



Kurdish Lobby Australia

TRANSCRIPT OF KLA WEBINAR 7 OCTOBER, 2023

WAYS KURDS CAN PROGRESS SELF DETERMINATION IN KURISTAN

Please note: Time codes are an indication only as the webinar has been very slightly edited as has this transcript.

00:00 Introduction (Gina Lennox – Host)

The subject of our webinar is "Ways Kurds can progress self- determination in Kurdistan". Kurdistan refers to the Northeast Section of the Fertile Crescent in which Kurds are an indigenous majority.

100 years ago, Kurdistan was divided between four nation states. Today, there is a province of Kurdistan in Iran, a semiautonomous Kurdistan region of Iraq, and an autonomous administration of north and East Syria.

In the context of colonization, the UN defined determination as the collective right of people to decide their own destiny. From the beginning, the concept was controversial. In its earliest form self-determination refers to all people being free to determine their political status and pursue their economic, social, and cultural development. This form is possible when all citizens have equal rights in a free, just, and democratic nation.

However, this form does not necessarily allow for self-determination over territory within or across existing nation state boundaries. For this kind of self-determination people must have the right to achieve legal independence. This can mean becoming an independent nation state or having an autonomous region within a federal state or a confederation of smaller districts.

For more than 100 years, Kurds have been fighting for some form of self-governance. Realistically, the exact form will depend on internal, regional, and international factors. Hence, this webinar's focus on strategies and processes for Kurdistanis to build a functional self-governance.

Welcome and thank you for joining us today. My name is Gina Lennox and I will be hosting this webinar. I would like to start by acknowledging that I live on the land of Australia's indigenous First Nations people, and I pay my respects to all indigenous people around the world who have not ceded their lands.

00:02:55:70 Introducing Panelists

For this discussion, we are deeply honoured to welcome four panelists. Dr.Sherko Kirmanj. Dr. Hussein Tahiri, Shukriya Bradost and Behrouz Boochani. They are all writers, analysts and commentators who have thought deeply about Kurdish issues. Not one of them is a politician. Each panelist will speak for ten minutes. They will be followed by a five-minute

discussion between themselves. People are free to submit questions and ideas by using the Q and A icon at the bottom of your screen. We will air as many of your questions and ideas as time allows.

00:03:46.240 Challenge for Kurds

Before we begin, I want to challenge you all by reading what an individual sent me. He prefers anonymity and says "I'm not involved in politics and am not affiliated with any political organization. I'm no expert, just a regular Kurd with some insight into the social dynamics of my culture, helped by living abroad."

This is his challenge. "Kurds need a major awakening as a nation that's been under attack. For centuries, we have not paused to assess how our history has impacted our individual and collective psyche. We love our land and culture, but we have low self-esteem and a self-defeating mentality, a victim mentality, which has led to tragic self-repeating cycles. It's as if we are sheep with Stockholm syndrome on steroids, living in a neighbourhood of wolves. We keep believing the lies and promises of the wolves. They poison our minds. We hide our fear and are polite, labelling our behaviour as humane. But we end up losing all that we've gained in our trauma. In our frustration at feeling so helpless, we turn on each other. I think this is the primary source of our political divisions, not party politics. We must overcome our individual and collective trauma from being constantly attacked and undermined. We must become confident, smart, tough. Where necessary we must be ruthless and accept the consequences. The question is, what are we willing to do for our freedom?" So I leave everyone with that question "what are all of us willing to do?"

00:05:48.480 Dr. Hussein Tahiri

Gina: Our first panelist is Dr. Hussein Tahiri. He has a PhD in political science and is an adjunct professor at Victoria University. He has authored a book on the structure of Kurdish society and the struggle for a Kurdish state and has written a number of chapters in books focused on Kurdish issues. He has chosen to speak about 'Alternative strategies to current politics and armed struggle'. Please. Go ahead. Dr. Hussein.

Dr Hussein: Thank you, Gina. I wish our audience a very happy day or evening, wherever they are. As Gina outlined, I'm going to talk about 'Alternative strategies to current politics and armed struggle'.

I should first say that the current political parties in Kurdistan have played a crucial role in reviving the Kurdish cause and at the very least, preventing the Kurds from being assimilated into the dominant cultures. However, they have been acting more like large tribes than political entities. Their loyalty is directed towards the party and the party's leader. This loyalty is not transferred to a higher authority, such as Kurdistan's national interest. This is the crux of the problem, and the reason why they have been unable to be effective despite decades of arm struggle. Their arms have become tools to maintain and serve their structures rather than instruments of liberation.

In fact, the era of armed struggle to liberate Kurdistan has come to an end. There was a time that arms could win, but not anymore. The Kurds cannot conduct an effective armed struggle when they are being chased by drones 24 hours a day, or when satellites observe

them days and nights, or when they can be targeted hundreds of kilometres away by missiles and other sophisticated weapons. More so, in the future, the Kurds might be fighting the soldier robots.

In addition, the primary purpose of the armed struggle is to exert pressure on the central governments to negotiate and make concessions. However, in countries such as Turkey, Iran, Iraq or Syria, armed struggle does not exert the intended pressure on the government. For instance, would Erdogan care if the Kurds were to kill hundreds of Turkish soldiers? The answer is "no". In fact, he might use such an event as an opportunity to mobilize the Turkish people and consolidate his power.

Similarly, would Khomeini care if the Kurds were to kill tens of thousands of Iranian Revolutionary Guards or army personnel? Again, the answer is "no".

Therefore, armed struggle does not put pressure on these governments. As for the destruction that such a war leaves behind, they would probably care less as the main destruction happens in Kurdistan. If Kurdistan is to achieve freedom, alternative approaches are necessary. First, we need to build an inclusive civil society. There is a pressing need for a civil society that is inclusive, where everyone has the opportunity to contribute in a unique way.

At present, the expectation is for all individuals and sectors to serve the interest of political parties. If their skills and contributions do not directly or indirectly benefit political parties, they risk being perceived as outsiders, and their patriotism and loyalty to Kurdistan are questioned.

The path to progress and freedom for Kurdistan lies in allowing everyone to excel in their respective fields, including journalists, artists, writers, musicians, businesspeople, and indeed, anyone else. When an artist advances, they are serving Kurdistan. When a linguist conducts research and contributes to the development of the Kurdish language, they are serving Kurdistan. The same applies to anyone who preserves or progresses Kurdish culture. All these individuals are contributing to the advancement and enrichment of Kurdish society, and they should be recognized and valued for their contribution. The focus should not be on serving narrow political interests, but on building a civil society centred around the development of the Kurdish society and its people.

Second, empowering women. Women should be encouraged and given opportunities to realize their full potential. It is impossible for a society to reach its potential when half of its population is marginalized. The empowerment of women should not be limited to their ability to bear arms. Instead, it should permeate every facet of life. Women's empowerment is not just about providing opportunities, but also about creating an environment where women feel valued, respected, and capable of making meaningful contributions. This involves challenging and changing societal norms that perpetuate gender inequality and supporting ideals that promote gender equality.

Third, focus on technology. Technology is a space to develop into an opportunity. Indeed, technology holds immense potential for the advancement of Kurdistan. Social media has emerged as a powerful tool for communication, organisation, and advocacy. It allows for the rapid dissemination of information, the mobilization of people, and the applications of

voices that might otherwise go unheard. It can be used to raise awareness about the issues facing Kurdistan, rally support from around the world and put pressure on those in power. Kurdistan needs cyber Peshmergas. Cybersecurity is a domain that is still open for competition. Leaders like Erdogan or Khomeini would be more worried about their money and assets than the killing of their soldiers.

