

## The Plight of the Kurds and the Prospects for Federalism After the War on Iraq

A presentation by **Othman Ali**, Woodbridge College, Ontario  
To the **Minaret of Freedom Institute** Annual Dinner 2003



**Aly Ramadan Abuzakouk** (Minaret of Freedom Institute Vice-President): One of the ideas we at the Minaret of Freedom Institute are working with is to show that Islam does not encourage any kind of hegemonic rule. It encourages decentralization and the power of the people. That's why we are interested in *waqf* institutions and in the civil society of the Muslim civilization. I hope that some day we will be able to bring about some seminars and some awareness about this, *inshallah*. Tonight, we are so honored, originally to have two great scholars to speak to us. One of them, Dr. Jamal Barzanji, the founder and vice-president of the International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT), has to be out of town for an emergency situation, and he sends his apologies to us. However, we are lucky to have with us Dr. Othman Ali.

When we were discussing our banquet this year in the board of directors, we decided that we need to focus on the issue of Kurdistan, the issue of the Kurdish people, because that is something that we need to open the eyes of our community, our society and our supporters about. I say sometimes that the Kurdish people seem to be suffering from the "curse of Salah-ad-Din". Salah-ad-Din (Saladin), as you all know, was the one who liberated Jerusalem after one hundred years of crusader rule. No one forgets what he has done. The Kurdish people are now paying the price for what Salah-ad-Din did in Jerusalem.

We are so proud tonight to introduce to you Dr. Othman Ali, one of the people of Kurdistan in Iraq or the Kurds of Iraq. Dr. Othman Ali is a longtime friend of ours, since we were in the IIIT. He told me that he was born in a small village called Lailan near Kirkuk. I think you all know Kirkuk because there is oil there. He is currently a lecturer at Woodbridge College in Ontario, Canada. He has his Masters in Political Science and he earned his Ph.D. on the Kurdish question from the University of Toronto, so he is the authority on this situation, *alhamdulillah*. He has published in many academic journals, and his book on Kurdistan is in print now. We hope it will be a bestseller, especially since the rebuilding of Iraq now is a hot issue. I hope the policymakers will benefit from his advice. He has also been the founder and editor of *Alaahi-Islam* which means the "Banner of Islam", a journal that is published both in Arabic and in Kurdish. It is one of the few journals that is published in Kurdish with Arabic alphabet, the Qur'anic alphabet. He is married with four children, and I don't think that we need to introduce you more to him. We will ask brother Dr. Othman Ali to speak to us, as tonight he came to us all the way from the SARS-infected Toronto. Let us all welcome Dr. Othman Ali.

**Dr. Othman Ali:** *Bismillahir-rahman i-rrahim!* Dear Brothers and Sisters, *As-salamu laikum!* First of all, it is an honor to be here at the Minaret of Freedom Institute. The issue that we are going to address tonight has great significance. It goes far beyond the border of Iraq and the four million Kurds in Iraq. It has another dimension: how nation

states, especially in the Muslim world, dealt or were unable, to deal with the issue of ethnicity, ethnic diversity. Unfortunately, this is an issue that Muslim scholars have not addressed properly. I wanted to address the Iraqi scene first, so we could put the Kurdish question in that context.

Another important issue is federalism. If the Kurdish issue is to be solved within Iraq, what consequences will it have for Iran, Turkey, and Syria? So, this has a Middle Eastern dimension. Please bear with me. My lecture will have a lot of historical events, mentioning the names of treaties that were related to the Kurds.

Iraqi society has a population of 23 million people with a very diverse makeup. Shias are 60% of the population, which has been marginalized since the creation of the state of Iraq by the British Mandatory power which gave the rule to the Sunni Arab elite. This Sunni Arab elite was ruling Iraq during the Ottoman Empire, so they just inherited that legacy. However, we have about 17% of Iraqis who are Kurds. Then, we have the Sunni Arabs who are around 20%. The Turkomans are about 3% of the population. We have 1% Christians, Assyrians or Chaldeans. There is no accurate statistic about the North which is inhabited by Kurds, especially in oil-rich regions. The South, which is populated by Shias is rich with oil and many other minerals. Unfortunately, during the last eight decades it has been ignored compared to the western parts of Iraq, which are very much developed.

In addition to the political marginalization, we have an economic imbalance in the development in the country. The Turkomans are another important factor in the Iraqi national arena. There are around 500,000, but in many cases they are also very much intermixed with Kurds. I mention the Turkoman factor because Turkey claims that there are 3.5 million Turkomans in Iraq, which is really an exaggeration. Turkey is using this minority in that area to perpetuate its historical claim to the north. Iraqi Turkomans espouse the kind of nationalism that is very much inspired and influenced by Turkish nationalism that is coming across from Turkey.

