Iran, the natural beneficiary of this renewed fighting, approached the PUK for new relations to combine forces against Saddam. Indeed, joint operations were undertaken with small numbers of Pasdars (Iranian Revolutionary Guards) who joined the Peshmargas in attacks on military targets inside Kurdish cities like Kirkuk. This was, naturally, unacceptable to Saddam Hussein. By spring 1987, the Kurds had become the only powerful and influential internal opposition, controlling massive liberated territories. The PUK alone had a firm grip over a land bigger than the Kuwaiti emirate, including the Arbil and Suleimani provinces. The KDP had a similar grip over the Bahdinan area in the Duhok and Mousil provinces. There were, of course, grey areas where control over villages and towns alternated, with the government in control in the day and the Peshmargas at night. The Peshmargas' threat to the major Kurdish cities of Arbil, Suleimani, Duhok and Kirkuk and the half-Kurdish city of Mousil was growing. This was in addition to the ever-increasing pressure on Saddam from the South, with the lack of any hope of a foreseeable truce with, or victory over, Iran. Saddam Hussein was growing impatient every day and was convinced that he could not eradicate, or even suppress, the ever-growing Kurdish movement by the use of "conventional" measures. Therefore, he did not hesitate to grant his powerful cousin, Ali Hassan Al-Majid, Governor of Northern Iraq [15], full access to Iraq's military capabilities, including chemical weapons, to eradicate the Kurdish movement. This former soldier of the Iraqi army was the very Al-Majid who recently earned international opprobrium when he was appointed as Governor of Kuwait in August 1990 [16], following Iraq's invasion. Al-Majid's prime responsibility in Kurdistan was to ensure a total and permanent suppression of the Kurds and complete Arabisation of the important Kurdish towns and cities, regardless of costs or methods used. One example of the methods he applied in Kurdistan is the horrific revenge killings in retaliation for Kurdish military operations. People were forced to watch the public execution of young Kurds (aged between 14-35) on the high streets of Arbil, Suleimani and Kirkuk as retaliation for the killing of Ba'thist security agents by the Peshmargas [20]. Al-Majid's other tactics to regain control over the liberated territories were:

1. To remove and deport all the people from the "grey" areas where the government retained only partial control, raze their villages to the ground and prohibit rebuilding or any other activity (see document LII below).
2. To impose a total economic blockade on defined "prohibition zones" where shoot-to-kill policies were applied and no moving creature was allowed to survive (see documents III and IV below).
3. To burn down crops, farms, bushes, trees and other plants and to spoil the water supply.
4. And finally, to launch systematic and highly organised attacks on liberated areas at several stages (the Anfal operations, see below) on different fronts, to regain control over these areas.

Steps 1, 2 and 3 were all preparations for 4 to minimise the support to Kurdish fighters before the final attacks and to impose a total blockade on the whole region, including the vast number of civilians and peasants who inhabited the area. It became evident that

the target was not merely the Peshmargas but the whole population of Kurdistan. Thus, over 4,000 villages were demolished [15] and half a million people deported and scattered all over Iraq [12], even to the desert part of the Arab south, where they were forced to live in "Protected Camps", comparable to the Nazi concentration camps. Villagers, who were not even warned or made aware of the Government's plans for them, faced the same treatment as the Peshmargas.

Mustard Gas and the First Clouds of Death in Kurdistan

On April 15th, 1987, four planes flew very low over Helladen, Bergallu, Kanitu, Sirwan, Awazic, Noljika and Chinara, all in Suleimani province [15], and dropped very unusual bombs in each of these small towns and villages. The people were unfamiliar with the strange sound of the bombs, the unusual colour of the smoke, the absence of the normal rocket attacks and the peculiar tin-like bomb shells that actually fell. It was long feared that the Iraqi Government might seek to use chemical weapons in battles with the Peshmarga. However, it did not occur to the villagers that these odd-looking shells were poison weapons, being dropped without any prior fighting or provocation in the area [20]. In Bargalu, five men went to the scene of the bombing after the planes had left and began a close examination of the shells and craters. Puzzled by their findings, some (like Mr Rawaz) went as far as touching the peculiar shells, carrying them to the town centre. It was past midnight before examiners of the bombs, one of whom (Hakem Omar Aziz) now lives in London, started developing puffy and watery eyes, dry throats and harsh coughs. They suffered skin burns and developed blistered armpits and groin during the following days. Describing his injuries, Hakem Omar said that it took two weeks before he could see again and at least a month before his skin lesions healed. In another village, a young shepherd had attempted to dismantle an unexploded bomb in order to use the contents for making fishing bombs, not knowing that this time it contained not TNT but a deadly poison.

As a result of this first attack, there were tens of serious casualties. In Bargalu, almost all the inhabitants suffered from severe headaches, weakness and other mild symptoms which took several days to disappear. Those who were exposed to heavy doses of the gas, because they were close to the attack area or were downwind, suffered extensive eye, skin and lung injuries. Infection of the wounds often led to complications, and many died as a result. Those who survived tended to be disfigured by scars, developed various eye problems or had chronic breathing disorders [17]. Doctors stressed that lack of proper advice on protective measures and ignorance played a significant role in worsening the effects of these bombs. There were no laboratory means of identifying the chemical used. However, from the symptoms and injuries, the doctors concluded that a powerful vesicant poison, like Mustard gas, was the agent used in these raids.

On the very next day, April 16th, Arbil province was attacked by Iraqi planes and several villages were bombed with similar poisonous gases. These villages were Sheikh Wassanan, Totma, Zeni, Ballokawa, Alana, Darash and the whole of the valley of Balisan. In Sheilch Wassanan, a village in Rawanduz district, Arbil province, consisting of 150 houses and a population of approximately 500 people, 12 aircraft attacked at 7.00 am for nearly 15 minutes using conventional and chemical weapons [18]. Everybody was poisoned to some extent in this village, and 121 civilians were killed instantly, including 76 children aged between one day and eight years, with the rest injured [15].

286 of the injured civilians hurried towards the city of Arbil to seek medical attention. The victims managed to enter the city's main hospital (Arbil Teaching Hospital), where they were initially admitted.

The authorities soon approached them, demanding their signature on a declaration in which Iran was named as the "perpetrator" of the attack. The victims refused to sign the declaration, and so the authorities rounded them up and took them prisoner. The fate of these victims was not known for a long time. Only late that year, it became known that they were being kept for a few days in a military prison in Arbil (near the exit which leads to Mousil), where they were deprived of all kinds of facilities [19]. The authorities asked them again to sign the declaration and appear on Iraqi television to incriminate Iran for this chemical attack on their village, but these victims refused to do so. In this prison, 202 of the victims died over a short period as a result of their untreated skin burns, lung damage, infections and other injuries caused by exposure to the mustard gas. The remaining 84 relatively healthy adults and children were taken to a secret spot near Rashkin village, not far from Arbil military base, where they were killed and buried in mass graves [19].

A military medical doctor, who witnessed the tragic scene and later defected to Iran and then to the West, revealed that the bodies were burnt before they were buried. It became known that even the bodies of those who died in Arbil prison were taken away by the security forces (Istikhbarat) led by Mamand Qishqayee and destroyed [19]. The horror of this mass murder shocked the people of Kurdistan. Relatives of the victims were prevented from speaking about or mourning their missing family in public.

From our contacts with doctors and paramedics in the Kurdish cities, we learnt that all the staff were ordered not to treat or in any way assist victims and were ordered to inform the authorities about the presence of any patient bearing wounds from chemical weapons. Failure to do so, or any moves to publicise the occurrence of such injuries, would be subjected to the severest punishment possible. My mother was severely injured in one of these attacks and was subsequently taken to Arbil for proper medical treatment. There, she consulted one of my old medical colleagues in Arbil Teaching Hospital, who was shocked and terrified by their meeting. He refused to examine my mother, and his only advice to her was to go back to where she came from as soon as possible, or else she would be caught by the authorities like those in Sheikh Wassanan and would not be seen again.

The attacks of April 15th and 16th were followed by daily attacks on villages and Peshmarga strongholds in Arbil and Suleimani provinces for at least six days (as shown in the table below), causing death and injury to hundreds of people. On May Day, 1987, the people in the liberated areas of Duhok, another province in Iraqi Kurdistan, witnessed their first raids by chemical weapons in which two people died, and tens were injured. The major Kurdish province of Kirkuk, the richest oil province in Iraq, suffered poison attacks for the first time on May 23rd, 1987, when Tomar, Gargan and Qamargan villages were bombarded, and tens of victims, including seven children, died.

By mid-1987, chemical attacks on the Kurds had become a daily reality, and it was clear that the Government would no longer hesitate to use these weapons despite the indiscriminate nature of the poison gas attacks. Unlike the war with Iran, where chemical

weapon attacks were almost always preceded by fierce fighting and concern over military defeat, most attacks in Kurdistan were completely unprovoked and were not preceded by military activities by the Peshmarga in those areas. On the contrary, the government used chemical weapons as a preliminary step to terrify people and generate panic before waging organised military offensives. Furthermore, in many instances, aircraft were witnessed dropping bombs on uninhabited land and farms far from villages for no apparent military reason other than the poisoning of the environment [20].