A 16- or 17-year-old youth can inflict the harm that hundreds of armed Peshmerga cannot do. Drones are widely available and relatively easy to operate, making them a popular choice for a variety of applications. The beauty of drones lies in their versatility. With a little imagination, they can be used for a multitude of purposes.

The digital economy offers new opportunities for economic development and prosperity. By promoting digital literacy and adopting a cultural innovation and business, Kurdistan can position itself as a leader in the Digital Age.

Finally, if I were given the chance to offer advice to the people of Kurdistan, my message would be twofold: pursue education and strive for wealth creation. These two elements, I believe, hold the key to unlocking a brighter future for Kurdistan. Education is the cornerstone of progress. It empowers individuals, encourages critical thinking, and fuels innovation. Wealth creation, on the other hand, is about achieving financial stability, encouraging economic growth, and improving the quality of life for all. It should be remembered that the goal is not just to get rich, but to use that wealth to make a positive impact. Education and wealth, at the very least, ensure that individuals cannot be easily deceived, bought or sold. One not only will be improving their own life, but also contributing to a betterment of their community and ultimately their nation.

To conclude, the case of suppression and oppression, alongside with an incompetent Kurdish leadership have undermined Kurdish self-determination and hope for a liberated Kurdistan. A new framework and a new approach are needed to restore this lost self-confidence and hope. Thank you.

00:16:20.570 Questions and Discussion on Dr Hussein Tahiri's Presentation

Gina: Thank you. Now I open up to everyone. Would any other panelists like to make a point or have a question? Dr. Sherko, please.

Dr, Sherko: Thank you, Dr. Hussein, for you braving or daring your initiative and proposals, especially with what currently is going on in Kurdistan, and the armed struggle. My only question is about the use of Cyber Peshmerga, I think if I may recall that you used. What exactly do you mean by cyber peshmerga? Why would even we need the cyber peshmerga? I think the use of AI, or technology in general, is very good proposal, or very good, let's say, initiative, but not against the occupiers of Kurdistan, but rather just to mobilize people, perhaps, or to make our discourse get to the people, but not in terms of fighting. Because if it is in terms of fighting, it's another kind of another kind of fighting. When it comes to cybersecurity, then the occupiers of Kurdistan, or the powers, Iraq, Turkey, and Iran, are much more powerful than us. We need to use a tool that can make us more powerful, rather than puts us in a weakened position.

Dr Hussein: Look, there are two aspects of that. I think I mentioned that aspects of AI and using technology for the development of Kurdistan and Kurdish people and Kurdistan society. But there's another element of cyber peshmerga. The reality is, if we like it or not, every country is using that cybersecurity as a tool. And I'm not saying that this should be used on a frequent basis, but this should be used as a response to a particular suppression or a particular act of violence by a government.

The other thing is that we have not much infrastructure for them to target. They are much more vulnerable than us. And to add to that, it is anonymous. So who has done it? It is in the dark. So not necessarily you can pinpoint a person, or a particular group, or a particular community for a cyberattack.

But the reality is, if you like it or not, every country is doing that and a lot of other groups are doing that. And my issue, if we don't do that, if we don't utilize this tool to defend ourselves, we will remain backward. Backward in a sense that we will remain behind. This is a concept I think needs to be developed in more details. But that's the initial thought.

Shukriya: May I ask a question?

Gina: Go ahead, Shukriya.

Shukriya: Yeah, I agree with you, Dr. Hussein, because when we're talking about the new securities, a new way, how to fight your enemy cybersecurity, is one of the most important one. And why with the cybersecurity or the cyber peshmerga, you call a very interesting name, because when we're talking about the peshmerga, they don't get paid. (Note: at least not in Rojhilat) And even the cybersecurity of the most countries, they get paid very well. One of the good example is even Khomeini admitted that they paid million dollars to cyber militaries they have. They call it cyber jihad. So when you're talking about that kind of the cyber peshmerga, peshmerga never been paid. They are willing to do it for the nation's cause.

But it's important to mention that for the Kurdish fighters, this kind of the organizing, this kind of attack will be more effective on the enemy. Because nowadays you don't go to the war with the army when you are not that strong in the case of the military, and you don't have missiles and drones that your enemy has. But in the cyber case, you can attack your enemy's powerful stations and disable them, you can attack them much better than if you have a small army that doesn't have the capacity of the army that your enemy has. And I think it's a good proposal for the Kurdish political parties to work on that. Not just for the political party. Even a lot of political activists do invest on that kind of cyber warfare for the better future for Kurdistan. I just wanted to add that to your point.

Dr Hussein: Thank you. I mean, it would be wonderful if we could have a talent to bring down those drones that hover over our villages and towns, to destroy them. So if we could have that capacity and that skill to bring them down, that would be excellent.

Gina: The Kurdish strength, apart from being politically organized because of their armed struggle in the 20th century, has been their trained peshmerga or trained militias, whether it be in Syria or Iraq or Iran. What do you do when people call for disarmament? And yet

you do need a trained force for defence, and also to be used by superpowers like the US, to stop dictators doing what they do.

Dr Hussein: Look, when it comes to a situation that we have to take arms and defend ourselves, we will have to do that. I think we have that capacity and that capability to do that. But using those arms to defeat the enemies - that is a lost cause.

Gina/Zirian: Does anyone else want a question? Yes, I can see Christopher has a question. Please. Go ahead, Christopher.

Chris: So I do agree it's very important to have cybersecurity in Kurdistan, although I'm pretty sure, even though it is anonymous, that they would probably still be attacked. So they would still need a force. So they probably need allies and to work on diplomacy to initiate that.

Hussein: Look, I don't think we are discounting other elements as well. We are just looking for the new additions or a new way of looking at things. Certainly diplomacy is not to be discounted, but the issue is the traditional political structures we have, have been unable, for various reason, to conduct an effective diplomacy. They have allowed us rather be used as tools than to gain any diplomatic concessions.

Gina: Thank you very much.

00:25:38.080 Behrouz Boochani

Gina: Our next speaker is Behrouz Boochani, a journalist, teacher and activist in Rojhilat, who spent six years in detention on Manus Island and in New Guinea because he dared seek asylum in Australia. He has since become famous for winning several prestigious literary prizes for his book "No Friend but the Mountains - Writing from Manus Prison". When New Zealand allowed Behrouz to start a new life over there, it was Australia's loss, and New Zealand's gain. His second book, "Freedom Only Freedom", was published in November 2022. Behrouz would like to speak about "Empowerment of civil society since the Jina uprising". Go ahead, Behrouz.

Behrouz: Yeah, thank you. Very glad to be here today. Actually, I want to start with what Kak Hussein mentioned. I think that is really powerful comment, and it's very important that we Kurds should realize that we are living in a different era. It is a different time. And we should rethink about our understanding of the world, of the geopolitical situation - our people, our achievement and what we lost. I think that is important and the way that we fight, the way that we struggle, because in Kurdistan, of course, we created a resistance knowledge. But this resistance knowledge, I think we should think about it, because the time is different, the situation is different.

I think the most powerful way to think about Kurdistan is how we empower ourselves, empower the civil society. Why? Because we should first ask this question "Are we a nation?" We should ask this question about the four parts of Kurdistan, that should we build a nation or not. I think in my perspective, we didn't do it yet. Of course, we say that we are Kurds, but that is not enough to be a nation. The first thing is very simple. In my

experience - recently I visited Europe and Australia, and I've met many Kurdish people in events - the reality is that all Kurds cannot communicate to each other. And they don't use an international language like English to communicate. Often, they are using the colonizer's language to communicate to each other. That even happens in Rojhilat. Now, the new generation, when they want to communicate to each other, many of them, from different parts of Rojhilat, they speak in Farsi because they don't understand each other.

