

SADDAAM HUSSEIN the Fighter, the Thinker and the Man

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Part II

CHAPTER 10

Democracy and progress for the Kurdish people

It must be clearly stated that one of the major problems facing any political leader in Iraq was to find a democratic solution to the Kurdish question. Since the Abdul-Kareem Qasim era, and throughout the Arif family's rule (Abdulsalam' Arif-Abdurrahman' Arif) the mountains of Kurdistan in northern Iraq have known nothing but daily bloodshed, with no foreseeable end, between the Arabs and the Kurds.

The Baath Party has succeeded in establishing a complete theoretical, practical and political formula to solve this problem. This formula is considered a historical turning point, not only in the struggle of the Kurdish masses and their rightful nationalist aspirations, but also in the struggle of the Iraqi masses, Arabs and Kurds alike, to build a progressive democratic society which can serve as an example to other neighbouring societies in solving the questions of their own different nationalities.

This formula is embodied in the famous March 11th Proclamation.

The Baath Party's new formula was based on three fundamental premises defined by the political report from the Eighth Congress:

1) "Despite its accompanying historical environment, and despite its defects and reactionary and isolationist trends, and its shameful ties with colonial and reactionary circles, the Kurdish nationalist movement is essentially and fundamentally just that. It is a nationalist movement, which, within the limits of its demands for the legal and national rights of the Kurdish people in Iraq, and for autonomy in particular, has principled and realistic justifications. Within this framework, it is a fundamental part of the patriotic movement in Iraq “:

2) "The Arab Baath Socialist Party is a nationalist and human party with a socialist democratic doctrine. It is therefore completely natural for it to understand the legal rights of the Kurdish masses and to struggle to secure and guarantee these rights. When the party assumed control of the country between July 17th-30th, it had the basic responsibility of legally and constitutionally securing these rights”:

3) "In order to secure and guarantee these rights the Arab Baath Socialist Party is following a sound and democratic programme of sincere and positive cooperation with the leading Kurdish patriotic and progressive forces. This, again, is within the framework of joint patriotic action as represented in the Progressive patriotic and National front)."

When the March 11th Proclamation was made, giving full nationalist rights to the Kurdish people within the framework of the patriotic union for the Iraqi people, it was opposed by certain Kurdish, and Arab sectors. The Kurdish sectors surrounding their leader, Mullah Mustafa Barazani, who was a reactionary and feudalist overtly associating himself with the reactionary, Zionist and imperialist forces abroad, opposed the Proclamation because they wanted secession and not autonomy. Certain Arab elements, particularly within the Iraqi armed forces, even at commanding level, opposed it, or at least did not believe in its essence. This was because they were considering their own positions in the ranks, and regarded this Proclamation as "tantamount to stripping them of any means of self-defence because of the conditions prevailing before March 11th in the existing relations and within Iraqi society (2)". As Saddam Hussein himself said, "the party leader therefore had a difficult struggle with himself, and with society, to produce the Proclamation of March 11th, 1970 (3)".

However, the March 11th Proclamation, guaranteeing the national rights of the Kurdish people, was followed by a series of laws passed by the Revolution Command Council. These guaranteed cultural rights for all other national minorities in Iraq, which, in terms of population, have little weight. These other minorities had the right to be educated in their own languages, although everyone, of course, would still learn Arabic, to retain their heritage and traditions, and to express themselves through their own press.

The feudalist leadership of the Kurdish movement was not content to oppose the March 11th Proclamation, but recklessly took up arms against it. This leadership was surrounded by sectors of the Kurdish people, which, for historical reasons, were drowned in ignorance, fanaticism and religious loyalty to Mullah Mustafa Barazani. The open borders with Iran in northern Iraq helped them receive arms supplies, not only from the Shah, but also from the imperial front guard in the Arab area, namely "Israel". Northern Iraq thus became the site of counter-revolution against the progressive revolution in Iraq.

Despite everything, the revolution executed the plan for autonomy on the appointed date. It paid no heed to maneuvers made by the separatists, who were talking of marked borders and dividing the oil revenue between the Arabs and Kurds, as if it was a question of establishing a new state and not one of granting autonomy to a national minority within the framework of a single state. At exactly 12pm on March 11th, 1974, the Autonomy Law for Kurdistan was declared. It gave the representatives of the Kurdish Democratic Party two weeks' grace to join the Progressive Patriotic and National Front.

Barazani's representatives, however, of course gave no reply, even after the two weeks. They continued to take refuge in the mountains and maintain their ties with the Shah, and with Zionism and imperialism. The fight against their saboteurs naturally continued and grew more savage on their part. Autonomy had become a reality, and all their hopes of secession were threatened at the core. During one year of fighting, there were more than 60,000 casualties, of which 16,000 alone were from the armed forces. Large numbers of Kurds also fell, having been forced into a war, which had no future or interest for them. Over 14 years they made no gains, and could achieve no decisive victory with arms, no matter how much support their reactionary leadership hostile to national unity received from the forces of imperialism.

