

Efforts to Establish International Peace, Kurds and Kurdistan

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Establishing international peace was an important issue that received significant attention from statesmen, politicians, writers, members of the media, and intellectuals during the first world war. It continued to be a topic of attention for intellectuals, writers, statesmen and politicians after the war. During the Paris Peace Conference in 18 January 1919, the issue of International Peace was high on the agenda. 32 States had participated in the Paris Peace Conference.

1920s The Era of the League of Nations

The need for an international organisation that would assist in resolving disputes between nations and prevent the escalation of tensions between states into violent conflict by finding peaceful solutions became increasingly clear and hence formed the common agenda of the international community. The League of Nations was formed as a result of this need. The League of Nations was supposed to provide peaceful resolutions to the disputes between states before it escalated into all out war.

Even though the organisation was known as the League of Nations, the principal interest it seeks to uphold was not the interest of nations but rather the rights, freedoms and interests of the states. The interests of nations and states frequently came into conflict in many locations. Kurds and Kurdistan can be analysed within such a framework.

One of the important objectives of the Paris Peace Conference was to redistribute the colonies of defeated states to the victorious powers. This also became an important objective of the League of Nations. Type A Mandates, Type B Mandates, Type C Mandates were created for this purpose.

Type A Mandates were created by the partitioning and redistribution of the territories of the Ottoman Empire in Mesopotamia the Near and Far East. Type B and C Mandates were created by the partitioning and redistribution of German Colonies in South West Africa and South East Asia.

As part of Type A Mandates. Iraq, Jordan and Palestine were established as British Mandates. Syria and Lebanon were established as French Mandates. Mandates can simply be viewed as colonies.

The main question that needs to be asked about this period is: Why was there no Kurdistan Mandate? Around this period, in South Kurdistan, Şeyh Mahmudê Berzenci declared himself the King of Kurdistan and demanded independent Kurdistan. He was making this demand from Great Britain. During that period the main power determining the world order was Great Britain. No doubt, France was also a major imperial power. However, in designing the world order France was well behind Great Britain. The relative influence of the two powers can be viewed as a 70% and 30% share.

Let alone an independent Kurdistan, the main imperialist powers such as Great Britain and France would not even accept Kurdistan as a colony. As a result, Kurdistan was divided, partitioned and redistributed. This resulted in a very heavy toll

for the Kurds. The situation was analogous to when a person's body is dismembered and their brain being divided into separate pieces. It is obvious that these developments came with a heavy burden. The present situation is clearly the result of the developments just mentioned.

One of the important facts relating to the Near and Far East after the first world war is the exclusion of Kurds and the complete disregard to their desires and wishes in the process of dividing, partitioning and redistributing Kurdistan. In my view, this is one of the most important facts of the region. It is obvious that the treatment of Kurds and Kurdistan during this period contradicted any notion of international peace.

The crucial role of the two great imperial powers, Great Britain and France, in the planning and the implementation of this process cannot be denied. During this process the collaboration between Great Britain, France, Turkish, Arab, and Persian rulers intensified and evolved. The collaboration of the two imperial powers of the time with the two states in the Near and Far East with deep historical roots cannot be overlooked.

After the first world war, a new status quo is established in the Near and Middle East. However, there is no status for Kurds in this status quo. Kurds and Kurdistan is distributed amongst the newly formed Mandates. This process witnesses the active collaboration of the two imperialist powers of the time and the two states of Near and Middle East with deep historical roots. This situation can be viewed as an Anti-Kurdish international order or anti-Kurdish world order.

The position taken by the Soviet Union to these new developments in the region needs to be analysed.

The principle of national self-determination was frequently raised in the 1920s, in the Soviet Union by leaders like Lenin, Stalin and Trotsky and in the USA by President Wilson. President Wilson's 14 Point Speech was directly related to this principle. The 12th point of his 14 Point speech explicitly referred to the self-determination rights of the peoples living under the rule of the Ottoman Empire. Soviet Union, within the framework based on the principle of self-determination, provided Emanullah Han in Afghanistan with military and diplomatic support against Great Britain. Kurds were struggling against Great Britain in South Kurdistan. However, Şeyh Mahmud Berzenci's request for military and diplomatic support was left unanswered by the Soviet Union. Soviet Union always chose to side with the states which cooperated and collaborated in oppressing the Kurds. The General Assembly of Eastern Nations gathered in Baku in September 1920 is very telling indeed. If we evaluate it from a Kurdish, Armenian, or Assyrian perspective, the General Assembly of the Eastern People was more about supporting the States involved in oppressing the peoples rather than empowering the peoples to uphold the principle of self-determination.

At a time when the principle of national self-determination was being discussed and the struggle to implement this principle in Near and Middle East and Asia was being carried, it is important to keep in mind that Kurdistan and Kurds were being divided and partitioned during the same period.