And that shows that we lost many opportunities. That shows that after more than 30 years having a state in Bashur, we don't use all the Kurdish dialects so people understand them. At least people should hear them. Like we know that 50 percent of Rojhilat is Kermanshah and Elam but we don't see their dialect on Kurdish TV, on the Kurdish platforms. We don't hear ourselves in the political parties, in the leadership. It seems simple, but it's important because when we don't understand each other, we divide our society.

That's really important. But also, we have not created a dialect or language that everyone understands so we can communicate. I don't mean that we should destroy all of the Kurdish dialects. No, we should keep them. We should work on them, develop them, but we should also work on a way so that people communicate to each other.

Using the colonizer's language is an assimilation process. It is destroying us, destroying our identity. And that's happening Rojhilat.

Another thing for actually building a strong civil society is that we should look at the diaspora as well. Kurdish diaspora and the role of Kurdish diaspora is really important. But unfortunately, in the Kurdish diaspora, again, we at least over the past year, in the Jina movement, we see that we (in the diaspora) didn't protect the Kurdish narrative of this movement. We didn't protect it. We've been fighting so hard to protect this narrative, that (Kurdish) slogan 'Woman. Life, Freedom' is a key part of this narrative. And how this protest started in Kurdistan, and how the (Kurdish) women cut their hair. All of this. We didn't protect this. That is the reality.

And that shows that we in the diaspora didn't make a strong network to work with other minorities in the society, to work with other nations who are oppressed, to work with the mainstream in the West. We didn't do that. And that's why we didn't protect this narrative. Many people still don't know. They are not aware of this Kurdish narrative.

And as Kak Hussein mentioned, it's really important that you mentioned about cyber peshmerga. It's quite an interesting concept not only for mobilizing people. Of course, that is important. But I think the main part of that is how we mobilize our people to protect this narrative. Protect this narrative.

Always I say that we are colonized two times. First by the Iranian government and by Turkey, by Iraq, Syria, and second by Western Media. If we look at the past year, we see that most of the Western media about Iranian woman focused on middle class, Tehranian women. And we know that our people paid the cost, at least a big part of it. The Kurdish women don't have a platform.

Of course, we achieved a lot over the past year, but we should think about this.

I mention an example. ABCTV in Australia made a documentary about this movement in Iran. It was a big documentary, like half an hour, and they talk with some women. All of them were middle class Tehranian woman.

So what is our role here? This organization, your organization, or other organizations - use your position as an organization. Because we are individuals. I wrote a letter to that producer. I wrote a letter to some others to let them know that what they did is wrong.

Gina: Did you get a reply from some of them?

Behrouz: From some of them, yes, but not the main person. But these organizations that we have in the West, that is your role. To create that connection, to appear in the places that it needed, that's really important. That is just an example that I share.

So I mean, regarding building a nation, we should work in a way that all Kurdish people, they identify themselves as a Kurd. I'm not talking about getting independent or not. That is a political issue that is related to geopolitics, that is related to international factors.

But at least, if we are not able to become an independent country, at least we are able to become a nation. And we should work in that way, culturally, we should work on Kurdish people decolonizing themselves, even if our Kurdish leaders are assimilated. So we should learn how to decolonize ourselves. It is a very personal issue - how to decolonize yourself. But unfortunately, in Kurdistan, there are many people, many political activists, that just hide behind this dream of getting independence. But actually they are doing nothing, many of them.

If you want to get independent - I have many questions about that - how we should do it. We should be realistic. But these people, this Kurdish Movement - they hide themselves behind this dream and they attack others, but in the reality, they do nothing. Actually, we should first become a nation. That is important. We should work in a way that Kurdish people first know each other. We don't know each other! Even in Rojhilat, in Rojhilat, the north of Rojhilat, people don't understand Kermashah and Elam dialects.

Even in this map that you put at the beginning - my province of Elam is not a part of that. But we are Kurdish. In my province we are 95 percent Kurdish. But even in this map, we are not a part of it. That is an example. So, I mean that we should think about how we build a nation, how we understand each other and know each other. That is important. Thank you.

Gina: Thank you very much. I think there's a big problem with mainstream media, Western mainstream media. We write all the time to ABC and SBS and so on, and journalists, particular journalists, particular producers, telling them what's happening in Kurdistan, and we just get no replies. So I think Kurds have to start becoming journalists in Australia and America and England and everywhere, and asking for interviews and getting put on mainstream television and also to make the documentaries, because it's very hard to get a reaction from mainstream media in a general sense. And when we do get invited on Q & A and everything else, they often don't take the question, or whatever. So it is a struggle to penetrate mainstream media. And it's very sad what's happening with the Jina uprising and how the monarchists have been given a platform and the Kurds have not.

Behrouz: Sorry, I should mention this. We are able, we are capable to do that. Palestinians did, and we are 40 million people. But our problem is that a big part of our society is still assimilated. There are many Kurds, I'm sure, in Australia. I know that they are in the media, but they don't know, they don't realize, how it is important that we protect this narrative. And unfortunately, we didn't do it during the Jina movement.

41:42.810 Questions and Discussion on Behrouz Boochani's Presentation

Gina: Does anyone want to comment or ask a question?

Shukriya: Yeah, allow me to be disagree with Behrouz with some points about the language. I'm a good example myself. In 2004 I fled Iran to Iraqi Kurdistan and I'm Kurmanji. So my Kurdish dialect is Kurmanji. I'm coming from Urmia in the north of Iran. So I didn't know one word in Sorani when I arrived to Iraqi Kurdistan. What happened? Since 2004 I live in Iraqi Kurdistan. I learned Sorani, I have written a chapter of a book in Sorani. I have more than 100 articles in Sorani. But my case is not important because I lived there. I learned Sorani. When I'm talking My mom and parents, when they first came to the Iraqi Kurdistan, they couldn't understand the Bahdini from the Dohuk. I had to translate for them. But right now, because of the Kurdistan region's TV (channels), because people follow all the TV programs and news, so like my sister who has always lived in Urmia and did her Master and Bachelor in Urmia - she knows Sorani right now. She can understand. She used some pure Kurdish vocabulary, like a "society". I remember because that word was so difficult for me, 'komalga' for 'society'. So I remember that vocabulary was really difficult for me in 2004. But now, my sister in Urmia, she understands this vocabulary. My sister in Australia, she understands Sorani very well. When she listens to Sorani.

Why don't we have that much voice in Western society and media? That all depends how much sources we have. So Iraqi Kurdistan became provides opportunities for Kurdish TV to produce Kurdish program, Kurdish news, Kurdish narrative. It has become opportunity for us, for Kurds to watch Kurdish TVs. So when you criticize Kurds based on that perspective, you have to know how many sources you have.

Like even when you're talking about the Kurds in Europe, why we didn't have that much of the 'Woman, Life, Freedom' - 'Jin, Jiyan, Azadi' support in the Western society, why we always have Persian TVs - it goes back to the root of the societies and social developments in Iran. We didn't have an economy source for Kurds to become educated, the way the rest of the country has been educated. How many Kurds, you know, they live in the US or the Europe, they came for scholarship, for education? Most of them came like a family of peshmerga. They came, and they tried to survive. They didn't have an opportunity to go to university, to study, to become a Hollywood star. We never had that opportunity. So that's the reason I think it's not fair to say all our societies backwards because of assimilations.

I do agree with Behrouz about the assimilation. We do have that part. But, the problem goes back to this colonialization of our territory, and how the wealth (of the colonizer) is not been expended on our people to be able to achieve what the rest of the country has been achieving in and outside Iran.