Nerve Gas and the Anfal Operations

Mustard gas at first remained the predominant chemical weapon used, and it was not until the Government launched the "Anfal Operations" that the more toxic nerve gases were used on a wide scale in Kurdistan. "Anfal" is an ancient Islamic term, which originally denoted the plunder and slaves seized in the cause of a Jihad or holy war. Termed Anfal by the Ba'thists, these operations in 1987-1988 consisted of carefully planned and highly organised massive multi-stage offensives on Peshmarga strongholds directly supervised by Saddam Hussein, who was based in Suleimani [13,15]. The attacks started with Suleimani's Jaffaty valley, followed by Garmian area, Arbil province and finally Duhok and Mousil. All these Anfal operations were preceded and synchronised with systematic waves of poison gas attacks that killed people instantly without leaving any apparent injuries.

Escaping death became more difficult. The conventional methods of protection were no longer useful as the gases (odourless and lighter than mustard gas) seeped through the wet breathing-turbans, damaging the respiratory system of the victim. People were seen gasping and struggling for breath, and helplessly lying on the ground, jerking with convulsions. Mr K. Bakhtiar, 27, a victim and eyewitness, recalled his experience when his village was attacked by the fast-acting nerve gas. He said, "We all knew it was a gas attack and tried to follow the usual steps of protection. But this time it was different. First, I saw people behaving strangely, and so were the animals, acting as if they were struggling. Some were lying on the ground. I saw birds falling out of the trees. Everything was mad. I knew that the situation was very dangerous, and I was frightened and did not know what to do but to run away towards the hill. I felt like I was weak, unable to run or fully control my movements. My mouth was full, I could not see properly, but worst of all, I could not breathe normally. I did not know what I was doing and realised that I must be dying. I can not remember any more, and I must have lost consciousness. Doctors tell me that it is a true miracle that I am alive, and I believe so too. This is my second life, and I am trying to enjoy the most of it."

The number of deaths increased considerably. In Halabja, 5,000 died, and over 9,000 were injured [15]. It is important to clarify events before the holocaust of Halabja and to stress a very important historical fact, as I have noticed that the world media, press and public have been misled so far. Halabja was not occupied by Iranian troops before the Iraqi planes bombarded the town with chemical weapons. Halabja was liberated from government control by the Kurdish Peshmargas, mainly from the PUK, who were partially assisted by the other Kurdish organisations [21]. Mr Shawkat Haji Mushir, a member of the leadership committee of the PUK, led 500 Peshmarga and fought his way towards Halabja while government forces were busy carrying out the Anfal-I operation in Jafaty valley.

The people of Halabja, desperate for freedom, welcomed the native Peshmargas, including their leader who was himself from the town of Halabja. Except for a cameraman and two unarmed individuals, no Iranians participated in this operation. Saddam Hussein, astonished by the people's loyalty to the Peshmarga, tried publicly to link the battle for Halabja to the Iraq-Iran war, even though no battlefront with Iran had been opened in that area and no Iranian official had entered the town. Iraqi planes then bombarded the town with poison gas. Only after that, the Iranians came to the rescue of the victims and entered Halabja. Their humanitarian efforts were much appreciated by all in the town; however, the authorities in Iran attempted to take advantage of the tragic scenes there for political propaganda. They obtained the film, which was taken earlier while the town was being freed by the Peshmarga, and combined it with footage taken after the bombardment [21, 22]. The way events were presented in their film indicated that the whole operation was an Iranian victory over Iraqis and that the people of Halabja had welcomed the Iranian occupiers. The Kurds later paid a heavy price for this misrepresentation of events, for which the Iranians expressed their regrets.

In Dashti Koya, and the Valley of Smaguli and Balisan, over 200 died, and over 1,200 were injured in one day on March 27th, 1988. On the same day, the Qaradagh district, including the heavily inhabited town and the nearby villages, was heavily bombarded. In this attack, of the hundreds of casualties, 412 injured civilians headed towards Suleimani seeking medical treatment, but failed in the attempt. The same story of Sheikh Wassanan was repeated; the military forces in Tanjaro rounded up the victims and stopped them from reaching Sulaymaniyah. They were never seen again.

The Casualties and Damages

Chemical attacks became increasingly intense and widespread all over Kurdistan. However, during the first year, before February 1988, the effects of the attacks grew relatively less and less disastrous. People were building up experience and gathering information on how to protect themselves from the poisons to avoid unnecessarily extensive injuries. Some obtained old gas masks, and others learned how to breathe through wet cloths containing charcoal. People were told that mustard gas is heavier than air and during attacks they learnt to rush to the top of the mountains and to sit around a big fire and not to scurry to the traditional refuge in the caves as they have done through out history unless they built a fire at the cave mouth, drank plenty of water and took thorough showers as soon as possible [20]. The efficacy of these measures became evident in the following months when recorded casualties decreased relatively in terms of numbers and severity despite the greater intensity and widening scale of the attacks.

The available data, see the table below, consists of reported victims with chemical injuries only [15, 17, 20, 21, 23, 28]. It was not easy to maintain a proper record of the casualties in these areas due to the far from ideal circumstances of collecting information. Not registered were those who suffered mild injuries, those who did not come forward for treatment and those who were outside the attack areas and received injuries as a result of breathing in poison blown by the wind. The latter casualties were much higher than all initial estimates, due to the massive scale of the attacks. An eye witness, Mrs N. Khidir, 49, spoke about her experience in Bargalu when she, and many others, woke up in the morning with headaches, tight chests and a general feeling of weakness. At first, she thought her symptoms were due to a bout of flu, but it soon

became known that they had been breathing in poison gas, which had travelled on the wind from Sargalu, a village a few miles away, which was bombarded late the previous night with artillery shells loaded with chemical weapons.

Panic would fill the minds of the people in risk areas with each air raid or artillery bombardment. The whole population would run in panic, screaming "Kimiawy, Kimiawy". Children ran in fear, looking for parents; parents wandered in panic, trying to account for members of their family. Some would rush to their homes to grab breathing cloths (or old gas masks for the few lucky ones) and then dash to higher altitudes. Mr F. Karim, 29, an eyewitness, said that on one occasion, "as soon as the cloud from the smoke of the bombs started to spread, we went climbing the mountain. Only after reaching the top, I realised that I was running with one bare foot and had dropped a fruit sack which I was carrying at the time. I was shaking, and we were all looking down at the village in the valley watching the other villagers, including women, children and even animals, running in all directions, and we could hear them crying. I suddenly realised that my handicapped cousin was left behind. I wanted to go back and rescue him, but friends stopped me and said, 'If you go down, you will never come back, and we will lose you both. The only thing you could do is to sit down and pray for him.' Mr Karim added, "He is martyred, and I still feel guilty because I forgot him at the time of panic. I should have behaved like a brave man and should have saved him despite the risks".

Soon after the planes had gone, people would head towards the areas attacked to assist the injured and bury the dead. The injured were usually taken to local health centres, where young Peshmarga doctors or paramedics were based. For the doctors, the difficulties were endless. In most areas, they could not offer any treatment. In most centres, no oxygen or life-support machines were at their disposal to support victims with severe lung or bone marrow damage. They were only able to offer first aid, advice and some symptom-relieving agents like pain killers or eye drops. They used to clean the wounds with antiseptics and protect them from infection. "The severely affected either died before us or were sent across the border to Iran", said one doctor [17]. Doctors and paramedics, and their health centres, were also occasionally victims of the bombardments. Mr Abdul Aziz, 59, told me about an attack on Bargalu on September 3rd, 1987, when he and his wife were severely injured along with several others. The whole area was covered in clouds smelling of rotten onions, and people were hurrying to climb the nearby Sekanian hill, seeking a higher altitude. Some people with physical injuries rushed to the local health centre, but the centre itself was cloaked in smoke from the chemical bombs and could offer no help, not only during the attack, but for some time after.

The Environment

Also not included in the available data is the amount of damage inflicted by the chemical weapons on the environment and wildlife. Mr Omer, 28, injured in March 1988, and currently being treated in Germany for disfiguring scars and other long-term effects of mustard gas, told us that he and 200 others were in Shanakhsy when Iraqi planes dropped their bombs one afternoon. People evacuated the village in panic, but by late that night, the majority of the people had returned to their homes. They re-inhabited the poisoned environment and started drinking water, eating food (particularly fruit) and using

contaminated furniture and beds, only to wake up after midnight suffering from symptoms identical to those suffered by the people they had assisted earlier in the day. Furthermore, after the attack, many people from neighbouring villages came to the assistance of the victims without taking protective measures, handling the victims and contaminated materials. They, too, subsequently became victims of mustard poisoning.