In the political map of Iraq, as we see it now, when we look at the secular political parties, we have the Iraqi National Congress, led by Mr. Ahmad Challabi. This was made up mostly of Iraqi exiles who came from abroad. It has no popular mass support in Iraq, and Mr. Challabi became an American man and became unacceptable to the Iraqis. I do not personally think that Ahmad Challabi will have, at least in the near future, an important role in Iraqi politics. Ahmad Challabi is the man selected by the Pentagon. He promised that he would deliver the Shia population's support to the new government in Iraq. As a result, he would marginalize the Shia Islamic parties. He also promised that he would try to build economic ties with Israel, should he have a role in the future Iraq. That is why the Americans gave Ahmad Challabi a lot of publicity during the war on Iraq. A second secular party is the Front of Iraqi Independence. These are mostly elite professionals, and mostly abroad. They are nationalists, Nasserites, and liberals, led by an ex-foreign minister Dr. Adnan Pachachi. Again, this is not known in Iraq. It has some support, I will emphasize, among the elites in the cities. But, Dr. Adnan Pachachi, an ex-minister in the 1960's has resided in the UAE so he has the support of Sheikh Zahid and

some Arab Gulf states. So he is more accepted to play a role, should Iraqis play a role in the future Iraq, at least by Arab states. Then we have the Iraqi Communist Party, now very marginal, very small and elitist. It used to be very strong in the 60's in the South among the poor Shia and in the urban and rural areas and among the Kurds. Among the Kurds, Marxism and Communism have receded greatly. Now, the nationalist spirit in Kurdistan is at its peak, and the Iraqi Communist Party, again in my humble view, is not practical, although they are very vocal, and have a good media, and they have experienced politicians. Then we have the Harkat-al-Wifaq led by Ayad Alawi ex-Baathists, Iraqi army officers. Again, most of these are in exile. I think they will have a role when America creates an administration, but they don't have popular support.

Then we go to the political map of Islamic groups in Iraq. We have the Islamic Party of Iraq by Dr. Usama Tikriti. This has mass support among the Sunni Arabs. In Mosul, Al-Ramadi, Baghdad. In Kirkuk too. This is Muslim Brotherhood. Now Americans have indirectly accused them to be behind the provocation in the town of Fallujah. Then we have the Shi'a Islamic group, the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), led by Muhammad Bakr al-Hakim. This is backed by Iran, and used to have a 12,000 strong army, the Badr brigade. When they entered Iraq (they had previously left), they left their weapons in Iran. Now, this group, SCIRI, created an alliance with the traditional Shi'a ulama in Najaf. So they are getting to be very powerful, and are going to have a lot of say in the future of Iraq. Then we have the Dawa Islamic party, again a Shi'a Islamic party. At least 20,000 of their cadres were killed during Saddam's regime. It is mostly professional doctors, students and youth. This party is now ineffective because it split into several groups.

The population distribution in Figure 1 is self-explanatory. Kirkuk is the major center for Iraqi Turkomans, and they are in the Kurdish and Arab area. Returning to the political map of Iraq, there are two Kurdish parties. The Kurdistan Democratic Party led by Mustafa Barzani occupies the northern part of Iraqi Kurdistan and before the American war on Iraq, they used to have control of 60% of the areas controlled by Kurds. Jalal Talabani's Patriotic Union used to control around 40% of the southern part. The city of Sulaimaniya was the center. These two areas have had de facto independence since 1991, a regional parliament and some institutions of democracy. These two Kurdish groups' forces now control region in the north up to Baghdad, Tikrit and Mosul. Those cities are not in their control, but they are very powerful there. They have hundreds of tanks. They inherited most of the Iraqi troops in Northern Iraq; so, they have very advanced weaponry. With the Iraqi army being dismantled, these two Kurdish groups are now the most powerful Iraqi groups. As such, they are the most dominant groups in post-Saddam Iraq.