But I think for now, as I start with my own life, background and experience, we are trying to achieve that now. Even now, imagine we are four kids, five kids. We're sitting here and we're talking in English about what's happening in our people. That's another opportunity - for us to learn English, to connect with the people outside of the Kurdish language. It wasn't easy. But now we're trying to pass this message to the audience in bigger world, to know what's going on in our land. I just want to add that thank you.

Behrouz: Thank you for raising that. I think that is really important. Yes, you are right. I fully agree with you. I fully agree with you that, of course, like for example in Iran, the Persian people had more opportunities. We are probably the first generation that we had access to really a proper education. Yeah, that is true. That's really important.

But what I mean by criticizing our society is that, even with this resource that we have, we are not really organized well. We are not really using this. That's what I say. For example, in Australia, my experience with the Kurdish diaspora is mostly in Australia, for example, yeah, we have many organizations. This year, when I visited Australia, I attended two events with Kurdish community. I could see that it was for the first time that Kurds from Kermashah and Elam, which are 50 percent of Rojhilat, attended those events.

And when I follow up why is like that, I found out that these Kurds, when they come to Australia, some Iranian organization or group, or association, they just take control of them, or they create a space for them. It's tragic, but I fully agree with you.

Yeah, I'm quite critical. That is my style. But, I think we are able, we are capable, to use our resources. We have enough resources to at least create a network.

And just let me share an idea with you. My idea is that these organizations in Australia, or in Western countries, I think we should let Western people make a strategy for us to create connection and network with others. That's what I believe. Because if we let people who are allies with us, people who know us - I know from the outside it sounds like a 'white saviuor' culture but if we just let Western people ... I think strategically it's important that we work, we open this organization, this association that we have. We let other people, like Palestinians, we let other people, like Western citizens, who know Kurdistan, who have sympathy to Kurdistan, who are willing to fight for Kurdistan, we should let them to actually take control and create that network for us. That is my understanding.

I know from outside it seems that I am just saying let the white people to do it for us. But I think it's strategically important, because Hazara people did that. And now in Australia, Hazara people have quite a strong voice. I just talk through my experience. Thank you.

Gina: Thank you very much. Dr. Sherko?

Dr Sherko: Yes, thank you. Thank you very much, Behrouz. I do agree with you that the Kurdish diaspora outside of Kurdistan are not as active, or not mobilized as they supposed to be. I think the only thing that I would like to talk about in this regard is that we know when we talk about building nation there is so many ways of building nations.

But the thing that we can talk about is that because we don't have a state so we cannot build a nation from the top down. Which means that we don't have the institutions to help

us, especially when we talk about Rojhilat or Bakur. We don't have the mass education in Kurdish, for example. We don't have a standard language that can be taught in schools. In fact, as you know that (in Bakur and Rojhilat) the teaching in Kurdish is banned. I mean we know that people are imprisoned for trying even to do so just like Zara Muhammad. So we have the bottom up nation building process that we can use, and that is something that we need to do, but we haven't done it.

I think coming back to Dr Hussein's point about that the use of media, social media, the use of technology, it will really help. For example, we haven't been able even to do schooling online. We can do schooling online that can be accessed by somebody from Rojhilat or from Bakur or from wherever. It can be used it to bring us together.

I do think, just like Kak Behrouz mentioned, that it's not about creating one language or eliminating the other dialects in Kurdistan, but rather to have a communication language. And communication language does not mean that we have to erase all the dialects that we have in Kurdistan.

But comparing the Kurdish case with Palestinian case, I think it's a different case. Palestinians have 22 countries, and all these 22 Arab countries support their cause. In addition, the Palestinian case has been Islamized, which means that there's 54 countries around the world that they somehow support the Palestinian cause.

I also would like to support one thing that Shukriya mentioned - that especially in Rojhilat and Bakur, we have been through a process which I call, and some other scholars call, "de-development. De-development. Which is on purpose we have been left out, and building a nation in areas which has been purposely left out is an uphill struggle.

But I strongly agree that the Kurdish community in Australia is not as active as has to be. Just mentioning that TV program - I watched that program, Kak Behrouz, but I think in the program did talk to a few Kurds also. They were not only from middle class, Tehrani or middle class Persian background. I think even one of them, maybe, if I can remember, was talking in Kurdish. I don't remember exactly. But I do agree that it was dominated by the middle class, Tehrani women and men. Thank you very much.

Zirian: Yeah, Gina, just quickly, we have quite a lot of questions coming through, so just to let everyone know that we are receiving them and at the end, we are going to have A-Q-A section and I will read out as many of the questions that we can get through. Gina, Kak Hazhar has raised his hand a few times. If we can just let him respond quickly now and then move on.

Gina: OK, go ahead.

Hazhar: Hello everyone. I just would like to welcome all the panelists. It's a very nice discussion that we're having here. One of the items we really wanted to get across at this webinar was the solution. In your opinion, how do you solve these issues that you raised in two or three points, please.

Behrouz: Yeah, I mentioned that. In Australia there are at least five organizations that I know. So I think one of the things in my second book that Gina mentioned, is a good example – how I used my experience, and my personal knowledge to link all people, marginalized people in the society, to empower them. If we create that link between the minorities in society, we are able to empower them.

So regarding Kurdistan and Kurdish community, for example, in Australia, they are quite divided because they have a different political background. They rely on some political parties in Kurdistan. And I could see that how this community is divided, because they cannot think just about Kurdistan. They don't put Kurdistan in priority, they put just their political benefits.

So I think it's very important that the first thing that these organizations should do is to work together, at least.

Gina: May I just say, Kurdish lobby Australia is nonpartisan, not associated with any particular political organization or part of Kurdistan. And we have worked with every one of those groups that you've mentioned. I'm just saying that I think you are absolutely right. That is essential for Kurdish people to achieve what they want to achieve to work between themselves and also with the other minorities, and also get to know the success of other people that have had to go for independence, like East Timor. Jose Ramos-Horta is a person that I'm hoping to get on a webinar, if these webinars do well. I'd like to invite him to talk about what he thinks are the key successes for the independence of East Timor, because I think Kurds need to know about the other people that have succeeded in self-determination.

Unfortunately, networking is a two-way street and the different parties must want to network. And you're right, the political divisions are deep, and we're going to get to this later. But now, I'm going to have to be brutal, and thank you, Hazhar. Incidentally, Hazhar is the president of our Association, so thank you Hazhar. And I'd like to move on.

00:59:04.410

Shukriya Bradost

Gina: As I've already mentioned, Kurds are an indigenous people in a multicultural region. The problem is that the four nation states established 100 years ago based themselves on a chauvinist understanding of nationalism, whether it be Turkish, Arab or Persian. A challenge for the 21st century is how to empower diverse ethnic populations within a state or between states. And it's a topic that Shukriya Bradost is investigating for her PhD. Helped by her Kurdish background and her study and work experience in law and journalism, she will speak about the desecuritization of ethnic group issues. Thank you, Shukriya.

Shukriya: Thank you, Gina. Allow me to thank you for putting together this timely panel discussion. Actually, thank you very much, Gina.

Before addressing the securitization, I think it's necessary to define what is securitization actually. When we're talk about securitization we are talking about a more extreme version of politicization. It's a process that occurs when political actors and issues are pushed from

normal politics into the security realm. When states or actors push for the securitization, like the regimes of Iran, Saddam (Hussein), Syria, and even Turkey. Despite Turkey being a NATO member - it thinks it's powerful, but it is actually a weak state.

The regime like Iran is my focus area. So what I'm talking about is that Iran is a weak state and unable to respond to ethnic group demands and issues in normal politics. So that's the reason why they securitize ethnic groups. The Islamic Regime (of Iran) is the best example when we say how a weak state uses the securitization of ethnic minority groups to forge or create an internal enemy as a strategy to maintain, to retain a popular support. This had been a consistent policy of the Islamic Regime since its inception.

