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Political Islam, Kurds, and the West

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Abstract

The Kurdish struggle for self-determination has endured a century of oppression, marked by military attacks, cultural suppression, and environmental devastation. The emergence of ISIS heightened global awareness of their plight, drawing Western support. However, this backing is not a new phenomenon. Political Islam's rise and Western policies have intertwined with Kurdish resistance, leading to a "Catch-22 theory" where Western actions inadvertently fuel instability. Recent shifts in Western attitudes towards Islamist groups pose questions about future policies, including regarding the Kurds. Amidst ongoing conflicts like the Palestinian issue, there's hope for a more ethical approach prioritizing democracy and minority rights in the Middle East.

Keywords: Catch-22, Islamic Republic of Iran, Kurd, Political Islam

Introduction

For over a century, the Kurdish people have been caught in the crosshairs of regional and international power struggles. They have been denied their right to self-determination and even the smallest degree of autonomy. Their history is marked by military assaults, genocide, ethnocide, linguicide, economic embargoes, and the devastation of their ancestral lands and natural environment. It is appropriate to refer to their experience as the "Kurdish tragedy," a term that, paradoxically, 'conveys the gravity and significance of the violence, catastrophe, agony, and loss they have endured'(Poole 2005:1).

The emergence of ISIS (IS) in the second decade of the 21st century brought the Kurdish struggle into the global spotlight. ISIS posed a significant threat to the stability of the Middle East, prompting Western powers to provide support to Kurdish forces in the region against the terrorist group. Consequently, the Kurds and their courageous resistance gained prominence in international media. However, it is important to note that the Kurdish fight against Islamists and Western support for the Kurds were not entirely novel developments.

In this speech, I will begin by providing a brief overview of the rise of political Islam as a dominant ideology in the region and the Kurdish national movement's four-decade-long resistance against it. Next, I will examine the complex relationship between Western powers' policies and the fate of the Kurdish people in the region—a legacy that has created a predicament I label as the "Catch-22 theory". I will conclude the current map of the Middle East, the ascent of autocratic regimes, dictators, and Islamist groups, as well as the region's unstable security, can be traced back to this theory and policy.

Lastly, I will address the subtle shift in the United States' approach, as evidenced by the unspoken boycott of Islamists and the warm reception of leaders and movements previously shunned by the U.S. government. This raises the question of whether we are witnessing changes in the West's policy regarding long-standing conflicts in the region, including the Kurdish question. In light of the ongoing Palestinian issue, which has significant regional and international implications, there is hope that a new perspective will emerge—one that moves away from the outdated concept of stability and embraces a more ethical approach to redefining terms like democracy and inclusive policies for resolving minority issues in the Middle East.

Political Islam and the Kurds

Since the Iranian revolution of 1979, a heated debate has raged about the nature of Islamists who came to power in Iran and the rapid spread of their ideology across the region. Following the fall of the Iranian monarchy, the term "Islamic fundamentalism" quickly became a buzzword in Western journalistic circles to describe this phenomenon. Notably, the late Ernest Gellner, a dominant and persuasive British philosopher, authored an influential book in 1983 titled "The Muslim Society". Gellner's aphoristic writing style, marked by memorable quotations, helped convince many that a thirst for power, inherent in Islam from its inception, had been embraced by lower urban strata groups who opposed westernized rulers. He put it powerfully:

> This inner intensity [of 'divine nomocracy'] can be kept alive even after independence, fed by the jealousy felt by the lower urban orders when contemplating their co-national, co-religious, but nevertheless inevitably more or less westernized rulers. These lower urban orders continue to be politically impotent even after independence, and can only console or express themselves in terms of their Islamic purity: for a nationalist expression of the ressentiment is no longer open to them (Gellner 1983:66).