After the first world war Arab's were also divided. However, the division of Arabs is substantially different to the division of Kurds. Arabs eventually came to take control of various states. Today there are 22 Arab States ranging from the Persian Gulf to Morocco. With the establishment of Palestine the number of Arab states will

increase to 23. Kurdistan, on the other hand, is not even a colony. Being colony is an official status. Kurdistan does not even have the status of a colony.

The situation of Assyrian and Suryani's should also be kept in mind. Suryaniz have also been the victim of division and partitioning.

The League of Nations did not establish international peace and could not prevent the out break of the Second World War. Kurds were also struggling during the Second World War period. However, despite significant efforts they could achieve any long lasting objective.

Western Iran was occupied by Soviet and Great Britain in 1941. The Northern area was occupied by the Soviet Union whereas Great Britain occupied the southern area. Within the area occupied by the Soviet Union was the towns of Mehabad, Senendec (Sine), Kermanshah, Urmiye, Maku where a Kurdish National movement blossomed in 1942-43. This movement resulted in the establishment of the Republic of Kurdistan in 1945. The Capital of Kurdistan was Mehabad. During the same period Azeri region saw the establishment of the Tebriz Republic of Azarbaijan.

The Republic of Kurdistan was very short lived. Managed to survive for around one year. With the special privilege obtained from the Iranian oil, Soviet Union withdrew from Iran. After Soviet withdrawal, Iranian army first attacked the Tebriz Republic of Azarbaijan and then the Republic of Kurdistan and destroyed these two new republics. The President of the Republic of Kurdistan Qadi Muhammed and three ministers were executed in the Carcira square in Mahabad. The General of the armed forces of the Republic of Kurdistan, Mele Mustafa Barzani together with 500 Peshmergas were forced to seek assylum in the Soviet Union as a result of the joint attack by Iran, Iraq, and Turkey and the Royal Air Force of Great Britain.

1945 The United Nations Era

The search for establishing international peace continued during the Second World War. The desire to avoid war and conflict and resolve disputes between states by peaceful means continued during this period of intense conflict. In 1945, the establishment of the United Nations was a direct result of this desire to avoid war and conflict.

The Kurds put in all their efforts to make their voice heard by the founding member states of the United Nations such as USA, Great Britain, France and the Soviet Union. However, the founders of the United Nations refused to hear the Kurdish calls for recognition and viewed their concerns as unimportant.

When the United Nations was established, special attention was paid to the experience of the League of Nations. The weaknesses of the League of Nations were scrutinised and ensuring that the UN avoided such weaknesses was explicitly emphasized.

The political landscape changed dramatically at the end of the Second World War. For example, the colonies in Africa achieved independence one by one. Before the Second World War, there were only two independent States in Africa. In the 1960s this number increased substantially. [Today there are 57 States in Africa. Politically independent 57 States also experience significant change in other areas. However, in Kurdistan nothing changed. In the 1920 during the League of Nations era Kurds were left without a status in the new established status quo. The same status quo was stubbornly maintained during the United Nations era.

United Nations has the word “Nations” in its name but the UN has never been on the side of the people, such the Kurdish people. UN has always sided with the States that have oppressed the Kurds and Kurdistan and defended their interests.

Even though there was a deliberate attempt to avoid the weaknesses of the League of Nations in developing a new organisation for the post World War Two era to maintain international peace and harmony, the situation of Kurds and Kurdistan was overlooked and ignored. A Status quo that pays no attention to the situation of Kurds and Kurdistan is not a healthy status quo. In this sense, the attempts to achieve and maintain international peace received a blow from the very beginning.

Human rights is obviously very important. However, human rights should be viewed as an integral part of the principle of self-determination. Any people who are deprived of their right to self-determination cannot reasonably be viewed as enjoying their human rights. The right to life, safety, residence, freedom of movement, right to own property, freedom of association, freedom of speech, freedom of the press have always been viewed from an individual framework. However, if a people are collectively under oppression and are deprived of practicing self-determination all other rights cannot be enjoyed fully. Kurds and Kurdistan is a very clear example of this.

Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples (14 December 1960, Resolution 1514)

It is important to pay attention to the UN Resolution 1514 (dated December 14 1960). This resolution is about the independence of peoples and states under colonial rule.

Before anything, we should focus on the intention of this resolution. The main objective of the resolution can be summarized as follows: Colonies are generally ruled by force and oppression. In order to for these countries to gain their freedom, the peoples living in these countries need to achieve self-rule.

The resolution contains 7 articles. Articles 1,2,3, and 5 relate to the colonial States and peoples and how they can achieve independence. The United Nations is going to encourage and also support this process of independence. Articles 4,6, and 7 on the other hand deal with protecting the territorial integrity of existing States. If there are any National movement that may pose a threat to the territorial integrity of a State, the UN will oppose these movements and uphold the territorial integrity of the existing member State. Treating these two situations separately is useful.