I have a hundred of examples about the Islamic Regime securitizing ethnic groups. But the most important one that stays in everybody's mind is when Khomeini made a declaration of jihad against predominantly Muslim Kurds in Iran, and calling them 'infidel', because they couldn't deal with Kurds issues (demand for regional autonomy) in normal politics.

I put the securitization of ethnic groups in Iran during the Islamic regime after 1979 in three different stage. The first stage started with the Islamic Regime establishing its own constitution. In the constitution they defined Iran as a Persian Shia country and marginalized all other ethnic group's identities.

Someone may challenge that statement and say what about Article 15 in the Iranian Constitution, which talks about ethnic groups' language rights (in media and education)? But the state has never acted on this article until today. And they never apply any policy or sources of investment to actually teach an ethnic language.

The constitution also talks about how the president must be a Shia. It means if you're not Shia, even though you were born in Iran and Iranian you cannot run for the presidential election. That's a huge when it's coming to discrimination, political discrimination.

The first stage started with establishing this constitution. The second stage I call it after 1980, when there was a militarization of ethnic group regions, particularly the Kurdish region. When the regime refused to respond to Kurdish demands for political autonomy and political rights, their response was the militarization of Kurdistan and cracking down on Kurds and all their demands.

The third stage started at the end of the Iran-Iraq war when (President) Rafsanjani introduced an economic policy that was centralized to Iran's central cities Karaj, Shiraz and Tehran. The policy put all economic development after the Iran-Iraq war into developing these areas. This is an example of economic discrimination.

When people in Western society talk about how economic sanctions have a severe impact on Iranian life, we have to distinguish between ethnic group regions and rest of Iran because these regions, the Kurdish region, has been under Iran's economic sanctions for four decades, and even goes back to the previous regime too. So we can say Kurds have been under economic sanctions in Iran for more than 100 years.

When we're talking about why we don't have a developed society, it goes back to when the nation state of Iran was established and when the budget of the country, a wealth country, was invested in central Persian dominated cities.

That's the reason why when you're talking about the Kurdish region, it's rare to find some educated people. Iran had 14 percent of its budget allocated for education but all of it was spent on the Persian dominated cities.

When you're talking about desecuritization, the regime tried during (President) Khatami's first period tried to desecuritize ethnic groups. Khatami opened a few TV channels and newspapers, but it was a short period. They soon decided 'No, we cannot deal with ethnic groups because the foundation of the regime doesn't work this way'. So they shut down all these channels and desecuritization of ethnic groups under the Islamic regime was discontinued.

Khatami, and almost all presidents in Iran since 1997, have been trying to use this desecuritization policy to get the ethnic groups vote. And even (President) Rouhani used that. And they admit that. It's not my or other academic people's word - the securitization of ethnic groups in Iran. The regime admits that the ethnic groups issue is securitized in Iran. They cannot solve this issue. That is why I say it is impossible with the Islamic Regime's foundations and constitution, well, it's not easy to desecuritize ethnic groups.

But what is important here, what is definition of the desecratization? Desecratization means you remove issues from security back into normal politics. Don't talk about ethnic issues as a security problem.

People in the Islamic Regime, address all demands from the Kurdish population as a threat to the national security, a threat to the Iran sovereignty, a threat to the Iran territory. They call ethnic group activists, foreign agents, or terrorists, or separatists. All this rhetoric used by the regime for years, for decades, has influenced the population too.

The securitization process is not only the government. It is the population too. Through rhetoric, the government has been successful to convince the part of the population that this part of the country (Rojhilat) is a threat to Iran's national security. So that's how the Islamic Regime been securitizing Kurds and other ethnic groups in Iran. It's not just Iran. Turkey does the same. Syria does the same.

Gina: How do you solve this problem? Because we're going to be running out of time soon. Sorry to cut you but how do you solve this securitization?

Shukriya: Because the problem started with the nation state – the establishment of Iran, in Turkey too, in Iraq and Syria too, I call it an incomplete nation state establishment. When Iran turned from empire to nation state, only one nation's identity, language, history, myth, became this nation's identity. In political analysis they call it 'dominant ethnicity'. The dominant ethnic ID becomes the national ID, and the different ethnic identities vanished. That's the reason Persians say we are not ethnic group. We don't have that identity because we are not ethnic. They are ethnic, but they are the dominant ethnic group.

And when this nation state was established based on one ethnic group, the other ethnic group's identities automatically become a threat to national security. Because their identity and their demands challenge the nation state's identity. That's the reason.

Gina: Now what do we do about it?

Shukriya: There's thousands of research about how we can fix this issue. Many, by mistake, say "Okay, how about sharing the economy, developing this area?" No, that's not going to work. Based on the recent development and political research, power sharing and political autonomy and political rights is the solution. Political rights, political power of the Kurds in Iran is the solution.

Gina: So how do you gain this political power?

Shukriya: We are sure that under the Islamic Regime we cannot achieve that power. So for the future we need to change the regime in Iran, but we don't have a united opposition against the Islamic Regime. Other ethnic groups don't trust the Persian opposition groups because they are still under the influence of Islamic Regime (or the monarchy). Kurdish demands and other ethnic groups' demand are called separatist. Besides that, unfortunately, most in the Opposition live in a Western country. They are mostly educated, have a degree from the best university. I can see people even from Harvard University, when they're talking in English, they are the most democratic people. They are modern, looking for Human Rights stuff. But when it comes to talking in - I don't know, it's weird - when they talk in Farsi, they're going back to the same dictatorial mentality that they grew up in, under this government's influence. They don't respect the demands of ethnic groups in Iran. And that's the reason we don't have a clear vision for future for Iran: this empire that didn't collapse. But if it is going to survive the people must live together with more rights, political rights, or it's going to be collapse like a Soviet, like other empires. The Ottoman empire. And be divided into new states or nation states. That's not clear for me.

But what I'm worried about is, if the opposition don't address this topic correctly, we will see a civil war in this country, which is not going to help Kurds, because Kurds don't have any ally in the region. If any war happens in Iran, I do believe the first people who will be attacked and who will be the victim of this civil war will be Kurds.

We are good fighters, that's true. But we don't have other countries' support that maybe other ethnic groups in Iran, or the central government have to stop a crackdown our people. And I don't want to be independent (or autonomous) by killing millions of Kurds in Rojhilat to achieve that goal of the nation state. My first priority, as one individual from Kurdish society is how I can protect my society and how I can find a way to achieve Kurdish rights without sacrificing millions of Kurds' lives.

I will stop here and please feel free to ask any question you have during this hour conversation, and I will provide more as needed. Thank you.

Gina: I reckon an international webinar that includes Kurds, Arabs, Baluch and all the other ethnic groups in Persia or a series of webinars where they can talk across countries - you know in the diaspora, because you can't do much talking inside Iran, would be one way to

go, wouldn't it? Unfortunately, I've been told, in Australia there are not many Arabs and Baluch from Iran. But I'm sure there are in America.

Shukriya: Actually, it's good point, because you compare Arabs in Iran with the Palestinians, the way Arabs support Palestinians, but they don't support Arabs in Iran. It's an interesting topic. I always challenge that.

So why are other countries not supporting their own ethnic groups in Iran, the way Turkey support Azerbaijanis, the way the Republic of Azerbaijan support Azerbaijanis in Iran? We don't have support for Arabs inside Iran from Arab countries,

That's based on each country's nation and national interest, the way they put together their own foreign policy, and they seem willing to deal with the Islamic Regime and see Iran as a weak state in the region. So that gives them the upper hand in the regional competitions. I do believe that's the reason they don't support that much.