Kurdistan is the most fertile part of Iraq, which is normally self-sufficient in wheat, barley, oats, vegetables, timber, dairy products, meat and poultry [6]. The inhabitants of the attacked areas are mainly peasants who rely on agriculture and domestic animals for their living. The environment was rendered completely uninhabitable for long periods after each attack. Depending on the distance from the bombarded spots, plants and trees suffered varying degrees of damage [20]. In general, the whole area, including the land and green plants, turned yellow. Nothing new grew in the heavily contaminated areas near the attack spots for more than one or two years despite heavy rains during winter. The grass and low-growing plants died within a short time with no hope of recovery. Higher growing plants and trees turned yellow and lost leaves, but recovered later. The damage was progressively milder further from the centre of the attack. Water sources were contaminated and rendered undrinkable.

Animals like birds, chickens, sheep, goats, cows, donkeys, cats, guard dogs and even insects like bees were not spared [20]. Animals suffered in various ways. Some were directly affected, just like the humans and killed instantly or suffered from watery eyes, burnt skin, damaged lungs and ill health. Others were indirectly affected either through eating contaminated grass and wild plants or drinking contaminated water. Many starved due to a lack of healthy pet food and were therefore put down by their owners. Some of the sick animals and even the healthier ones were sold at very cheap prices (one-tenth or even one-twentieth of normal). Owners of these animals had tremendous problems in selling dairy products like milk, yoghurt and cheese and even meat, because people in the cities refused to buy potentially contaminated animal products. This also forced owners to destroy their animals. It goes without saying that the local wildlife all suffered a great deal. There were scenes of snakes lying dead on the ground; falcons lying dead as a result of feeding on the carcasses of poisoned animals; frogs and tortoises lying dead at the lakesides, and fish floating dead in the water, dead flies, cockroaches and earthworms were everywhere.

Saddam's Aggression was Rewarded

By the end of May 1988, the area looked like a different planet. The land had become uninhabitable, and the people, including the Peshmargas, had to retreat from the Suleimani area and parts of Arbil province in the face of massive poison attacks. Elsewhere, the Kurds were still able to maintain liberated areas, and Peshmargas were able to repulse Government forces in fierce battles, inflicting heavy losses on the government. The situation remained unstable throughout this period until Iraq signed the truce with Iran and the subsequent arrival of the United Nations Iran-Iraq Military Observatory Groups (UNIIMOG) at the border between the two countries. The UNIIMOG troops were refused access to the Kurdish areas by Iraq despite requests. The Government transferred more troops from the south to Kurdistan and built up a large army ready for offensives. Towards the middle of August, a few days after the truce with Iran became effective, the countdown started for Saddam to make good his promise

made to King Fahd of Saudi Arabia when the latter suggested an achievable solution for the Kurdish problem in Iraq [24]. Saddam's reply to the King was that he would deal with the Kurds "once and for all". Thus, the period from August 25th to September 1st (the Bahdinan holocaust) became another tragic watershed in the Kurdish struggle for human rights and self-determination and in Kurdish relations with the central government and the Arab people of Iraq. Within a few days, thousands were gassed to death; tens of thousands were made refugees, and thousands more were captured to face life in a heavily guarded camp as prisoners of war. The captives were dumped in a camp on open land to suffer the most appalling conditions and the harsh winter of Hoshtirmil near the city of Arbil. They were deprived of food and shelter. Over 70 children died within the first few weeks, as did several elderly and pregnant women.

The lucky ones who managed to cross the border into Turkey were accepted as "guests" and kept in three camps, Diyarbakir, Mardin and Mus. There, in exile, the Iraqi Kurds suffered fear, abuse and neglect [25]. One year after their arrival in Mardin, 2070 of the refugees were poisoned [26]. The symptoms suggested the use of some form of neurotoxic agent. Blood samples from victims were tested in United Kingdom laboratories, including the National Poison Unit of Guy's Hospital [27]. The toxicologists concluded that an unusually potent organophosphorus nerve poison must have been the cause. They also suggested that the poison was most probably of the kind used by the Iraqi Government as a chemical weapon. All the circumstantial and scientific evidence pointed to deliberate poisoning.

The Bahdinan tragedy gained international publicity and aroused public concern worldwide. But the governments of the major world powers and of the Middle Eastern countries failed to condemn Saddam for this inhuman attack on his own citizens. The Soviet Union failed to comment on the tragedy in its own internal media and went as far as condemning the Western media for publicising the gas attacks, calling it "American propaganda" against sovereign Iraq based on "no evidence" [29]. Some Western countries even rewarded Saddam by increasing his credit for buying military hardware [30]. Most of the Arab states failed to express any humanitarian concern, and some of them, such as Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Egypt, went as far as strongly defending Saddam before the United Nations' Security Council members. Mr Ghazy Al-Rayes, Sheikh Nasser Almanquor respectively the ambassadors for Kuwait and Saudi Arabia joined with Sadiq Al-Mashat, the Iraqi ambassador to the United Kingdom (now to the United States) on a visit to Mr William Waldegrave, then United Kingdom Foreign Minister, in condemning the British media coverage and "Britain's campaign against Iraq", encouraging the British Government to disbelieve Kurdish claims about the use of chemical weapons [31].

The impotence of the international community and the lack of condemnation from individual governments in the face of Saddam's clear violation of human rights allowed this regime to continue with its genocidal war. Indeed, some expert media commentators suggested that Western impotence acted as an incentive to Saddam to continue these monstrous attacks [32]. Chemical bombardment of Sheikh Bizeni and Hamea in Kirkuk province and Chami Razan in Suleimani province in mid-October 1988, only a few weeks after the Bahdinan holocaust, showed that Saddam was swift to realise the opportunity that this lack of opposition offered him.

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Table 1. The available data on the use of chemical weapons in Kurdistan includes the names of the villages, dates of attacks and the number of victims who died or were injured by the gases. In many of these occasions, a proper recording of the data was not possible (NA).

Month	Day	Province	Villages	Died	Injured
April, 1987	15	Suleimani	Haladin, Bargalu, Kanitu, Amazic, Sirwan, Noijika,	NA	NA
	16	Arbil	Sheikh Wassanan, Totma, Balisan valley,, Khati, Balalokawa, Alana, Kanibard, Dardashir mountains, Sawsukan	387	100s
	17	Suleimani	Qizlar, Singar, Mewolaka Jweze	10	NA
	18-21	Suleimani	Qaywan mountain, Kovak, Kunakotir	2	52
	19-21	Arbil	Balisan valley	NA	NA
	21,22	Suleimani	Qaradagh area	10s	100s
May, 1987	1	Duhok	Zewe	2	10s
	23	Kirkuk	Tomar, Gargan, Qamargan	10s	100s
	27	Arbil	Malakan, Gorasher, Kandol, Bardok, Bily, Nahi, Nazaneen Valley, Balisan Valley.	120	100s
June, 1987	27	Duhok	Zewe, Peramagron	35	10s
	27	Suleimani	Sargalu, Bargalu, Yakhsamar, Haladin, Maluma	5	10s
Sept, 1987	3	Suleimani	Bargalu, Yakhsamar	NA	NA
	14	Suleimani	Merga pan	0	42
Feb, 1988	25,26	Suleimani	Sargalu, Yakhsamar Gayzla, Jafaty valley	62	800
Mar, 1988	16	Suleimani		>5000	>10000

Table 1, cont.

Month	Day	Province	Villages	Died	Injured
Mar, 1988	21-23	Suleimani	Shanakhsi and its area, Boin, Sewsinan, Dukan, Balakzar,Jafran, Wulyan, aradagh area, Jalila, Buwela, Decon, Zalm, Bawakochak, Hassanawa, Sazan, Gomalar, Ababila, Reshawa, Hawar, Hawarakon, Tawera, Biara, Ahmadawa, Biawela, Dega Shekhan, Chamisor,	92	760s
	27	Suleimani	Qaradagh city and district	412	100s
	30	Suleimani	Baramawa, Darband, Dizli (Camps of Halabja victims)	24	10s
April, 1988	7	Kirkuk	Garmyan area. Nibarigl, Dawe, Zangana, Jaf ate, Jabari, Sangaw, Qadir Karam,Darawyan, Said Hussinan	10s	10s
	14-16 23-27	Suleimani	Darawyan, Said Hussinan Garmyan area	10s	10s
May, 1988	3,4	Suleimani	Goptapa, Askar, Garchinan, Galnagas, Sotka, Kalashera, Zarty, Koya area	112	844
	3, 4	Kirkuk	Qalasewka, Khalkhalan,Suqawshan	NA	NA
	3,4	Suleimani	Chamirezan, Sarchinar	NA	NA
	15	Arbil	Valley of Smaguli, Balisan, Warte, Hiran, Wan, Bawaji	102	400
	19	Arbil	Buiqamish, Goptapa, Askar, Sotka, Kani Hanjir, Haidarbagh, Surkawshan, Sheikhan, Motlija, Snartu, Blujen, Morkhwarda	200	750
July, 1988	30-31	Arbil	Serouchawa, Semaqoli, Nazanin, Heran, Ganawa, Sharsena, Khati, Darash, Balisan, Garadan, Harrutakon	NA	NA
	30-31	Duhok	Zewe, Arnedi district	19	100s

Table 1, cont.