The Articles 4,6,and 7 mentioned above contradicts the resolution on the rights of peoples for self-determination adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 5 January 1952. Resolution 545 (VI) states that, “all people shall have the right of self-determination”.

The decision regarding the relationship between human rights and self-determination was made clear by the UN with an earlier decision. The UN General Assembly in December 1950 ‘recognised the right of peoples and nations to self-determination as a fundamental human right’.

Articles 1,2,3, and 5 of the UN Resolution relates to the independence of overseas colonies. If there is a sea or an ocean separating the center from the colonial periphery, UN will endorse and defend the independence of such colonies. For example, the case of Great Britain colonies in Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia,

Zimbabwe etc. ; French colonies in Algeria, Ghana, Senegal; Belgium in Zaire; Portugal in Angola, Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau etc.

Besides these type colonies, there are also colonies of close proximity. Iraq's north (South Kurdistan/ Basur). Iran's west (East Kurdistan/Rojhilat). Turkey's east (North Kurdistan/ Bakur). Syria's north (South-West Kurdistan/ Kurdistan Rojava). These are neighbouring colonies. We should also mention the Red Kurdistan that existed in the Soviet Union Caucasia between 1923 and 1929

At this point, there is an important question. We say that colonies are generally ruled by force and oppression. Which type of colony requires more oppression in order to rule and the use of force is more widespread. Without a doubt, neighbouring colonies require more widespread force and violent oppression to maintain foreign rule.

Let's us think of it this way: Portugal and its colonies in Angola and Mozambique. There are thousands of kilometres separating Portugal from these colonies (around 18000-20000 kms). When there are shortages in military and police personnel or military equipment and logistic supplies in general, the rulers can only provide reinforcements and resupply by covering huge distances. The great distance between the centre and the periphery prevents the use of force and violence to be widespread and extensive. Neighbouring colonies the situation is different. The distance between the centre and periphery is minimal or non-existent. The short distance makes the widespread use of force and violence more practical

A plane that takes off in Baghdad can start bombing Kurdistan in half hour. Furthermore, the second largest headquarters of the Iraqi army is located in Mosul, in other words inside Kurdistan. Having no distance separating the two enables deep and widespread use of oppressive measures.

We knowhow Great Britain, France and Portugal etc. ruled their colonies. None of these imperial powers could have systematically employed poison gas against their colonies. Even if they had such intentions, international pressures, criticism and accusations prevented them from putting them into practice. However, Saddam Hussein systematically employed poisonous gas against the Kurds. The peak of the use of poisonous gas against the Kurds by Saddam Hussein's regime was in 16 March 1988. What happened in Halapja was Kurdish genocide.

On March 16 1988, more than 6 thousand Kurds died instantly from the use of poisonous gas. However, Saddam Hussein had been employing poisonous gas against the Kurds since 1983. The scientific experiments to determine the most 'poisonous gas' was carried out against Kurdish villages and Kurdish prisoners. The number of Kurds who perished as a result of these experiments between 1983 and 1988' is significantly higher than the 6000 killed in Halapja. However, because the genocide was spread over time and place and did not get covered in the media international community has remained ignorant of it.

At this point, it is important to go back to the UN Resolution mentioned earlier. This resolution was about the freedom of peoples and colonies under oppression. We mentioned how neighbouring colonies experience more widespread violence and oppression. United Nations on the other hand, endorses the oppression under the guise of territorial integrity of member countries. Criticising the blatant obvious double standards by the UN is very important.

What makes Saddam Hussein comfortable with initiating a genocidal campaign against the Kurds? Why is Saddam Hussein not anxious or concerned during this period?

These questions demonstrate that Kurdistan's position is different and is more than a case of being a neighbouring colony.

There was no protest or reaction against the Halapja genocide in any part of the world. There was not one protest in London, Paris, Washington, Moscow, Rome, or Berlin. Even in Japan, where they commemorate the Hiroshima and Nagasaki every year in 6 and 9 August, there was no protest. The complete lack of interest and silence needs a closer look.

When the Halapja genocide was taking place, Conference of Islamic Countries was convening in Kuwait. The Halapja genocide happened on the 16th of March. Islamic Conference convened on 18th of March. In 1988, the member states of the Islamic conference was 53, today it is 57.

The Halapja genocide was never mentioned in the Islamic Conference and no one even tried to put it on the agenda. The concluding statement of the Islamic Conference also made no mention of Halabja.