01:14:51.130

Dr Sherko Kirmanj

Gina: Okay, look, we're going to go on to the next last-but-not-least, Dr. Sherko Kirmanj, a civil engineer with a PhD in International Studies and an author of four books and six book chapters, his topic is the rogue elephant in the room - the divisions between Kurdish political organizations despite them having achieved miracles in the last 32 years. These miracles were only possible because Kurds were organized, and at a critical time, collaborated with each other. In turn, this enabled outside forces, like the US-led coalition, to work with them. Hence, Dr. Sherko has bravely agreed to discuss strategies to minimize divisions and enhance cooperation between KDP, PUK and PKK, and between Rojava and Bashur. So go ahead, Dr. Shekhar.

Dr Sherko: Thank you very much, Gina. And thank you very much Kak Zirian and Hazhar. Thank you to Kurdish Lobby for organizing this seminar.

In fact, because of the time, I will be probably just only focusing on what is going in Bashur, because it's going to be really complicated if you talk about Bashur and Rojava in one go.

So I'll be focusing on Bashur, the division between PUK and KDP. To start with, I asked this question to my friends on Facebook. And to be honest, most of the respondents were not very positive because they basically thought that PUK and KDP are not the tools, or they are not the political parties that will be compromising or be able to lead the Kurdish cause.

However, taking in the reality of the situation, that at the moment they are leading the government and they are in power, I will talk about how we can do something about approaching or bringing PUK and KDP together for the sake of the entity that we have in Bashur.

I personally believe one of the major issues that is facing these two political parties and in fact, even the PKK, when it comes to the PKK and KDP's relations, is what I call in Kurdish 'Ba shaytan krdini away dika', or 'the demonization of the other'. Which means that how the KDP see PUK as Shaitan, as a devil, or evil, and PUK sees KDP as Shaitan.

As a consequence of this, what has happened in the last few years, in the last decades actually, maybe even go back to before the establishment of the KRG, that each party, I mean PUK or KDP, tries to either eliminate the other one, or marginalize the other one. And in this process of eliminating the other one or marginalizing the other one, it makes them rely on a foreign power, or rely on a regional power. And normally it is either Turkey or Iran. And when Turkey and Iran come into the game, into the arena, Kurdish parties become instruments or tools to implement the goals and interests of these foreign forces, which is 180 degrees contrary to the goals and interests of the Kurdish nation in general.

Turkey and Iran, and to a lesser extent Iraq and Syria, want to weaken the PUK and KDP. They only support them to stand against each other. For example, Turkey, which is known to support the KDP against the PUK and PKK, never wants KDP to become the dominant force in the Kurdistan region. The same is true even for Iran when it comes to supporting the PUK. Therefore, any aid or support received by the KDP from Turkey or the PUK from Iran, is only provided to serve the interests of Turkey or Iran. Clear evidence of this was when Turkey backed down in its support of KDP on the eve of the referendum. The dominant or regional forces support the Kurds' political parties only against each other, not for the sake of the Kurdish cause.

The solution is that both PUK and KDP must avoid consulting the regional powers on internal issues because whenever they come in into the arena, they just make the situation much worse. So the PUK and KDP's first move should be to avoid consulting Turkey and Iran especially because the PUK and KDP are running a government in Bashur. I don't mean that they need to cut ties or raise wars against Iran and Turkey, but not to go and consult on internal issues.

The other issue, which I think it's very important for Bashur, is the need to institutionalize the Peshmerga forces, meaning basically forming a force that is a Kurdistan force rather than forces affiliated with one political party. The Peshmerga forces should be created from compulsory recruitment as needed, where elements from different ethnic and religious and sectarian backgrounds join the force. I mean from all sections of Kurdistan society. This helps integration of Kurdistan society, as in this case Yezidis, Turkmen, Kurds, Christians, people from Sulaimani, people from Zakho, people from Kalar, people from Koya - they join one force and that helps the integration of Kurdish society. This new national force, the Peshmerga force, should be created and organized by law, and the fighters of the PUK and KDP should not be part of this force.

In other words, partisanship should be prohibited in this established force. Weapons in the hands of political parties makes the possibility of civil war always in the air.

I would like to suggest a few other things to revitalize the experiment that we have in Bashur - to help us achieve self-determination and to help us re-establish our status that we had, because the current conditions are really bad.

I think one of the things that we face in Bashur is the marriage between the business elite and the political elite. That marriage needs to be terminated.

The other things that I would like to suggest is establishing a Nation Building Board. A Nation Building Board needs to look at how we can build a nation in Kurdistan, just like Behrouz mentioned - especially in Bashur, because we have (regional) institutions. So it's not only building a nation from down up, but also from up down.

I think we also need a Strategic and Critical Issues Board to identify the issues that need a consensus, need support from all political parties, especially when it comes to issues related to the (Baghdad) central government.

We also need probably a National Media Board. In Bashur we don't have a national media. All the medias that we have are political or partisan medias. And when you look at the Kurdish media in Bashur every day, you see issues looked at from the perspective of the political parties, and also sometimes from a personal perspective, rather than a group perspective, or a national perspective.

I don't know how much time I have, but I think one of the things that we need to do in Bashur is diversify the Kurdistan Region's economy by promoting and supporting non-oil sectors. What is killing us in Bashur is relying so heavily on oil sector, and especially nowadays, because Bashur cannot export its oil (since March) so it relies on Baghdad for a budget or it relies on Baghdad (for everything).

And that has put the Kurds in Bashur in very weak position. (We need to) create a more attractive investment environment. It's very, very important. I mean, just recently I was listening to a Kurdish economist in Bashur and he was telling us that ten years ago 30 percent of investment across Iraq was happening in Sulaimani. Now it is about 5 percent. Imagine how much we lost in the last few years because of not having a creative or attractive investment environment.

So how we can go ahead with bringing PUK and KDP together? I think what I'm going to suggest is something that comes out of the tribal mentality that dominates the Kurdistan Region. So I would like to apologize for this, but in reality we have two political parties dominated by the tribal mentality. What I'm suggesting comes out of the reality, not what I would have wished. I think the KDP leader, Masoud Bazani, the father, needs to visit Sulaimani and hold a meeting with Bafel Talabani to assure PUK that they will not push further marginalization on the PUK. Because the further KDP marginalizes PUK, the further PUK strengthens its ties with Iran.

And the same thing happens with KDP. The further PUK pushes KDP, the further the KDP goes towards Turkey. So I think what Barzani needs to ask PUK is to stop supporting the Shia parties (in Iraq), in return for having a more balanced distribution of the region's budget - more balanced in terms of the projects that we have in the region. Because that's what the PUK is claiming, that the budget is not balanced or evenly distributed.

Based on this understanding that neither party can sideline other ones, I think maybe a new agreement between PUK and KDP is important. From 2005 to 2014, both parties had a power sharing agreement that was not the best that we wished for as Kurds, but at least it kind of worked and put the Kurdish position much better than what we have now.

So I think a visit by Barzani to Sulaimani can basically start the real rapprochement between KDP and PUK. And the KDP and PUK must be made to understand that if they are not united, or they are not agreeing on a unified platform, they will be forced to make more and more concessions to Baghdad, which will further reduce their personal, party, and national position, not only in Kurdistan and Iraq, but also in the region, and the world. Thank you very much.

Gina: Thank you Dr. Sherko. When you say PUK should not rely on the Shia militias, what about KDP not supporting Turkey in attacking PKK? Because that's what a lot of people think they're doing.