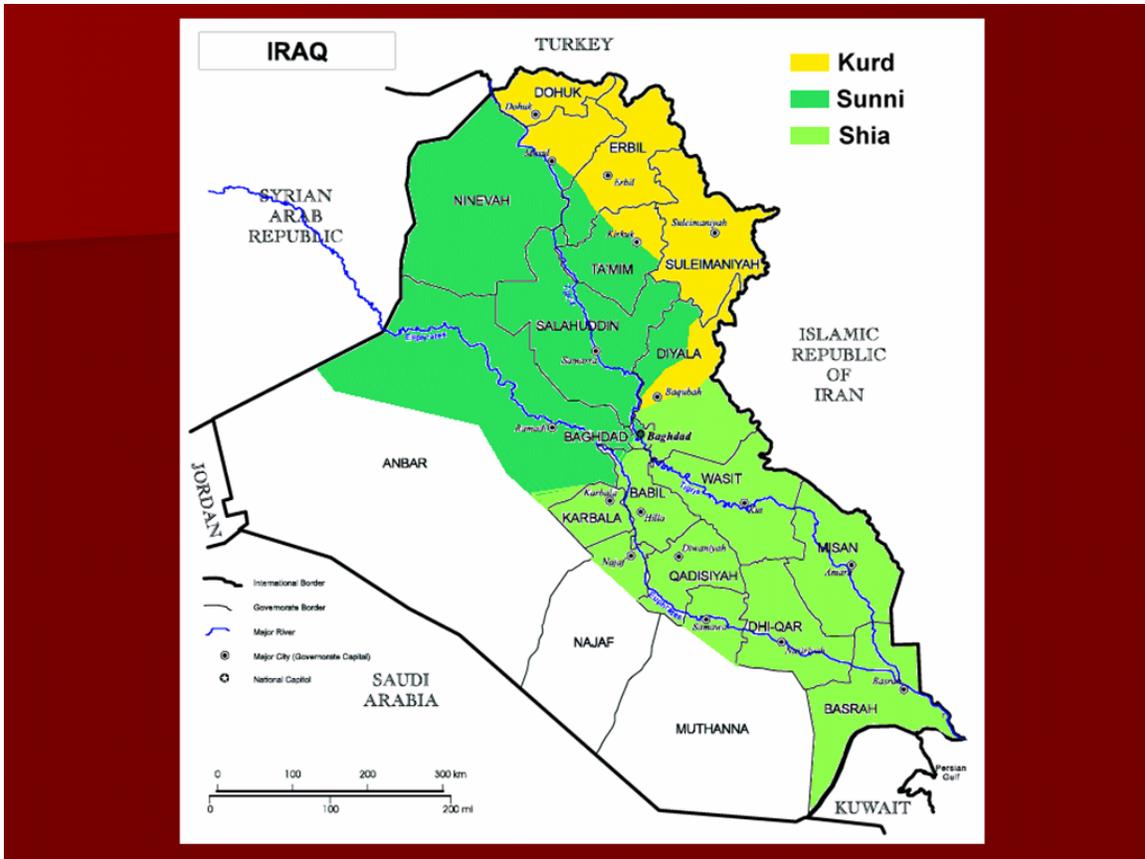


Figure 1. Population concentrations in Iraq.

During the war, the Kurds extended their rule to Kirkuk. This was very important for the Kurds. The central government has always disputed the Kurds' claim to the city. The city has a balanced Turkoman and Kurdish population, and, lately of course, Arabs which has grown considerably due to Arabization policies.

# Kurdistan in Middle East



Figure 2. Kurdish population in the Middle East.

If you look at Kurdistan in the Middle East, it is a geographical unit. There are artificial borders, but usually the tribes are divided across the borders. It is very strategic; it is rich with oil, rich with water. Both Euphrates and Tigris flow in Kurdistan for several hundred miles, so in the future when many scholars agree that water is going to be very important, more important than oil, Kurdistan will gain more significance, of course.

Figure 3 shows the autonomous principalities during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Please keep this in mind. These were 19<sup>th</sup> c. Kurdish principalities within the Ottoman Empire. That is to say, they were de facto independent, semi-independent states. They used to give only annually some money to the Khalifah in Istanbul, and they were hereditary rulers, and they were ruling for at least 500 years. The reason I am mentioning this is because some people say “well, you know, giving Kurds a federation or semi-independent rule, ...they are unable to or incapable of dealing with it.” But here we have historical evidence. For 500 years, Kurds really ruled these areas. And these were Kurdish principalities who were very loyal to the Khalifah, although they had all privileges of independence.



Another great Muslim scholar of the modern day is Bediuzamman Said Nursi. This is a very great scholar and philosopher in modern Turkey. He has written many things about how to combine science and Islam, and also a refutation of atheism. Today, the Nursi movement in Turkey, is the most powerful intellectual and grassroots movement in Turkey. Of course, there is Sheikh Said Ramadan Buti, another Kurdish contribution to the modern Islamic civilization. Now, before the First World War, Kurds did not have the idea of a nation-state or nationalism. Many would agree that it was during the British rule in Iraq, from 1918 to 1920, that they first thought of having a Kurdish state. The British were thinking about it, but they found that most of the telegrams, sent by British diplomats, said these people have no attachment or any articulate nationalist feeling. Their only attachment was to a Khilafah and to their Sufi sheikhs. So there was no nationalist movement. However, with British coming to the scene, especially the mandatory power, from 1918 to 1932, they gave many pledges that really inflamed Kurdish nationalism. I will mention the treaty of Sevres in 1920. This was signed between the Allies and the Ottoman Empire. Article 64 says:

“If within one year from the coming into force of the present Treaty the Kurdish peoples within the areas defined in Article 62 shall address themselves to the Council of the League of Nations in such a manner as to show that a majority of the population of these areas desires independence from Turkey, and if the Council [of the League of Nations] then considers that these peoples are capable of such independence and recommends that it should be granted to them, Turkey hereby agrees to execute such a recommendation, and to renounce all rights and title over these areas.”