Month	Day	Province	Villages	Died	Injured
August 1988	1-3	Arbil	Sidakan, An, Sirozerwa	NA	NA
	25-26	Arbil	Edelpe, Ziet, Selka, Pendrou, Meroz, Argosh, Mawata, Spind, Harke, Pedav, Barya, Geri, Spone, Moka, Hostan, Resharan, Pekhash, Beie, Kanibot, Bedaran, Pekhshash, Ban, Khati, Wan, Heran, Nazanin, Balisan, Warte, Mizuri Bala, Barzo	NA	NA
	25-31	Duhok	Sherana, Balit, Bawerk, Ekmala hash, Cheqala, Gerahou, Zewe, Hesse, Warmel, Nerwa, Goherz, Avoke, Babier, Dere, Borjen, Dargel, Zerhawa, Toka, Belijan, Zir, Benavi, Wazmele, Bapire, Ashe, Baze, Muska, Tushambik, Mergachia, Kani Blav, Kere, Baliti, Bawarka Kafri, Grka, Kuflinik, Ridinia, Sarke, Zewka, Sherana, Sware, Spindare, Kanika Baska, Afoke, Bemnash, Brina, Jizgira, Cham Shrte, Cham Rabatke, Meruke, Bilmabas, Tuweka, Zrhawa, Brjin, Dagala Shekha, Zinava, Dbangi, Sare Shamidi, Spir, Sina, Nerwa, Kharkul, Gawharzka Khrap, Baje, Kani, Drkni, Speri, Skeri, Sargale, Merstak, Chia Rashk, Shivie, Kania Ping, Bashi, Sarni, Gara, Karu, Bawanki, Kali Kutki, Bazi Banka, Metut, Jamjali, Blejan.	NA	100s
		Mousil	Sware, Spendare, Kanya Baska, Hein, Shine, Kadan	NA	NA
October, 1988	11	Kirkuk	Sheikh Bizini	11	NA
	14	Kirkuk	Hammea	48	NA
	14	Suleimani	Chemi Rezan	NA	NA

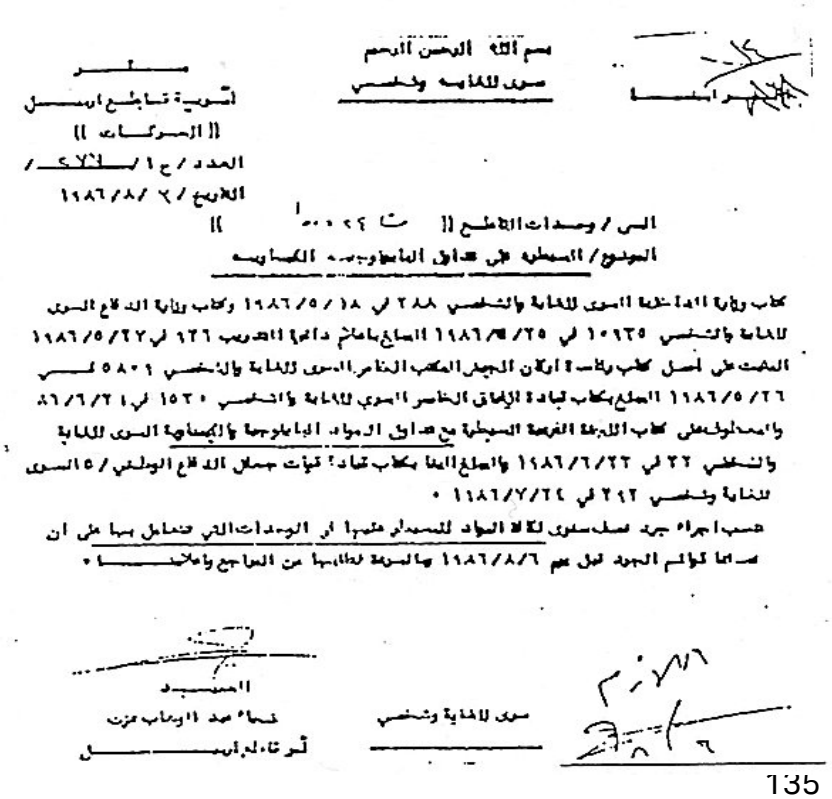
Document I: Translated from Arabic
In the Name of God the Compassionate the Merciful
"Victory is Ours" Highly Confidential and Personal

Headquarters
The Command of Arbil District
"Operations"
NO-H1277
Date - 3/8/1986

To: All units of the District (24th Battalion)
Subject: Control over distribution of biological and chemical materials

[With reference to] the letter of the Interior Ministry personal and highly confidential 288 on 18/5/1986, and the letter of the Defence Ministry personal and highly confidential 10/35 on 25/6/1986 which was sent to the training office by Ref 36 on 27/5/1986 and based on the original letter of the Special Bureau of the Army Chief of Staff personal and highly confidential 5801 on 26/5/1986 which was sent to us through the command of the Fifth Army Corp personal and highly confidential 1530 on 21/6/1986 which referred to the sub-committee letter on the control over the distribution of Biological and Chemical Materials- personal and highly confidential 32 on 23/6/1986 which was sent to us accompanied by the letter of the command of the Light National Defence Forces /15 personal and highly confidential 2/2 on 2417/1986.
It is required to carry out a half-yearly stock-take for all materials at the disposal of units. Please note that the stock- take lists must be submitted (by all the command bodies) to us by 6/8/1986, and we should be informed in due course.

(DOCUMENT-I)



(*DOCUMENT II, Translated from Arabic*)

"Telegram" **Urgent and Secret**

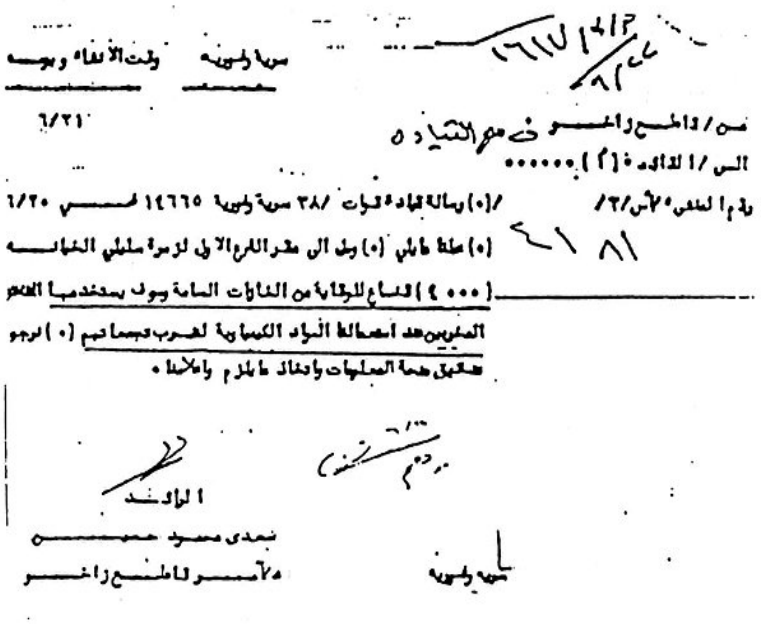
From: Zakho District
To: Commander (A)
Ref: AS/3/4181
Time and Date Received
2116 K/3/1617
22/6

(.) [With reference to] letter of the command of the command of the 38th Force Secret and Urgenr 14665 on 20/6 (.) we have learned the following (.) 4000 gas masks arrived at the First Branch of the descendent of treason to guard themselves against poison gas and the saboteurs will wear them when we use chemical meterials to attack their concentrations. (.) Please check the accuracy of these information and take all necessary measures.

Signature: Major Sa'di Mahmoud Hussein
Commander of Zakho District

Iraqi terminology used
The 38the Forces = 38th division based in Zakho
First branch = KDP
Descendent of treason = KDP HQ in Bahdinan
Saboteurs = Peshmargas

(DOCUMENT II)



(DOCUMENT III, Translated from Arabic)

Arab Ba'th Socialist Party One Arab Nation that has
Leadership of Zakho Section an eternal message
Organising Committee **Nr:** S/Sh/ 664
National Defence Battalions **Date:** 14/6/
1987

Top Secret and Personal
To: All the Party organisations
Subject: A decision Comradely greetings,

With reference to the letter of Committee of Organisation of National Defense Battalions S/Sh/1 175 dated 9/6/1987 which refers to the letters of the Bureau of the organisation of the North (top secret and personal) 28/ 2650 dated 3/6/1987 which includes the following:
1. It is totally forbidden to let any foodstuff or person and machine to reach the forbidden villages which are included in the second stage of collecting villages. Villagers are allowed to come to the national fold if they wish, but their relatives are not allowed to contact them without prior information of the Security Apparatus.
2. Existence is totally taboo in the forbidden villages of the first stage. It starts on 21/6/1987 for the second stage of collecting villages.
3. After harvesting the winter crops which ends before 15th of July, cultivation is forbidden for the following summer and winter seasons.
4. Animal grazing is also forbidden in these areas.
5. It is the duty of military forces, every one according to his section, to kill any human being or animal that exists in these areas which are considered totally forbidden.
6. Those who are included in the deportation should be informed and they will be responsible for any misbehaviour towards fulfilling these orders. For your information and to do accordingly every one according to his speciality.
With respect Comrade
Signature: AU Moashna Kazim, Secretary of the Committee

(*DOCUMENT IV, Translated from Arabic*)

[The text of a decree issued by Au Hassan Al-Mafid, the Military Governor of Northern Iraq.]