Dr. Sherko: Same thing. Same thing. I think it's the same thing. It all comes back to what I firstly mentioned is that 'Ba shaytan krdini away dika' - seeing each other as existential threat. So the PUK sees KDP as existential threat and the KDP sees PUK as existential threat. That's what makes them affiliate with Turkey or Iran. Yet, we all know that the Turkish forces, the Turkish army has bases in Bashur, and that's a threat not only to PUK or PKK, but it's a threat to our national interest. It's a threat to Bashur as an entity, and it is a threat to the Kurdish nation.

We know that Bashur doesn't have that much option. They need Turkey to send the Kurdistan oil to Europe and to other countries. And now for the budget, for the development, they need Turkey. They didn't have that much economic connection with Iran because we know Iran's situation in the global stage. But when it's come to the political party like PKK, KDP, and PUK - I do believe Kurds need to play smart in the region. Because if you're trying to use the KRG territory, Kurdistan Regional Government's territory against Turkey, that's not really a smart move because Turkey is going to attack KRG easily when Baghdad doesn't support KRG. Iraq is willing to see that kind of the conflict or bombing of the KRG.

Secondly, when Iran uses these militia groups like the *Hash al Shaabi* and other even Turkey affiliated groups like the new Turkmen' sradical parties against the Kurdistan region, you have to be really smart and you have to know what is the situation of the KRG and the PUK and KDP. In this situation, are you going to be more burdensome or are you going to make their job easier? That's a problem, when it's coming to competition among Kurdish parties, they don't understand that.

Like in Rojava, you cannot say "we need to have competition between Kurdish parties". We have more than 13 political parties in Rojava, but the one in power is PYD. So you don't have much competition there because one party has full control of all sectors. They are not much open to different political parties taking political responsibility.

Shukriya: Kurds in Rojhilat have been successful in that policy. They have not been a reason for Turkey or Syria or Iraq to attack other parts of the Kurdistan. So I give them a really good mark on that, because when you're compare with PKK, KDP and other parties, you see Kurds in Rojhilat don't have that bad background, the historical background, when it's coming to hurting other political party or other parts of the Kurdistan. I think it's an important policy when we're talking about the competition between Bakur and Bashur - the way we've seen recently. I don't know how to describe a protest inside of Turkey. We see young people related to PKK, they have a protest inside Turkey and are saying and

chanting against Bashur and KDP, not Turkey. And to do this against Kurds - for me is really - I feel the pain in my heart when I see that kind of the video coming on social media. You are a Kurd in Bakur, you've been oppressed for years under Turkish authority, and now you are in the Istanbul Street or Diyarbakır, a Kurdish city in Turkey, and you protest against KDP in Bashur. I mean, something's wrong here. We have to change that policy. We have to be supportive of each other. We cannot attack each other to be the strongest party among Kurds, because first of all, we have to be strong for our enemy and on the international stage. Then if it's coming to competition, we have to have a different way to have this competition among each other – a political, democratic way, to achieve such a goal, such autonomy or independence in the future. Thank you.

Gina: Good point, Shukriya. And you, Hussein?

Dr Hussein: I was just going to outline that what Sherko said is something that has been happening for over 100 years. The Ottoman and Persian empires have been basically playing that game with Kurdish tribes. They always tried to make a balance between Kurdish tribes in a way that no one can win. Let's say if a tribal leader tried to control Kurdistan, either the Ottoman or Persian empires would help support other tribes to balance and then defeat that one. You have been having that kind of balance of power in Kurdistan starting with tribal leaders over 100 years ago and that balance has been transferred to Kurdish political parties.

Gina: Dr. Sherko, who would be responsible for making these lists of common interests, like core interests that all Kurdish parties could consolidate around? Who would do that? Who do you propose?

Sherko: Who do I propose to do that? As a person. You mean.

Gina: As a person or organization. It's one thing suggesting these things. Acting on them is the important thing. And I think you're absolutely right in all your bullet points. But who do you think is best positioned to do that?

Sherko: I'm afraid to say that it's still Barzani, the father, who can initiate something that can probably lead, especially in Bashur, and Kurdish worldwide probably the KNK can do something, perhaps. But also individually, people like Behrouz, why not people like Behrouz? We can do things.

And knowing that, or just listening two of our presenters mentioned the need to strengthen Kurdish civil society, so I think the pressure needs to come first from the civil society, individually and groups. We all can do something. We can pressure further the Kurdish political parties to agree on something, in our national interest. I mean, everybody can do. You can do something. Gina, also. One thing, as Kurds, as individuals or as groups, is to bring one international player, like a movie star, a Roberto de Niro, perhaps, or at least we need to convince one of the international players in terms of the country like Germany, or Italy, or France (to be an ambassador for Kurds). In this case, France is perhaps the best positioned at the moment.

We need as Kurds to initiate things. But at the same time, maybe we need to have a very

important actor, a very important state player like France, to pressure the Kurdish political parties to compromise, basically. Thank you.

Zirian: Gina, we have a lot of questions. Kak Nader and Kak Barzhou have their names up.

Gina: Can I just say, we are being very Kurdish here. We said we were going to be one and a half hours and now we're over our time limit. But hopefully people will be able to withstand another 15 minutes.

Shukriya: We've been Middle Eastern - not just Kurds.

(Laughter)

Zirian: So we'll allow Kak Nader to talk followed by Kak Barzhou.

Nader (KLA Treasurer): Can you hear me, Kak Zirian?

Zirian: Yes, very well. Okay.

Nader: I really enjoyed listening to all of you guys and watching you. I have a hypothetical question to all the panelists. And because I believe history will repeat itself, if we fast backwards to 2003, when the Americans were going to attack Iraq, and if we had Masoud Barzani and Jalal Talabani calling you guys into a room to ask for your opinion, what should we do? Should we democratise Iraq? Or should we talk to the Americans and say, "We'll help you if you allow us to be independent." Thank you.

Dr, Hussein: Can I answer? Gina?

Gina: Please...

Dr Hussein: I think my request would be "Please, please, don't form an Iraqi government." Because that's one of the great mistakes the Kurdish leaders did at the time, both Mr. Barzani and the late Jalal Talibani. They helped establish the Iraqi central government, then basically asked that government 'Please, give us our rights'. If they did not intervene, I predict that Iraq was going to be dismembered - you would have three states, a Shia state, a Sunni state and a Kurdish state. But unfortunately, both Barzani and Talibani, with encouragement from the United States, they helped form a central Iraqi government, which turned on them later to do what they are doing now. And this is not the first time. That has happened many times in Kurdish history.

Shukriya: Allow me to add a point to that. When the constitution of Iraq was established in 2005 and they voted for it there was an official referendum for independence in Kurdistan parallel to that constitutional vote, and more than 98 percent of Kurdistanis in Bashur voted for an independent Kurdistan. I was there.

So what happened? Iraq has the best constitution in the region. But with the people in power, with the involvement of Iran, with the mentality of the Shia, who came to the power for the first time - even during the Ottoman Empire they didn't have a power because the Ottoman Empire was Sunni, and they didn't allow Shia to be in power. So

when these people came to power as a puppet of Iran, the Tehran regime, they didn't allow this constitution to be applied.

And the reason most of the Kurdish leaders like Talibani and Barzani allowed - I don't call it mistakes because we have to go back to the circumstances of those days and they did not have support from international organizations, any international committee to support them for independence. I remember there were many arguments about 'Do we stay with Iraq to create a country while we establish our economic sectors?'

And there was a huge conflict between America and Barzani and the Talabani about the Peshmerga forces. The Americans wanted to dissolve the Peshmerga forces and it was one of the Kurdish conditions "We're not going to join a new government of Iraq if you don't recognize Peshmerga as the forces of Kurdistan'. It was a really bad situation at that time.