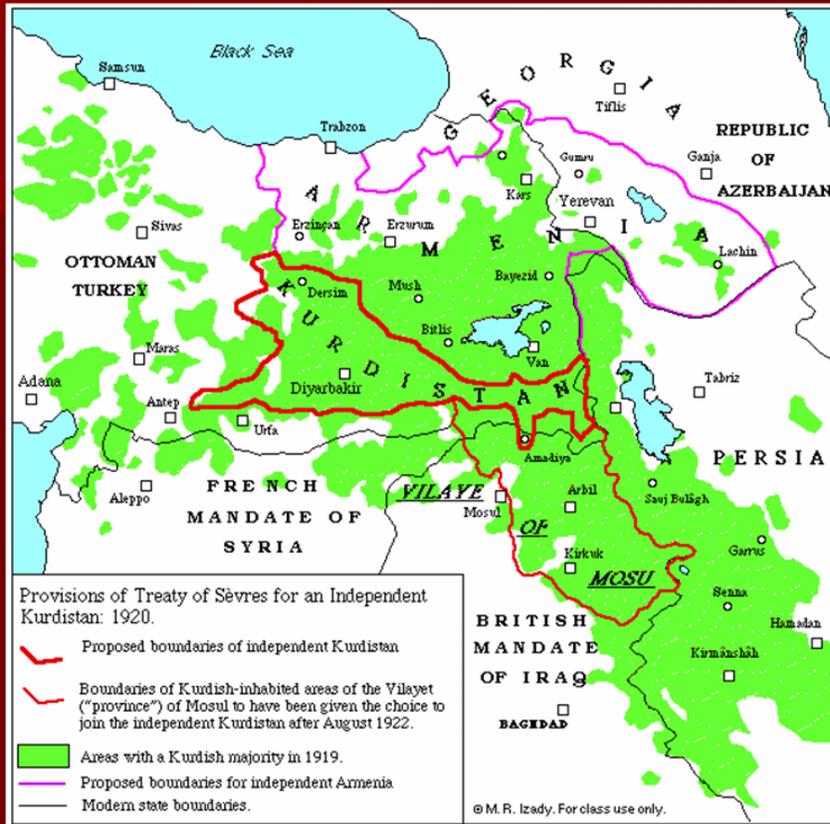


Figure 4. Provisions of the Treaty of Sèvres for an independent Kurdistan

This is an international treaty signed which gives Kurds the right to their independence and inflames Kurdish nationalism. This is the international promise that was not honored. This state was supposed to be created. This was to be created from Kurdistan in Turkey and down to Mosul and the northern part of Iraq. So the treaty of Sevres provided unification of independent Kurdistan.

In 1922, the British government in Iraq and the government of Iraq recognized the right of Kurds who live within the boundaries of Iraq to set up a Kurdish government within this boundary. However, by 1923, Mustafa Kemal was able to establish his rule throughout Turkey, including Turkish Kurdistan. He also forced British government to sign another treaty, the treaty of Lausanne, which formalized the division of Kurdistan up until now. Between 1923 to 1925, there was a major issue between Iraq and Turkey about their ownership of northern Iraq, which at that time used to be called Vilayat-e-Mosul. Turkey said most of the population are Turks, and they are within our border. The British said, no, these people are Kurds. They are not Turkish. Turkomans are a small minority there. And the economy of northern Iraq is tied to Iraq, not to Turkey. So the issue was taken to the League of Nations, and the League of Nations sent a committee to the northern part of Iraq. In 1925, they decided that the Mosul issue be settled in favor of Iraq. Again they said that regard must be paid to the desire expressed by Kurds that officials of Kurdish race should be appointed to the administration. This is another international obligation by the League of Nations that Kurds should have a say in their

own affairs in northern Iraq. Yet, as you heard during the last war, Turkey was claiming again its historical right to Vilayat-e-Mosul, . But that's not true. Historically, they renounced it, and as a part of this settlement, they got some around 500,000 pounds at that time. Historically, that issue is ended, but the Turks are using that as a pretext to force the American administration not to allow Kurds independence in post-Saddam regime.