There was huge bloodshed, hopes were daily thwarted, and the need for developing the country grew.

Saddam Hussein believed that "decisive elimination of the renegades would not be decided by arms, but by policy. To the extent that this policy agrees with Arab and Kurdish interests, it can succeed in pushing the renegades to surrender (4)".

On March 6th, 1975, a meeting was held between Saddam Hussein and the Shah of Iran during the OPEC Summit in Algeria. They made an agreement to solve the problem of borders between the two countries, and have relations based on mutual respect for sovereignty.

The signing of these agreements by the two sides settled the border control, and put an end to the assistance being given to the reactionary pocket in the north. Barazani's stooges were destroyed, and Barazani himself fled to Iran.

Three years after these agreements were concluded, Fidel Castro said the following to Saddam Hussein:

- Your agreement with Iran was a wise step. -there was no alternative, and even though we were in torment over it, it was a wise and courageous decision.

- We have profited from the revolution and been able to concentrate on building socialism (5).

After the conclusive victory over the reactionary elements in the north there were those, both within and outside the Arab world, who thought the Autonomy Law had been revoked. Some states even enquired of the Iraqi authorities about what happened to autonomy after the 1975 victory. Saddam Hussein always replied: "We did not achieve victory that day merely as Ba'athist, or even Arabs, but as Iraqis, Kurds and Arabs. We had victory over ourselves in tackling the mistake, and over the agents who put themselves at the service of foreigners with the tacit agreement of Arabs, Kurds and the Arab Socialist Baath Party leadership, and with the backing of all progressive patriotic and national forces. We therefore had two victories, one voluntary, and one over ourselves. The deviant was driven out and destroyed, and those at fault withdrew under new conditions and facts.

There has been no change in our policy. The programme for autonomy is not something temporary to be lightly snatched away. Autonomy is rather a true expression of our triumphant programme, and we are at the peak of our victory when we take mature decisions to settle any Iraqi, Arab or international problem. Victory was not only in our solid will in the armed conflict, but is also, along with courageous political decisions, sometimes more valorous than any daring military decisions, however momentous. Autonomy was a brave decision, and was, is, and will continue to be a true principled decision for our Kurdish people (6)."

The victory of the Revolution in Iraq, however, over the most serious problems within her borders, has certainly not pleased various numbers outside the country, namely the reactionaries, imperialists, and the small remaining groups of Barazani chauvinists in Europe and the Middle East. The campaign against Iraq will intensify every time it makes a progressive, revolutionary or anti-reactionary and anti-imperialist move within the country. We will hear tales and stories about the resumption of fighting in the north, and about the migration of Kurds from Kurdistan to southern Iraq. Naturally, those who spread rumors will exploit any incident in the north, which has happened, or is likely to happen, in the area, which, for 14 years, had a war around which myths were fabricated. It is also possible that they will transform normal everyday events, such as the 10-20 kilo meters move inwards by those living on the Iraqi borders with Iran and Turkey to specially prepared model villages with facilities not even available near the capital, into a counter-campaign. With this, they would claim that the Kurds have been "moved" from their villages in order to be absorbed unnoticed amongst the Arabs. Such rumors and biased campaigns, however, do not cause worry, but perhaps instead give reassurance. Those responsible are always the advocates of counter-revolution, but only serve to show that the revolution is following the right course.

After the victory, Saddam Hussein confirmed to his colleagues the meaning of the revolutionary principle which endures in spite of, and perhaps because of, every victory: "Do not be affected by vanity, because you will get caught up in a whirlpool and lose the ability to see the correct goals. Do not lose track of the factors, which lead to victory, for they must evolve if the victory is to become permanent. The essence of these factors is to strive for your people. We don't just love the mountains in Northern Iraq because they are a part of Iraq, but particularly because they contain our people, and to defend our people we defend the mountains. Whoever defends the mountain but crushes its people cannot be triumphant, and you must fully recognize that you are basically defending your people who live on the mountain. (7) "

In the north of Iraq, neither the Ba'athist, nor the Arabs and Kurds alone were victorious. The prime victor was the principle of democracy, which was always, and still is, abominably defeated in more than one of the places in Iraq's vicinity.

NOTES

- 1) The political resolution of The Eighth National Congress, pp. 81-82.
- 2) Saddam Hussein, *op. cit.*, p. 38.
- 3) *Ibid.*
- 4) *Ibid.* p. 82.
- 5) From Saddam Hussein's meeting with Fidel Castro in Havana, December 1978.
- 6) Saddam Hussein, the full text of the press conference attended by 150 journalists from around the world on 18-7-1978, p. 23.
- 7) Saddam Hussein, *Khandaq Wahid Am Khandaqan fi Qadhayya al-Jabha al-Wataniyya (One Trench or two Trenches in The Issues of The National Front)*, Beirut, Dar at-Tali'a, second edition, p. 32.