The letter of the first legion SF/1725 dated 21.6 notified by a letter of positions FLI SF/4089 dated 22/6/1987 begins as follows:

(A letter of leadership of Northern Organisation s' Office SF/4008 dated 20/6 (:) In view of the end of the officially announced period for collecting the security- prohibited villages which will expire on 21/6, we decided to implement the following from 22/6 onwards:

1. All security- prohibited villages shall be considered to be places (bases) of the subversives of Iran and successors of treason and the like of Iraqi traitors.
2. Human and animal existence in these areas shall absolutely be prohibited and (the areas) shall be considered as operation zones in which shooting shall not be restricted by any instructions unless issued from our base.
3. Travelling from to the areas and farming or agricultural, animal or industrial exploitation in the areas shall be completely forbidden and all concerned authorities are responsible to follow-up this subject seriously and each within their specialty.
4. Your commands shall prepare special attacks from time to time using artillery, helicopters and jets against as many as possible of those existing in these prohibited areas during all times, days and nights.
5. Anyone found within those prohibited areas shall be detained and interrogated by the security organs. Those whose age lie between 15 to 70 years shall be executed after benefiting from their information.
6. The concerned security organs shall interrogate those who surrender themselves for a maximum period of 3 days and when necessary 10 days and if the interrogation required more than this time they need to get our sanction either by phone or cable.

Every item captured by consultants of the National Defence Regiments of their fighters shall be given to them free with the exception of heavy, supportive and medium weapons. Light weapons can be retained by them and we are to be informed of the number of these weapons only.

Commands of the regiments must be active in informing the consultants and commanders of army units and detachments in detail about their activities within the National Defence Regiments. We hope the above shall be executed by each within their specialty. (Over)

Chapter Nine

Nature breaks up Iraqi toxic trail

Newscientist, January 1993

SOIL in areas of northeastern Iraq where Saddam Hussein's army attacked the Kurds with chemical weapons is now free from all traces of mustard gas and nerve agents. The unpublished research is good news for Kurdish farmers who have returned to their land since the Gulf War, but bad news for scientists who want to uncover where chemical weapons have been used.

During 1988, the Iraqi army used chemical weapons against Kurdish villagers and farmers in an attempt to destroy support for rebels operating in the countryside. In one attack alone, on the town of Halabja, an estimated 5000 people were killed.

Soil and blood samples taken around the time of the attacks confirmed that mustard gas had been used. After the Gulf War ceasefire, UN inspectors found that Iraq had huge stocks of mustard gas and the nerve agents tabun and sarin.

On a trip to Iraq last autumn, Dlawer Ala'Aldeen, a microbiologist from the Queen's Medical Centre in Nottingham and secretary of the London-based Kurdish Scientific and Medical Association, took soil samples from Halabja and two other sites of chemical weapons attacks.

Tests carried out by scientists from the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment in Porton Down, Wiltshire, proved negative for tabun, sam, mustard gas and their breakdown products.

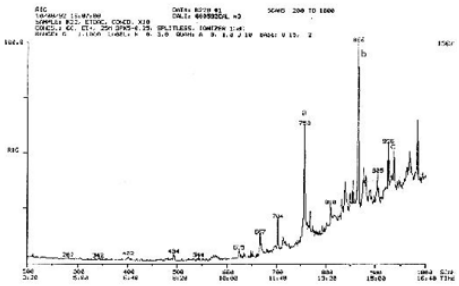
It is not surprising that all traces of the nerve agents had disappeared, says Alastair Hay, senior lecturer in chemical pathology at the University of Leeds. When exposed to the elements, these gases break down in hours or cause headaches and malaise, and stunt the growth of plants. "We can say almost for definite that these complaints can't be attributed to gas," he says.

New Scientist, 23 January 1993, issue 1857, Page 6.
http://www.newscientist.com/article/mg13718571.000-nature-breaks-up-iraqi-toxic-trail-.html

This project was completed in 1992, its summary published in the *New Scientist* 23 January 1993, issue 1857 p6. The full report was published in Zanin Online in 2005 [See article C14].

[This research was primarily designed to investigate the long-term survival of chemical agents in the soil of farmlands, and provide much needed information on whether previously exposed lands are safe to cultivate, and their products are safe to consume. This is the first investigation of such kind, and the result showed that in the absence of hard or protected niches, nature would clean the land and possibly the environment. This was welcome news for Kurdish farmers from areas which were attacked by chemical weapons during the Anfal Operations]

Soil samples were collected and documented in Ware village (Balisan), Jafaran village (Qaradakh) and Halabja.



Samples were transported to UK and tested at the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, Porton Down, Salisbury (By Graham Pearson, Mary French and Robin Black)

Chapter Ten

Playing by the Rules

March, 1994

Published in: Iraq since the Gulf War, Prospects for Democracy. Editor: Fran Hazelton, for CARDRI. Zed Books Ltd. (1994). London & New Jersey. Chapter 18, pages 232-243

[A decade before the regime change of 2003, we had major concerns that the US administration remained insensitive to Iraq's cultural and political complexity, and the Shi'as of Iraq had not learnt the rules of the unrivalled superpower. I warned in this chapter that both sides need to review their policies and behaviour. Much of the concerns, fears and predictions were realized after the regime change. Little has changed. Former Iraqi opposition leaders themselves have so far failed to agree a workable alternative, making co-existence of the Kurds, Shi'as and Sunnis more difficult than ever before]

Introduction

The artificial boundaries of the modem state of Iraq, which were laid down by the British in the 1920s and have been protected ever since by the major powers, created a heterogeneous combination of ethnic and religious groups. The British, militarily dominant after the First World War, drew the map of Iraq by annexing the southern part of Kurdish lands - the Ottoman province of Mosul - to the Ottoman provinces of Mesopotamia inhabited mainly by Arabs, namely Baghdad and Basra. In the process, they denied the Kurdish people any right to an independent Kurdish state. The Kurds of Southern

Kurdistan have been through seventy years of forced co-existence with the Sunni and Shi'a Arabs under the rule of Sunni Arabs in Baghdad. The division of Kurdistan and amalgamation of these divergent groups created one of the most unstable countries in the Middle East. The plight of the Kurds (and their armed struggle for basic human rights) and the plight of the Shi'a Arabs in the south have been major contributors to instability in the entire region.

In the 1930s and 1940s, the Southern Kurds somehow adapted to the new reality and started thinking in the context of modern Iraq. This was at the expense of their national identity and their human and political rights. With the overthrow of the Hashemite monarchy in 1958, Britain finally lost influence as an imperial power within Iraq and the fate of the Kurds was left entirely in the hands of a series of undemocratic Arab nationalist governments. Without exception, these regimes - all of which were supported by either, or both, Cold War superpowers - refused to recognize the Kurds' democratic rights or demand for self-determination.

Since the Ba'thists came to power, first in 1963 and then in 1968, the very existence of the Kurds has been at risk. To the superpowers, the violation of human rights and suppression of the people of Iraq were no more than 'internal affairs' so long as the regime was deemed indispensable for trade and most recently for preventing the spread of the Shi'a Islamic revolution.

The 'sacred' boundaries of Iraq and exclusively Sunni rule in Baghdad became the only recognized image of Iraq during the era of the two superpowers. All policies were worked out around those boundaries which ensured that they remained unquestioned. However, with the emergence of the United States as the leading, or the only, master of the world, international relations have changed and old policies are no longer applicable. The clock must now turn the American way. Sadly, however, there is no evidence that the USA has developed any well-thought-out policy towards Iraq. Its only obvious policy has been a reaction to events, and too little too late. Many observers have the impression that the US administration changes its policies frequently. This, and the way the USA conducted the Gulf War, demonstrates their ignorance of Iraq's social and political structure.

The USA has long valued Saddam Husain as an economic and political partner. However, following Iraq's invasion of Kuwait on 2 August 1990, it strongly indicated that he was no longer a partner and should go, hence General Schwarzkopf's desire to march all the way to Baghdad. But when, in the intifada of March 1991, the Iraqi people had the opportunity of removing Saddam Husain and replacing him with a Shi'a-dominated opposition, the Americans pulled away the rug and actively sought to prevent his downfall. Not having prepared a 'friendly' alternative (a military dictator with a different name), the USA accepted Saddam Husain as the 'devil they knew', preferable to the one they did not. They allowed the 'internal affairs' to carry on. The Shi'as were slaughtered in the south and the Kurds were left in the wilderness.