We now move forward to the in Saddam's era. From the time the British left Iraq in 1932 until Saddam came to power, the Kurds have always been in conflict with the central government because most of the governments that came were Arab nationalist, and they tried to impose assimilationist policies on Kurds. However, before Saddam, when we compare the Iraqi policies towards the Kurds with Iran and Turkey, the Iraqi government was more generous to the Kurds. At least in Iraq, because of these treaties and the British policy, Kurds had cultural rights. The Ba'ath ideology, however, believed that Kurdistan is an indivisible part of the Arab umma and the Kurds were really alien on this Arab land. So, Saddam and the Ba'ath party had in mind that either gradual assimilation, or keeping them out of this Arab land.

Therefore, in 1970, Saddam went to the legendary Kurdish leader at that time, Mustafa Barzani, and said, Mullah Mustafa, what do you want? Mustafa said: We want some cultural rights, we have a lot of villages being destroyed, people in the villages to come back, and we have a lot of detainees in your prison cells. Saddam said: No, no, that's not what you want. You want autonomy. So, write it here, we are granting you autonomy. Saddam gave the Kurds autonomy in 1970. But within a year, it became apparent to the Kurdish leadership of Mustafa Barzani that that was in fact a plot. Saddam wanted to enhance his power in Iraq by keeping the Kurdish question pacified for a while, until he enhanced his power. Of course, Saddam also accused the Kurdish leadership of maintaining their ties with Iran and with Israel, which was true. Barzani did maintain their ties, because Barzani was not sure that the Iraqi government would honor their obligation under the March agreement of 1970. Moreover, within four years, it was proposed for the Kurdish autonomous area to be defined. However, within a few months of signing this treaty, Saddam began to settle Arabs in Kirkuk and other oil-rich areas so that it would create a de facto demographic change, so that oil-rich Kirkuk, which has historically been a part of Kurdistan, will no longer be a part of Kurdistan. So, this agreement failed. In 1975, Saddam unilaterally declared an autonomous area, which actually constitutes only 40% of actual Kurdistan, and under that pretext, he began a policy of Arabization and killing the Kurds, until 1991, when we have Anfal campaign.

This is very important. As you see, it is four campaigns, starting in 1987 and ending in 1988. Basically, we have 120-140,000 Kurds missing from 2,037 villages. They were put in mass graves. Up until now, nobody knew. The most able Kurds in most villages were either in the Iraqi army serving in the Iraq-Iran war or they were with the Kurdish resistance, so these were mostly children, women and the elderly. They have disappeared. In 1991, after the failed uprising, the Kurdish leadership went to Baghdad. They told Saddam: Listen, we want to make a deal with you. You are our president. But we have 200,000 Kurds missing. Ali Hassan Majid, known as Chemical Ali in the media, said:

No, there weren't 200,000. There were only 100,000. He admitted what he has done to them in the 1989 audiotape when he was in Mosul:

“Taking care of them means burying them with bulldozers. That's what taking care of them means. These people gave themselves up. Does that mean I am going to leave them alive? Where shall I put these people, so many of them? So I began to distribute them across the provinces. From there I had the bulldozers going back and forward.”

Many Muslims rightly denounce the genocide of Muslims. Yet here there are Muslims, and no Muslim government, no Islamic organization, wrote a comment on it, a denunciation of this. So the Kurdish people are now very anti-Arab, unfortunately. Not all of them, but there is a general idea that Arabs have always sided with Saddam. We have known Iraqi Arabs only through the Iraqi army coming and destroying our villages. There is now, unfortunately, this antipathy and resentment towards the Arabs.

By the way, Saddam was doing this Anfal campaign at a time when the United States was giving loans after loans to Saddam, and the Western governments pretended they didn't see that. Only when Saddam, after Iran-Iraq war was finished, became a threat to Israel, then they began to show the Anfal.

Now, the role of Kurds in post-Saddam Iraq. It is my humble view that Kurds will play a dominant role in post-Saddam Iraq for several reasons. First, they are the most powerful Iraqi group militarily now, and the US occupation forces are allowing them to maintain that weaponry and those forces. Secondly, as I mentioned in the political map of Iraq, most real credible Iraqi forces are Islamic fundamentalists, the Arabs and Shi'as, so, Kurdish leadership is a secular leadership. They feel very comfortable with it. Third factor: the Kurds are the balance between the Shia and the Sunni Arabs, so, a Kurdish leader may be acceptable to both Sunni Arabs and Shia Arabs, providing another way in which Kurds may play a dominant role. Another factor is that Israel's government is going to have a lot of say in what is going on in Iraq now. A Kurdish-dominated Iraqi government will be less interested in the Arab-Israeli conflict. The Kurdish leadership up until now, both Barzani and Talabani, have connections and ties with Israel. Many of them are Mossad-trained since the 1960's.