During that period, Bulgarian government was trying to implement a program aimed at changing the names of Turkish minority. The message of the Bulgarian government to the Turks was as follows. If you accept a Bulgarian name you will be given duties in the Bulgarian Communist Party and State bureaucracy and you will face no obstacles in progressing in your career. However, if you continue to use Turkish names you may meet obstacles in your daily life. The name changing operation of the Bulgarian government resulted in extensive reaction and protests from within Turkey. The Turkish State, government, civil organisation and NGOs all actively and extensively participated in these protests. The Islamic Conference specifically criticised the Bulgarian government in its concluding statement for the treatment of Turkish minority. Greece is also criticised for similar policies against their Turkish minority. However, there is no reaction from the Islamic Conference on the genocide in Kurdistan. What makes Saddam comfortable is this silence. Saddam Hussein was fully aware that there would be no reaction or accusation coming from the Islamic Conference, Western world, Socialist and Communist world for his attack against the Kurds. This is directly related to the fact that Kurdistan is divided and occupied by different states. This fact has left Kurds without any friends and an increasing number of enemies.

I mentioned above that there was no reaction around the world to the Halapja genocide. In order not to upset Iraq or countries that later supported Iraq such as Syria, Turkey and Iran and of course not to upset the two super powers USA and the Soviet Union many opted to ignore and remain silent towards Halabja. However, it is important to point out that in the Israeli capital Tel Aviv there were demonstrations against the gassing of Kurds in Halapja. Jews and Kurdish Israelis organised demonstrations and other activities protesting the Saddam regime.

It is also important to mention another point. When the Kurdish genocide was taking place in Halapja the leader of the PLO Yassar Arafat was in Washington. An American journalist asked Arafat a question: "Saddam Hussein employed poisonous gas against the Kurds, 6 thousand Kurds died instantly. What are your views on this?" Arafat's reply is as follows: "Should Saddam have thrown roses at them?" [FOOTNOTE: I feel the need to show how Arabs view Kurds and Kurdistan]

Bu, “ezilen halkların omuz omuza mücadelesi” çerçevesinde değerlendirilmesi gereken bir ilişkidir. “Omuz omuza mücadele”nin, Kürdler söz konusu olduğu zaman amacından nasıl saptığını gösteriyor.

There are Kurds who have left Nusaybin and travelled to Saudi Arabia to work in construction sites. They work in Riyad. Amongst these workers there was a friend names Sait. Sait is religious Kurd. Every Friday he would attend the prayer session. Sait informs us of his observation. Sait states *“I go to the mosque every Friday. I listen to the Arab imam’s Khutba very carefully. During his Khutba, the Arab imam individually names the Islamic communities and their countries and states from Indonesia to Morocco and prays for them. There is a special pray section every Friday by this Arab Imam*

The Arab imam would cite every single Islamic community and peoples from Indonesia to Morocco and prayed for them. I always carefully listened to the Arab Imam’s Khutba. I noticed that he did not mention anything about Kurds or Kurdistan. Kurds and Kurdistan was not mentioned in the prayer. I listened for a few week and realised that nothing changed. Finally, one Friday after the prayers I went up to the hoca and spoke to him.

“Hocam, in your Friday Khutba’s you mention all the muslim people from Indonesia to Morocco and you pray for them but you never mentioned our people or our country.

The Imam asked: “Who are you? And where is your country?”

“We are Kurdish and our Country is Kurdistan” I replied.

The Imam asked: “Who are they and where do they live?”

I objected: What do you mean Who are they? Where do they live? Only 2 months ago my people was killed by poisonous gas. Children, men and women, old and young were all killed.”

Sait describes what happened after this conversation: *“After this conversation, the Arab Imam told me to write something about the Kurds and I will find out where they live etc and from now on I will make sure to include them in my Khutba and pray for them”.*

I wrote about one page on Kurds and Kurdistan. When I went to the Friday Prayers I handed it to the Imam. That day, the Arab Imam as usual mentioned islamic communities from Indonesia to Morocco but added “and also others” at the end. However, he continued to not mention Kurds or Kurdistan.

This is an example of how Kurds and Kurdistan has been excluded in Saudi Arabia. The key question that arises from these two examples is: Why do Israelis know about Kurds and Kurdistan but the Arabs living in Saudi Arabia, including the Imam in our example have no information? To get an idea it is important to look at what Said experience later on in his life.

In the early 1990s, during the Islamic Eid holidays, Sait goes back to his home town of Nusaybin. One morning when he leaves to do Eid shopping he is murdered with one bullet fired point blank range to the back of his head. The Hizbullah member who

killed Sait is also from Nusaybin. They may have been childhood friends playing in the streets together.

Sait also had mentioned an important detail about his activities while he was working in Riyadh. In our living quarters, we would collect money every month to send to the Kurdish Guerillas. Arab officials inspecting our living quarters were aware of this but did not raise any objections.