The British, however, are acknowledged to have a better understanding of the area, and have long conducted the policy they see as in their best

interest. British policy has nevertheless time and again proved to be catastrophic for the people of Iraq and the rest of the Middle East. The British have had more knowledge, but always followed the USA, who have no thought-out policy. Fortunately for the Iraqi people, by the time of the mass exodus of refugees from Iraqi Kurdistan in April 1991, Margaret Thatcher had her own personal policy towards Saddam Husain. She had developed a deep dislike for him and, although no longer in power, was strong enough to make people listen in Britain and the USA. She initiated a sequence of events that resulted in John Major's passionate move to intervene militarily in Kurdistan (with or without the Americans). Instead of letting the British take the moral high ground, the Americans jumped in ahead and led the way into the 'quagmire' to save lives. This was a classic example of US policy. Lives were saved in Kurdistan and George Bush became Hajji Bush. But the 'safe havens' were set up only in a part of Iraqi Kurdistan, less than half the area from which the refugees had fled. As for the Shi'as in the south, their untelevized suffering remained an 'internal affair'.

Kurdish Safe Haven

The Allies made a deliberate effort to limit the Kurdish safe haven to the province of Dohuk where no more than 800,000 people had been displaced. The majority of the refugees (1.2-1.5 million) were fleeing eastward towards Iran from the major cities of Kirkuk, Erbil and Suleimani. Operation 'Provide Comfort' was an attempt to appease Turkey. Great efforts were made to stop the refugees entering Turkey by providing immediate aid on the mountains, Refugees were actively encouraged to return to their homes under the impression that the Allies would stay there to protect them. Turkey closed the border from day one and succeeded in creating enough pressure to have the refugee burden shouldered internationally. The Iranians, while opposed to the whole idea of the safe haven and regarding it much like a second Israel, tried to play the Turkish game and announced the closure of their border in the face of the tide of refugees. Their calls for others to shoulder the burden were largely ignored by Western governments (except for some limited aid mostly from non-governmental organizations), and fortunately they never closed the border, The Kurdish refugees along the Iranian border cried for help and for extension of the safe haven, but they too were ignored. Masses of refugees fleeing the provinces of Kirkuk, Erbil and Suleimani remained in the open at Saddam's mercy without aid or protection. They were trapped between the Iraqi army and the border with Iran, far from the safe haven in Dohuk province to the north-west, adjoining the Turkish border. Iran did not allow international aid to cross its border. The 36th parallel, which provided air cover for less than half of Iraqi Kurdistan, was not sufficient to inhibit Iraqi army advances south of the line. Thus, Allied protection not only remained

inadequate throughout the period but, more sadly, the whole of operation 'Provide Comfort' was abandoned in July 1991. The Allies left the area before their task was completed.

In Autumn 1991, the Iraqi government suddenly withdrew from the three main Kurdish governorates of Erbil, Dohuk and Suleimani and imposed a strict embargo on the entire area, leaving the strangled Kurds as the sole authorities in charge. The purpose of the Iraqi government's gamble was not entirely obvious. It was believed to be a blackmail attempt which assumed that Iran, Turkey, Arab countries and the Allies would rush in to prevent the Kurds from running their own affairs for fear of a Kurdish independent state being established. Iran, Turkey and Syria began holding regular meetings to discuss the Kurdish situation, and publicly declared that they would not tolerate any talk of Kurdish independence or the break-up of Iraq. Nevertheless, the Kurdish parties were left alone to run a de facto state, with no income and no direct foreign support. None of the Western governments have offered direct financial support to the elected Kurdish administration which is seeking to lead, feed and police between 3.5 and 4 million people. One US government aid official attempted at a London conference in July 1993 to justify his government's lack of action, by referring to the Kurds' inability to eliminate the corruption inherited from Saddam's regime. He ignored the need for financial support to combat corruption and the fact that Western support enabled Saddam to establish such corruption in the first place.

Saddam Husain's government is able to extract, refine and sell oil. It is still able to provide people with basic services, while the Kurdish region has been deprived of the means of providing such services. No attempt has been made to relieve the sanctions on the Kurds or allow them to generate some hard- currency income. Even the small amount of money made available to the United Nations for relief in Kurdistan was wasted through Baghdad. Furthermore, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are no longer backed to provide alternative support for the Kurds, and some have clearly been instructed not to deal directly with the legitimate, elected authorities in Kurdistan.

Southern Iraq

The uprising in the south of Iraq had a different tragic fate. Thanks to Iranian interference with the Shi'a uprising and the Allies' lack of interference in Saddam's counter-attack, Iraqi Shi'as were badly defeated. Tens of thousands of people were massacred during and after the uprising, and the true figures of those killed may never be known. Since the intifada, the level of repression of the people and destruction of their historical religious institutions has intensified to such an extent that the entire Shi'a

cultural legacy is in danger. The 'modernization' of mosques, construction of highways over holy cemeteries and the 'reorganization' of the structure of the Shi'a clerical school have all accelerated since 1991.

The Marsh Arabs are one of the most ancient communities in the Middle East. They are now facing total destruction of their community and way of life. Like all other Iraqi communities, they suffered a great deal from oppression and from the Iran-Iraq war. Iii addition, the hard-to-govern marshlands form a refuge for army deserters and opposition members. This meant they have suffered government military offensives, including air attacks, the use of chemical weapons, underwater mines, burning of reed beds and water poisoning. Having failed so far to achieve total control of the Marsh Arabs, the government's last resort has been to speed up and expand the southern desalination project (the so-called 'Third River' project). The clear purpose of this project is to drain the marshes and facilitate the government's control over the area, thereby eliminating it as a base for political opposition. However, a spin-off is the desalination of the areas between the Tigris and Euphrates and possibly the exploitation of oil-fields under the marshes. Drainage has probably reached an irreversible stage, with vast areas already drained and dried.

All this is actively taking place south of the 32nd parallel, under the nose of Allied surveillance aircraft. Protective air cover has not stopped the Iraqi regime on the ground continuing to violate both human rights and UN Resolution 688. Saddam's bombardment of the area has, if anything, intensified since the creation of the no-fly zone. Air cover without monitoring on the ground has proved almost as inadequate as not providing any cover. A no-fly zone with no safe haven for the Shi'as in the south means continued persecution, humiliation, starvation and destruction of long established social and religious structures.

The Opposition and the Future Political System

Since the creation of modern Iraq, the Sunni Arab minority has monopolized power. This was convenient for the former superpower but catastrophic for the Kurdish and Shi'a populations and the rest of the Middle East. With an ethnically and religiously diverse population forcibly combined within artificial boundaries, Iraqi governments failed to minimize the country's potential for disintegration by establishing a civilized constitution that would secure people's rights and strengthen the affinity between them.

For a long time, the Iraqi opposition has remained disunited. This is hardly surprising. The various groups come from different backgrounds and have distinct interests. Their diverse backers include Iran, Syria, Sa'udi Arabia,

Turkey and the CLA. However, sharing a single enemy, their common sense dictates the formation of a low affinity coalition. This has never been easy.

Clearly, the sections of the Iraqi opposition that enjoy wide popular support and have a strong organizational base inside Iraq are the Kurds and the Shi' is. Alliances between Kurdish and Shi'a political organizations are therefore vital for any progress by the opposition, even though they are not monolithic groups. The rest of the opposition groups, important though they may be, are mainly loose organizations with little fame or following inside Iraq. Despite the diversity of the Iraqi opposition, there is fortunately at present a higher level of understanding among the various groups than ever before. All have accepted multi-party democracy as the only alternative to Saddam Husain, though they do not seem to have achieved unanimity on the issue of a future federal system for Iraq.

The Iraqi opposition has had to pass many tests before being able to present itself to the world as a credible alternative to Saddam 1-lusain. It has been expected to demonstrate that it represents the views of all the people of Iraq and enjoys the moral authority to act on their behalf. But its biggest test is to demonstrate that it has understood the rules of the game and can project itself as a coalition of professional, moderate statesmen who can relate to the West. It has not passed all the tests yet. It has not been able to prove that it would contribute to peace and stability and would not disturb the balance of power in the region; that it would not pose a threat to the West's lifeline interest (the oil in the Gulf) or to Israel; that it would establish a capitalistic, pro- American free-market economy. It may even be expected to guarantee the Americans a lion's share of the future reconstruction contracts (as in Kuwait) to repair Iraq's crippled infrastructure, which is estimated at around $200 billion.

In the same way as dictatorship by the minority Sunni Arabs has proved catastrophic, the dictatorship of any other ethnic or religious groups will undoubtedly have a similar consequence. For instance, in the absence of complete democracy, a future Shi'a government based on clerical dictator ship will be suicidal. The non-Shi'a Iraqis, including Kurds, Sunni Arabs and Christians, have good reasons to fear such a dictatorship. All these groups, however, accept that a parliamentary system with a Shi'a majority is legitimate, tolerable and acceptable. Iraqi Shi'a leaders, willingly or not, seem to have accepted such a scenario, although the fundamentalists among them (and many so called 'moderate' Shi'a leaders) cannot accept Kurdish demands for limited autonomy, let alone self-determination. Many nationalist Sunni Arabs share the same feelings about the Kurds. Therefore, only a fully democratic constitution can guarantee human rights for all Iraqis and the creation of a stable country.