Masud Barzani has already gotten the support of both Sunni and Shi'a Arabs in addition to the Kurds. If there is to be a provisional government, I think Masud Barzani is most likely candidate to become a leader of the government. Now, if you look at these two statements by Jalal Talabani, he says: “My dream is Iraqi”. Masud Barzani says: “Kurds will no longer be second-class citizens”. If you look at the implications of both, this shows that Kurds now have the ambition to rule Iraq, to be dominant. In a way, I look at it as a positive step, because now we are becoming more pragmatic. We realize that to confine our aspirations to a Kurdish region and leave Baghdad is not practical because whoever rules in Baghdad will affect what is happening in Kurdistan. What you see is the Iraqification of the Kurdish movement and of Masud Barzani.

Now, what is the solution to the Kurdish question? I find that the assimilationist policies have failed. In fact, during the last eight decades, Kurdish nationalists have been suppressed in Turkey; Iran and Iraq have become stronger. Assimilation will not work; it increases Kurdish nationalism. Now, many Kurds want to have an independent state of their own. But in my understanding, this is not practical because, first of all, we are living in the era of globalization. I think that the borders of the nation-states are being eroded. Moreover, the Kurdish economy in Iran, Turkey and Iraqi Kurdistan is dependent on the nearby areas. My study of Kurdish society shows that Kurds in Iraq are economically really very much tied to the rest of Iraq. Nevertheless, this idea of Kurdish nation-state is widespread among Kurds. Moreover, a Kurdish state is not acceptable to the West, because that would destabilize the Middle East, especially Turkey. Up until now the American administration did not want that destabilization.

Therefore, I do not think that an independent state is the only solution. I think that federalism is really a good solution for Iraqi society in general and for Kurdish Iraqis in particular. Iraqi society is diverse, and as such a decentralized state will allow all cultures to flourish without a centralized state. Federalism lies in our Islamic tradition. You remember the autonomous Kurdish states, which I have mentioned in Figure 3. We have a rich tradition of 500 years of Kurdish region being decentralized, being ruled by Kurds, and they did not want independence. Many Arab nationalists, even within the Iraqi opposition, look at federalism as a step toward separation. They are concerned about it, but actually, federalism enhances Iraqi unity, and it would work. Again, in our Islamic tradition, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, before the Young Turks came to power, the Ottoman state was divided according to the Vilayat system, and the Young Turks who were influenced by the European idea of a nation-state, forced Westernization, which was called Tanzimat or reforms on Turkey. Actually, the Young Turks tried to destroy these local indigenous rules in several Ottoman Vilayats, and tried to create one centralized nation-state. This was very alien to the Middle Eastern or Islamic culture. Islamic states throughout history were decentralized. Federalism is a very practical solution, provided that the challenges of federalism are met.

The challenge is this: First, in Iraq during the last 8 decades, we don't have a legacy of democracy. Federalism can only work within a democratic environment. Second, many Iraqi opposition groups up until now are suspicious of federalism. They will not support it if they have a say. If they are able to convince the American administration, they will try to prevent federalism. Then again, federalism on what basis? Ethnic basis? Or administrative basis? This is another challenge for federalism. In many areas Arabs, Kurds and Turkomans are mixed. What would be the border of the federal states? There are some challenges. In my understanding, federalism is a very practical kind of solution. I just mentioned in Canada where I come from in Quebec, we have a federal state, and the people of Quebec twice within 20 years have been asked: "Do you want to separate from federal Canada?" And they said no. And I think that the Kurdish people, if they have federal state, it will satisfy their nationalist aspirations. So these separatist tendencies we see today will really no longer be there. Thank you very much for patiently listening to me.

**Imad-ad-Dean Ahmad** (President, Minaret of Freedom Institute): Our dear brother Othman Ali will stay here. I know he is tired, but he will stay here a little while longer and answer your questions. So, please, raise your hand and I will recognize you. If you want to make a comment, it's OK, but please be brief. Question or comment, don't take more than a couple of minutes, please.

**Shahid Shah:** How much revenue is under Kurdish control? We have heard a lot about the population; we have heard a lot about the political stuff, but in any country, whichever group is controlling the monetary revenue generation and revenue enhancement gets political power.

**Othman Ali:** The only important revenue is the oil. And this was, before the war, under the control of the central government, not the Kurdish administration. Now, it is not in the hand of any Iraqi. It is in the hands of the American administration. However, the Kurds have said that in federal Iraq, we will like the oil to be administered by the federal government, not the Kurdish government. Which is again a good compromise on their part, and this shows that they are very serious about federalism and about being a part of Iraq. This is my reading of this provision especially. It is that we don't want oil. Oil will be controlled by the central government. This is again that federalism is being proposed by Kurds as a sincere project, solution to the Kurdish question in Iraq.