But for sure, if they had international support, and they have this opportunity, that they could declare independence, for sure that was the best option based on what we are seeing right now. The Shia are trying to dissolve this federal system in Iraq, which is the Iranian regime's plan. Even Iran has now ordered that Tehran regime's affiliated media are not to use the name of the 'Kurdistan Regional Government'. Instead, to call it the 'north of Iraq', which we have been seeing in Turkey. So now Iran's follow the same policy. Don't even mention it as a Kurdistan region. The name of Kurdistan is a heart attack for the enemy of our people.

But I mean I just wanted to add that based on the international circumstance like 2017, the voting for the Independence of Kurdistan - it was the most successful process in the Middle East. It was first time, which I wrote about. If this process has not been accepted by Western society, it means they don't accept the peaceful way of establishing a new state. You always have to go through war, conflict and this kind of stuff to establish a new state.

How about the democratic process - people voting for that? But, unfortunately, the western countries show -

Gina: Can I suggest to you there might be a more long term plan. Look at how the US has tried to get Bashur and Rojava together. They see the postage stamp size of Bashur. And really a successful Kurdistan needs a seaport, a Mediterranean Seaport. And if Rojava had gone to its full extent and if Rojava and Bashur had come together, you would have a viable state initially.

Oh, Dr. Sherko, what do you say to Nader's question?

Dr. Sherko: Nader's question was hypothetical, really. So it's not that easy to answer hypothetical questions. But honestly, I think, and I have said it and I have published Facebook posts on this issue, is that let's say as an expert on international relations and state building, I think all the states around the world have been established through crisis. So crisis leads to the establishment of states. The European states were established after 30 years of war of what's called the religious wars in Europe, that led to the of Westphalian agreement that established the new nation states in Europe. Most other states after that, as nation states, were established or formed after World War I, and the dissolution of empires like the Ottoman Empire. The same thing happened after World War II, when the

major international powers, the UK and France weakened and led to the establishment of many other states. The dissolution of the Russian empire or the Soviet Union led to establishment of many other states. The same thing with Yugoslavia.

I think in the last two or three decades, we had two opportunities in Iraq to establish a Kurdish state. One was when the Iraqi state dissolved after the intervention of Americans in 1991. But I think we had a better, much better opportunity in 2014, when ISIS came in and the Iraqi army dissolved one more time. What the Kurdish leadership did is basically waited until the Iraqi government strengthened, the Iraqi army was reformed, revitalized, and only after then, we tried to go for referendum. We should have just taken the opportunity in 2014, and declared Kurdish independent state.

So probably we need to wait for other opportunities. And I always say that the Kurdish people do not have an issue with the opportunities, but with missing opportunities. Thank you.

Gina: Thank you. What does Behrouz think about Nader's question? Behrouz, should the Kurds have gone for an independent state in 2005?

Behrouz: Actually, I study at geopolitic at university, but always I refuse to talk about geopolitical issues in the way that they do. So that's why I always try to put comment as a cultural person, as a part of civil society. But of course I'm not knowledgeable to talk about that and I prefer to talk about other issues. I like to focus on the society more rather than these big issues that I should go back to 2003 and 2005. But generally my perspective is a different one.

Zirian: It's already half an hour over the time Gina and I have a long list of questions. I can either read the questions and leave them unanswered, and everyone can go away and think about them, either for a future webinar or future report, or I can send them by email to the panelists.

Gina: What would everyone like - would you like to hear the questions now or do you need to go?

Zirian: I will just read them quickly and apologies to the attendees that we can't answer the questions. However, from Kava we had "What I understood from Dr. Hussein Tahiri is that Kurds need a project plan that is tangible, comprehensive, inclusive, and based on Kurdish national interest. But how Kurds can define Kurdish national interest and draw a conclusion on it? Do they have it? And if not, how can they pursue that?"

I'll move on. This is from Anonymous.

"I believe there is a lot to learn from the Ukraine War. How can the Kurdistan cause be navigated within the greater global struggles, in particular Ukraine, so we can attract similar support?"

Another question from Kava. "Mr. Boochani started by mentioning the need to empower Kurdish individuals to become a nation. But he only reminded us of all the shortfalls and

issues Kurds might have. Can you propose tools to empower Kurdish individuals and how to become the nation you describe?"

Ziran: I believe some of that was answered already.

Another question from Cyrus. "Very good point, Gina. A strategy for penetration into mainstream media is greatly needed. More Kurdish writers and content creators are required. There is a lot to learn from the developed political systems, including in the West. However, we should be in control in consultation with those organisations, while doing so, to build our democratic foundations and our future leaders."

A point from Parvin is "I agree with Shukriya that we Kurds don't have much financial resources and not many highly educated people compared to Persians. How many Kurdish millionaires do we have that are ready to support the movement? How many strong TVs and broadcasts in English and even in Farsi so the rest of Iran can understand Kurds? How many famous journalists do we have compared to Persians?" But he agrees "We could do more if we united."

Look, there are too many questions. I will randomly select them.

One of them says "I propose a naive proposal, top down and bottom up approaches to nation building would require internal, regional and international support. Is it fair to say we need experts rather than celebrities and individuals to have the systematic approach to nation building? Considering all these, do you think it is possible and more beneficial to create self-managed teams of experts, such as international law experts, economists, environmental experts, entrepreneurs, et cetera to help define the Kurdish narrative first and diversify socioeconomic and political aspirations for Kurds and then design a project to unite Kurds with aspirational, but also attainable goals. These expert groups can create an ecosystem interconnected by an ultimate goal of enabling the Kurdish issue to be advocated on international platforms and institutions and attract alliances at the internal, regional and international levels, while supporting global peace, regional security, and individual prosperity."

Gina: Fantastic idea but it would need quite a lot of resources to support it.

Zirian: Last one I'll read from Alison Buckley. "Dr. Sherko mentioned successful international support for the Palestinians. And Behrouz has mentioned getting Western people to network with Kurds. Should Westerners aid Kurds like they have Palestinians, or are there other ways?"

It's quite late. We're not going to answer these, but these are left with the panelists to think about either for future reports or future webinars.

Behrouz: Would you please give me 1 minute. According to my experience in Australia where I've been working, I'm only one person, but through my work I see that how it's really important that we create that connection, create that network, and how we can empower our nation. I'm just one person that I did some work with Aboriginal people in Australia. I did a (theatre) play with Aboriginal people in Australia. I did a book even. Recently, for example, with Rohingya, and with a platform in the Monash University with Hazeera people. I mean, I'm just one person that I see that, oh, I can create some

change. So just imagine if we Kurds in diaspora, we have this mentality to work with other people, other groups of people, other minorities, and we work together to empower each other. Definitely we are able to make at least Kurdistan, and Kurdish people, recognized internationally as a nation. That's really important. So we should work in that way. But I just leave the answers for the questions 'do we get independence? Are we able to do that?' to the experts. But my perspective is that we should change our perspective, the way we do activism. That is a way.

Gina: Yeah. Everyone can do their bit.

Behrouz: Everyone do a bit. That will be a big change.

Gina: Yep. Well, thank you, Dr. Hussein.

Thank you, Dr. Sherko.

Thank you, Shukriya.

Thank you Behrouz.

Also a big thanks to all my colleagues in KLA for making this webinar possible and of course, to all those who are listening - Thank you for your interest.

In a couple of days, the webinar recording will be available on the KLA website. Just look up Kurdish Lobby Australia. Please send the link to anyone you think might care about these issues. We are also hoping to publish a transcript of the webinar.

KLA realizes this webinar has only touched the surface. It seems the struggle for democracy and justice is never ending. And just as you don't expect military commanders to win wars without an army, we are hoping webinars on this topic will inspire people from all walks of life to think about what they are willing to do for the people of Kurdistan. Thank you, one and all, and goodbye for now.