Since the March 1991 intifada, the Iraqi opposition in exile has come together and developed more mutual understanding than ever before. All parties are clearly convinced that their only chance of survival and of creating a formidable alternative to Saddam Husain's rule is to reach such consensus. This perspective is shared, albeit with varying emphasis, by all three main communities that comprise Iraqi society: Kurds, Sunni Arabs and Shi'as.

Kurds

The Kurds have long realized the grave risk in the short term of insisting on an independent Kurdish state, and have accepted the current boundaries of Iraq. The only hope for them of securing some of their desired rights in the foreseeable future seems to lie in them committing themselves to an integral but democratic Iraq. The 'State of Kurdistan' remains the dream of every Kurd in the same way as every Palestinian dreams of the 'State of Palestine'. Nevertheless, the Kurdish political organizations are genuinely insisting on coexisting with the Arabs in Iraq. The Kurdish leaders have recently come under growing pressure from sections of the Kurdish population for greater commitment to the Kurdish right of self-determination (including independence). However, the leaders have so far skillfully and successfully managed to resist pressure, persuading people to weigh risks against interests.

Looking back at the history of Baghdad's Kurdish relations, it becomes apparent that the more aggressive the regime has been in treating the Kurds, the more demanding the Kurds have become. From the 1920s to the 1950s the Iraqi monarchy ignored the cultural and political rights of the Kurds, but treated individuals as full citizens. During those years, the Kurdish movement, for its part, restricted its political demands to little more than cultural rights. Since the 1960s, under republican rule, successive regimes have further denied Kurdish tights and stepped up their suppression. At the same time, Kurdish desire for self-rule increased and 'autonomy' became the slogan of the armed struggle.

Under Ba'thist rule and after a decade of genocidal war, coexistence with Baghdad has become increasingly difficult. The Kurds have developed a stronger desire for divorce from Baghdad. Indeed, the deteriorating relationship between Baghdad and the Kurds may soon reach a point of no return where mutual trust and coexistence become impossible. This is why only multi-party democracy with a parliamentary constitution can enhance Baghdad-Kurdish affinity, which a federal system will hopefully sustain into the foreseeable future.

Sunni Arabs

The loose term 'Sunni Arabs' refers to a heterogeneous combination of tribal, semi-tribal and non-tribal peoples occupying the triangle of Iraq between Mosul, Ramadi and Baghdad. This collection of non-religious, mainly nationalist Arabs is the social base of the Ba'thist oppressive machinery, with its monopolization of absolute power. Opposition to the Ba'thist regime is at its weakest in this region, and almost all Sunni Arab anti-Saddam activists are abroad. They enjoy less popular support than the Shi'as or Kurds and inside Iraq they are virtually unheard-of.

Among the Sunni Arab political organizations, there are many extreme pan- Arab nationalists who stress Iraq's Arab identity and its role as a potential leader of the 'Arab national liberation movement'. Groups such as former Ba'thists and the current pro-Syrian Ba'th Party not only insist on a firmly integrated Iraq and think that democracy will dismember it, but also see the expansion of Iraq and the formation with Syria of a giant United Arab Republic as a dream ticket. These 'leftist Ba'thists' count on Saddam's Ba'th Party as their organizational base in Iraq, hoping that Saddam's downfall will allow the exiled Ba'thists to fill his vacant post and continue Ba'thist domination.

The rest of the Sunni Arab opposition (i.e. the majority) consists of moderate democratic groups which are genuinely interested in establishing a constitution based on a Western-style democracy. They have long accepted that without this, the disintegration of Iraq is inevitable. Some have gone so far as to suggest a federal system (with a federal Kurdish state) for Iraq. It is important, however, that most of the organizations which have been arbitrarily labelled 'Sunni Arab organizations' are not founded on the basis of such an ethnic/religious identity. They all have a wide spectrum of membership, including Shi'as, Kurds and Christians.

Shi'a

The terms 'Shi'a organizations' and 'Shi'a opposition' have been incorrectly used to describe Shi'a political/religious organizations or the people of southern Iraq. Apart from the purely clerical organizations, which recruit on the basis of Shi'a-Islamic religious commitment, the rest are largely party- political organizations driven by the plight of the people of the South. Shi'as in Iraq suffered from persecution under the Ba'thists simply because of their religious identity, just as the Kurds were persecuted because of their ethnic identity. However, it is important to stress that not all Shi'as in Iraq support the Shi'a clergy or the Shi'a political religious organizations, and not all Shi'as wish to see an 'Islamic state' in Iraq. All the various political viewpoints and affiliations can be found in the Shi'a

community, developed according to personal ideologies and interests. Nevertheless, the way that the Iraqi regime has insulted the spiritual symbols of Shi'as and denied them their human rights has in creased support for the clerical leadership abroad.

Such support is split between party-political organizations, like the Da'wa Party and the more religious pro-Iran clerical groups led by Al-Hakim. Al-Hakim is the son of one who epitomizes the Shi'a religion for many Shi'as and is regarded by many as a symbol of their struggle against Saddam. More importantly, Al-Hakim is now the head of the Tehran-based Supreme Council of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), the umbrella organization of all Iraqi Shi'a groups. It is interesting to note that there is no unanimity within SCIRI on Iraq's future. Some have no problem with a modern Western-style democracy and accept the open market economy in principle. Others would accept nothing short of a pure Islamic state with a Shi'a-clergy dictatorship. During the Gulf War, members of SCIRI prayed for an Iranian victory which would carry them to power in Baghdad.

The end of the Iran-Iraq War and the changed circumstances it brought about helped lend a new dimension to Iraqi Shi'a thinking. More importantly, years of bitter experience in opposition have eventually enabled Shi'a organizations to understand the rules of the game of modern international politics. Whether they play by these rules is another matter; they ignored them for years and only recently have they given some indications of abiding by them. Nowadays, moderate Shi'a personalities are given a higher profile in international lobbying than the mainstream radicals of SCIRI. They have openly endorsed a Western-style democracy and are actively keen to be seen as truly modern statesmen. It is important to note that most Shi'a organizations no longer style themselves as the 'only' alternatives to Saddam Husain. Behind the scenes, however, a great majority of SCIRI members have not thoroughly digested the above rules, or the notion of a Western- style democracy in Iraq, let alone the rights of ethnic and religious minorities or the notion of a federal system.

The obvious dependence of the Iraqi Shi'a organizations, particularly the SCIRI leadership, on Iran, has had tragic consequences for the Iraqi opposition and the spring 1991 intifada, as it has masked the fundamental differences and genuine disagreements between the Iranian clergy and the Iraqi Shi'a party political leaders. There are innumerable religious and political differences between the two sides. For a start, the Iraqi Shi'a organizations do not believe in the same Wilayat Al-Faqih, in which ultimate power is concentrated in the person of al-faqih. Such differences are deep rooted and go back centuries. More importantly, the Iraqi Shi'as strongly resent Iranian interference in their internal affairs and in Iraqi opposition affairs. On a private level, Iraqi Shi'a leaders do complain about

this interference. Publicly, however, they would not put down their 'religious brothers' as the Western media do, because this would not serve their purposes. Also, they see no reason for giving up a 'brother', especially as they still await a gesture of good will from the West or its allies in the Arab world. It is unfortunate that the notion of Iran's Islamic state or Shi'a fundamentalism has been generalized to include all Iraq's Shi'a population in the South. Iranian attempts to export the Shi'a revolution to Iraq, Sa'udi Arabia, Afghanistan, the Lebanon and the former USSR made East and West unite in opposition.

It is tragic that the Iraqi Shi'a organizations have underestimated the power and danger of an unrivalled superpower. But the bigger tragedy lies in the illiteracy of this superpower which is yet to demonstrate skill and logic in manipulating the world. The only logic applied to US policies is 'protection of the US national interest', with no serious attempt to understand local politics and cultural values.

The US administration has yet to demonstrate an understanding of the differences between Iraqi and Iranian Shi'a, and the very complex nature of their relations. In the same way as Shi' I organizations have realized that their only hope of participation in power is to accept Western-style democracy, the Americans should realize that without the participation of Shi'a political organizations in power there will be no stable, united and peaceful Iraq. Furthermore, as the Kurdish population of Iraqi Kurdistan will not settle for anything less than a federal state of Kurdistan within a federal Iraq, the Shi'as will not settle for anything less than full participation in any future governing institution. Unless the rights of these two long-suppressed groups are secured, and unless the West starts winning the good will of these people, there will be no guarantees for a stable market in Iraq or secure business with future governments.