**Imad-ad-Dean Ahmad:** Before I call on the next questioner, I can't help but say that I am not really delighted to hear that the Kurds want the federal government to control the oil. I really think that the oil should be owned by the Iraqi people. I would like to see the oil industry decentralized. I would like to see private companies formed and shares of stock in those companies be given directly to the Iraqi people, and, after a period of time, that they would be allowed to sell it to other Iraqis, and after a longer period of time, they can sell it to anybody they wanted to, and that way, begin a decentralization of the economy from being just an oil economy to where I can see the Iraqi people being able to start their own businesses, and I don't just mean *shwarma* stands, I mean big businesses, to develop a healthy economy, and not become a rentier state like Saudi Arabia or Kuwait where they have a lot of money, and the yet the economy is very sick and unhealthy.

**Hisham Altalib:** I want to clarify one thing, and then I have one question. Will every single Iraqi have one share in the oil?

**Imad-ad-Dean Ahmad:** Whatever number of shares. It would be distributed. What I was thinking is that it could be distributed locally. They have already divided the oil companies into different administrative zones, Southern Oil Company, Northern etc. But each region, each person can be given, for example, two shares of stock in their local oil company and one share of stock in the other oil companies, whatever. That is to be decided by the Iraqis. I want them to decide the details. I want the people themselves to own the oil.

**Hisham Altalib:** May I follow up on this? It is really interesting. I have read when I was young that some authority in our Islamic legacy says that the revenue of oil, of all

minerals, should be distributed every year to every single citizen in the area. So, that is the same concept.

**Imad-ad-Dean Ahmad:** What you find in Islamic law is that there is a zakat on minerals. 20% at the point of extraction. And that 20% could be distributed to every Iraqi. That would be fine. Or it could be distributed to civil service organizations that would use it for zakat purposes. Now some people might want to give it to the government. I am not one of those, but that is another possibility. However, the control over the oil should be by shareholders who are free to sell their shares if they want to.

**Hisham Altalib:** My question to Dr. Othman. If there would be a free referendum in Iraq, and the question is asked of the Kurds, the Sunni and the Shia. Do you want to be an independent part, entity in Iraq or do you want to be one unified Iraq? How do you think each section will vote?

**Othman Ali:** The Arabs, Shia's and Sunnis have Iraqi nationalist, strong nationalist identity. So they will vote for one Iraq. As for the Kurds, it will be, I would say mixed. But mostly, at least for the time being, for independence. The people, not the political parties. The people, because of the legacy of Saddam. They are afraid that any association with the regime in Baghdad will bring them the genocide. There is a lot of animosity for the time being.

**Mozaffar Partowmah:** I have one comment and two questions. The comment is that the revenue in the time of the so-called "safe zone" has been coming not through the oil as much as the revenue taken from the tolls that they take from the trucks that are coming from Turkey or from Iran into the safe zone. They have run themselves in the safe zone on these revenues mostly. My first question is what happened to the 8,000 or more Barzani Kurds who were picked up way before this havoc started in Iraq, and as far as we know, they were allegedly buried alive in the sands on the border of Iraq and Saudi Arabia. Do you have any information about that? Question two: If you think that federalism and federative attachment to Baghdad is a solution to the Kurds in Iraq, what about the Kurds in Turkey? What about the Kurds in Iran? What about the Kurds in Syria? In Azerbaijan? In Armenia? What about those Kurds? To my understanding, a solution of independence for the Kurds, which is uniting these sections, would be much more comprehensive than just looking at the segment of the Kurds in the north of Iraq, and confining yourself to federative attachment. I think we have to look at these questions, and I have proposed all the Muslim organizations in North America and elsewhere that they should have a separate entity discussing this issue. Because this is a Muslim issue. If we don't resolve this issue, somebody will come and resolve it for us, and be sure, 100%, that their solution to our problem will not be to our advantage. *As-salamu `alaikum!*

**Othman Ali:** As for Barzani's Kurds, they did not find them. There are mass graves here and there, but the Barzani mass graves have not been found. The Anfal mass graves have not been found yet. Those people, part of them, have been discovered. There are a lot of mass graves, unfortunately. As for the issue of Kurdistan and whether it should be

separate within the nation states or an independent state, I have been very pragmatic when I say that the Kurdish question of an independent state is not on the agenda of the effective powers in the world. I understand that Muslims have to raise this, but can you go and tell Iran's government, will you give independence to the Kurds? Is independent Kurdistan good for you? No nation state leader will accept that. What we need is to educate the people who prescribe to the Islamic way of thinking that decentralizing the administration within Iran, Turkey, Iraq will address the issue of ethnic identity. My reading of Islam is that in Islam the state is not based on race. State is based on ideology, and therefore I don't think that any nation state leader will ever allow an independent Kurdistan. However, we have to tell the people in Turkey and Iran that it is in your own interest to allow the Kurds to enjoy their rights and of course within their ummah. If their ummah comes together, then automatically the Kurds will come together. Again, I want to be very pragmatic, very realistic. Iranian Kurds, the dominant Kurdish parties, Iranian Kurdistan Democratic Party, Iranian Communist Kurdish Party, they are very much Iranian in outlook. They only want autonomy. Hizb-e-Islami Kurdistan's proposal of a Kurd Islamic state is valid, but how practical is it? That is the issue.

**Arezo Yazd** (*Washington Report on the Middle East*): I went to a State Department press briefing yesterday, and the way they were discussing Iraqi Kurdistan was that they were going to establish some kind of sectarian government, similar to Lebanon, where they would establish government on the basis of ethnicity. How is it possible to work with the federalism idea if it is to be based on ethnic minorities? Wouldn't it cause the same problems as in Lebanon?

**Othman Ali**: I think the cases are not analogous. In Lebanon, the Convention, which was in 1945 by the French, was based on sectarian makeup of Lebanon, with one minority ruling the rest. In Kurdistan, what is proposed by the American leadership, the Kurdish leadership, and the Iraqi opposition is a fair distribution of power where the Kurds in northern Iraq where they constitute 90% of the population will have an autonomous area, which will be a federal state within the Iraqi state, and they will have a say in the administration of the internal affairs of the Kurdish area, and then they would have equal say in the central government. I think this is a healthy state, and it is a pattern followed in many advanced states. And as I said in my lecture, it agrees with our Islamic tradition of decentralizing power, religious, political and administrative power.

**Imad-ad-Dean Ahmad**: I think maybe one bit of clarification will help you better understand the difference between Lebanon and what the brother is talking about, federalism. Lebanon consisted of a bi-national state with a strong central government. We are not talking about that. Federalism consists of local states that are self-governing, in a federation whose federal government is only concerned with those issues that must be at the level of federal government. Things like national defense, the mint, printing of the currency, those kinds of things, whereas most of the authority would be in the states. As for example, in the United States today. Even today, as the central government has gotten stronger over the years, but even now, most laws that are passed by your state legislature. It is your local government that controls most of your life. The federal government has still relatively small control. If you have that kind of system in Iraq, and other parts of

Kurdistan too, I might add, you would have a system where the local people would mostly control their own lives and not be subject to legislation that rewards one ethnic group at the expense of other ethnic groups. And that was the problem in Lebanon, and that is the problem today in Turkey. It was the problem in Iraq before.

**Jennifer Bremer** (the Keenan Institute): I have two questions, and I will make them both very short. One, as I am sure you are aware, there is some discussion of bringing back a monarchy to Iraq to provide an umbrella. And I am wondering if you feel that would be beneficial to the Kurds, as in other divided states such as the United Kingdom, in providing a framework? And the second question is that if there is an autonomous region for the Kurds, how do you feel that will affect the internal politics in Turkey?

**Othman Ali**: As for the monarchy, when you look at the history of monarchy in Kurdistan and the Iraqi monarchy. First of all, the Kurds did not vote for their monarch, for Faisal I. In fact, the Kurdish divisions boycotted the election, but the British imposed the monarch on all Iraqis, including the Kurds. So, the Kurds didn't really have that attachment to the monarch. And it was really the monarchy, Faisal I, that allowed the Iraqi Arab nationalist elite in Baghdad, to manipulate the Kurds and deny them their rights. So most Kurds don't have attachment to the monarchy. By the way, Iraqi monarchy is out of tone with present Iraq in general. As for the Kurds' autonomous region, I think in the end it would have a positive influence on Turkey. By the way, just two days ago, Turkey passed a law in the parliament that gives Kurds a lot of cultural rights. I think that one of the reasons is what is happening in Iraqi Kurdistan. Now they learn that if they do not satisfy the rights of Kurds, then the Kurds will become a threat, a time bomb, which could explode. That's what I said 15 years ago to some Iranian leaders I met. I said, listen, you settle the Kurdish question in an Islamic way, or otherwise it is a time bomb. As soon as the Americans establish their rule in Iraq, the Kurdish question will be most effective tool to destabilize Iran, because there are a lot of legitimate grievances against the central government by Iranian Kurds.

**Imad-ad-Dean Ahmad**: I want to thank everyone for coming and making this such a successful occasion. We look forward to seeing you next year, when I don't know what wonderful and important issue we will be dealing with. But I know there will be something, *inshallah*.

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