The time for dictatorial rules in Iraq is over, and the time for democracy is now long overdue. The only system capable of saving Iraq's integrity is a genuinely democratic multi-party parliamentary system. Until recently, many believed that in an Islamic developing country of the Middle East it would be difficult to establish such a Western-style democratic system. These views, however, were put to the test in May 1992 in Iraqi Kurdistan, with the first historical opportunity to establish a parliamentary system in part of Iraq.

The Kurdish Federal State as a Model for Iraq

Kurdish internal politics has many similarities with that of Iraq as a whole. It has comparable ingredients of conflict and bellicosity. Politically, there are the two main bitter rivals, the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) and the

Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), in addition to the communists, right-wing nationalist parties, Islamic parties, Christian parties, and others. Ethnically, there are Kurds (Soranis, Bahdinis, Hawramis, Failis), Turcomans, Assyrians, Armenians and Arabs. Religiously, there are Muslims (Sunnis and Shi'as), Christians and Yazidis. In fact, Kurdistan is more heterogeneous than any other part of Iraq. Nevertheless, it was possible to combine all these diverse groups under one legislative and executive system in which all parties (political, ethnic or religious) are represented.

A few years ago, it would have been unthinkable to see leaders of the KDP and PUK even dine together; now they dine, travel and rule together. Both parties have realized the importance of the success of the experiment on which their own future and the future of their people depends. Their high level of collaboration and mutual compromise has provided security and reassurance for the people of Kurdistan.

This experience shows that irrespective of the ethnic and religious multiplicity, cultural diversity and geographical location of the nation, it is possible to establish a truly democratic system with a considerable degree of harmony. The actual constitution need not be an exact replica of that of any of the Western systems. In the same way as different Western countries have developed their own systems, Iraq can develop its own. The initial set-up of the current democratic system in Kurdistan was agreed before the election of 1992 by the different rival parties under the coalition of the Iraqi Kurdistan Front (IKF). The end result was the establishment of a unique parliamentary system which is well adapted to local politics and cultural values. Also, the rights of minorities like Christians have been secured through special mechanisms. As time goes by, the parliament will gradually develop the constitution and put down the roots of the system.

Despite the absence of any real income or external support, and despite the double imposition of sanctions, the democratic system in Kurdistan has managed to survive and grow in strength. The vast majority of its current problems are due to lack of funds and/or political security. How-ever, there are a few problems which are purely local and require immediate attention. For instance, the problem of the supreme leader of the Kurdish Federal State, locally named 'the head of the Kurdish Liberation Movement' has proved difficult to resolve. In the circumstances, one could argue that the people of Kurdistan were lucky that this issue was not resolved in 1992, because not all parties were convinced of the necessity of such a leader and they had not agreed on the extent of his or her executive power. The whole concept of the election of such a leader was raised only days before the 1992 election, and arguments about the powers of the post continued until election day. Even now, the rival parties have not resolved the issue.

Failure to elect an outright leader in the first round of voting meant that the two most powerful individuals in Kurdish politics, Jalal Talabani and Mas'ud Barzani, remained outside the system of government in Kurdistan. Without them, the Kurdish parliament and the Kurdish government remained relatively weak and financially poor. Throughout the past decade and a half these two leaders have had the ultimate decision-making power and they now jointly head the military coalition of the IKF. Even though they have remained outside parliament and have not been given any state positions, they constitute the ultimate authority behind the governing body in Kurdistan. They have retained the power to appoint (or fire) a prime minister, choose his cabinet and appoint (or fire) the speaker of the parliament. Furthermore, on the international platform, they act on behalf of the Kurdish parliament and its government. Their absence from government has been seen as a weakness, both in the internal authority and in the international standing of that institution. Their inclusion in the legislative and/or executive bodies, in whatever capacity, is an absolute necessity.

The two leaders of the KDP and PUK have demonstrated their genuine interest in supporting the elected bodies and demanded that the Peshmerga forces and the general population see them as their legitimate rulers. Indeed, without the blessing of the two leaders, the whole experiment could have failed.

However, careful consideration clearly must be paid to the kind of executive and legislative powers to be given to the sovereign leader. His/her relation with the legislative and executive institutions must be well defined before the

election battle is conducted and such definition has to be formulated in a way that leaves ultimate authority with the parliament. There is no reason why a single leader cannot be elected by the people of Iraq.

The experience in Kurdistan showed that the vast majority of Kurds had not decided who they would vote for until near the election date, when they were still examining manifestos to see who would protect their interests best. The same thing should apply to the people of Iraq, including those in the south. The people are sufficiently sophisticated politically to think in terms of peace, justice, economic well-being and freedom rather than religious fundamentalism or Arab supremacy.

Currently, the Iraqi opposition has chosen a council of joint leaders consisting of a Kurd, a Shi'a and a Sunni, but the ultimate test for people's choice should be determined by a direct free election with nothing to stop any candidate becoming president, regardless of whether he/she is an Arab

Sunni, a Kurd, a Shi'a, a Christian, a Turcoman, a Yazidi or a Communist. In Kurdistan the candidates for the leadership contest included representatives of four different parties, two of which were relatively small. One was an Islamic party represented by a Sunni clergyman, the other was socialist. One of the major candidates was a Bahdini Kurd while the others were all Soranis. Many Sunni clergymen and religious Kurds voted for agnostic political parties rather than the Islamic one, and many Sorani Kurds voted for the Bahdini candidate and vice versa.

Conclusion

There remains a wide gulf between the Allies and the Iraqi opposition, and between different groups within the Iraqi opposition. The first has resulted from a lack of understanding between the two sides, caused by the ignorance and obsessive approach of Western governments (particularly the USA) towards the Iraqi opposition, and its fear of the unknown when it comes to alternatives to Saddam Husain's regime.

On the other hand, some Iraqi groups (particularly the Shi'a organizations) have not yet learnt to play by the rules of modern politics under the supremacy of the USA. Each side, it seems, will have to begin to learn from the other. The Shi'a groups need to demonstrate true independence from Iran and the Allies need to demonstrate more skill and sophistication to help them achieve just that. Without winning the good will of the Iraqi people and the inclusion of Shi'as in the game, Iraq will neither be a stable country in the region, nor will it be a peaceful market for the West.

The gulfs between the Kurds, the Shi' is and the rest of the Iraqi opposition have largely been created by the stubborn demand of the pro Iranian Shi'a groups for an Islamic State of Iraq, with a clerical dictatorship and the absolute denial of the aspirations of other ethnic and religious groups. Sunni Arab nationalists are just as undemocratic and stubborn. Both groups fear the disintegration of Iraq and resent the Kurdish movement and the declaration of a Federal State of Kurdistan.

The Kurds have not yet fought for an independent state and have done their utmost to reassure all Iraqis, but further denial of their rights will undoubtedly fuel enthusiasm for such a fight. Iraqi opposition parties need closer ties and better understanding than ever before. Replacing one dictatorship with another is certainly no longer acceptable to Iraqis. Democracy is the only alternative to Saddam Husain that will secure stability and peace.

Autobiography

I was born in Koya, near Erbil, in 1960 and raised in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. I completed my primary and secondary education in and around Erbil, before studying medicine in Baghdad. Forced to flee, I sought asylum in the United Kingdom in December 1984, where I later naturalised and completed my postgraduate training (MSc, PhD, FRCPath).

During my PhD candidacy, and later as a Research Fellow at the Medical Research Council, Northwick Park Hospital in Harrow, I became deeply engaged in advocacy on behalf of victims of chemical weapons attacks and displaced populations.

I moved to Nottingham in 1992, where I pursued a clinical academic career and established the Molecular Bacteriology and Immunology Group. My work primarily focused on the human immune response to bacterial infections, including meningitis and septicaemia, alongside research in population genetics and vaccine development.

As Professor of Medicine at the University of Nottingham, I held a number of senior board and executive roles within leading national institutions and professional societies, including Health Protection England (Deputy Director of the Centre for Infection), the Royal College of Pathologists (Director of Research, member of both Medical Microbiology Examination Board and Speciality Advisory Committee), the Medical Research Council (Infection and Immunity Board), and the Society for General Microbiology (Chair of Clinical Microbiology Committee). I secured numerous research grants and patent awards, published extensively in peer-reviewed international journals, co-authored several books in microbiology and infectious diseases, and served on the editorial boards of multiple leading medical microbiology journals.

I was a co-founder for the Kurdish Scientific and Medical Association (KSMA), UK, an advocacy organisation for human rights in Kurdistan and Iraq. I also took an academic interest in documenting and publishing scientific evidence on the use of chemical weapons in Kurdistan.

Since 1992, I have been actively involved in nation-building and capacity-building initiatives in the Kurdistan Region. In October 2009, I joined the Cabinet of the Kurdistan Regional Government, serving as Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research until April 2012. During my tenure, I launched an ambitious programme to modernise and reform the higher education system and led a major government scholarship initiative that enabled thousands of students to pursue postgraduate education in international centres of excellence.

In 2014, I founded the Middle East Research Institute (MERI, www.meri-k.org), a policy research institute and think tank based in Erbil.

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بیرەوەری لۆبی و تێروانینی ستراتیژی

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