The idea that contemporary Islamic movements are inherent in the very nature of Islam as a religion has deeply influenced many political activities, journalists, and scholars. This raises the question of why, after nearly a century of political modernity in the Middle East, this ressentiment found expression in Islamic fundamentalism. Gellner's response was straightforward: "it is part of the essential nature of Muslim Society" (Zubaida 2009:xv). In reply to this assertion, Zubaida has argued that modernity led to the decline of religious authority, and consequently, "fundamentalism" is a product of secularization:

> The papacy continues to fight a rearguard action on some of these issues, but in the process is losing support and authority among the faithful. The fringe elements who refused to accept these reforms have become anomalous in Europe. These elements are the first

referents of the term 'fundamentalist': those who insist that the scriptures mean what they say. 'Fundamentalism,' whether Christian or Muslim, is essentially a phenomenon of secularization (Zubaida 2011:11).

Zubaida further contends that ressentiment against westernized and tyrannical rulers has long been a prominent aspect of popular sentiment. To be more precise, this popular and political sentiment found expression in secular nationalism and leftist forms in the Middle East before the rise of modern Islamism(Zubaida 2009:xv). This does not deny the connection between modern Islamism and fundamentalism in general but highlights the distinction between conservative fundamentalism, such as Wahhabism and Shia traditional thought in Iran, and modern Islamism in the latter half of the 20th century, which has consistently favoured religious customs over political action.

To put it in the nutshell, the concept of political Islam or modern Islamism was an attempt to insist that to the core of ongoing "Islamic phenomenon are well-known economic and demographic problems and the policy dilemmas they pose for the government". The central ideological concern of Islamists is to redefine Islam in the light of contemporary knowledge and the predicament that 'Islamic' societies had faced in order to seize state power and generate the project of re-Islamisation to wipe out modernism. Its emergence was a result of a specific process of modernisation and interaction with the west, and should be understood as a product of modernity in the region (Zubaida 2009:xvi). Although since the interaction between the Western colonialism and 'Islamic world' political Islam, as concept and theory, has been discussed and circulated among of educated strata, but as a popular movement only gained thrust from 1978 when a group officers seized power in Afghanistan which led to occupation of the country by the Soviet Union. Its spread from the late 1970s and early 1980s was a result of the Western power policy in the region. The US immediately begun discussing aids and support for incipient rebellion. The US was a in favour of 'good jihad' against the Soviet invasion and facilitated a horizon for promotion of Islamism in the whole region. From 1980 Afghanistan became the centre for the emergence of global village of Islamic fundamentalism. Then came the Iranian revolution of 1979 that endorsed further Islamism in the region. Although the Muslim Brotherhood from the 1960s had started activities in Kurdistan as well but the ideology of political Islam neither before nor after the Iranian Revolution has gained a foothold in Kurdistan.

Khomeinism as a form of Political Islam

How can one assess Khomeini's concept of *Velat-e faqih*, his doctrine of government. To what extent Khomeini's theory is in conformity with traditional Shia fundamentalism and political authority in the time of occultation 12th Imam. In general Shia *ulama* reject the legitimacy of power in the period of the occultation of the Hidden Imam. However, in Iran the majority of *ulama* had supported Mohamad Reza Shah and the hereditary monarchy with some quantum of conviction, sheer opportunism, or a mixture of both. Their maximum expectation from the Shia king was to ensure the laws promulgated be in conformity with Shia tenets.

In his lecture in Najaf in 1969 Khomeini had not only advanced a new theory of Islamic government within the Shia philosophical perspective but also had experienced a kind of radical change in comparison of his first political book, *Kashfal Asrar* (Revealing of the Secrets) published in 1940.

Put it simply, Khomeini argues an 'Islamic' society cannot function without a state and concludes the separation of Islam from state 'and its relegation to a system of worship and ritual is completely alien to the spirit and teaching of Islam'(Zubaida 2009:16). Challenging the dominant viewpoint of *ulama* about government and their conciliatory approach towards the king and the institution of monarchy, he boldly argued it is not enough that the laws promulgated to be in conformity with the sharia; the state must be Islamic in its substance and form. Then he had formulated the Islamic government in both respect as a Guardianship of the Jurist:

> In view of the fact that the government of Islam is the government of law, only the jurisprudent, and nobody else, should be in charge of the government. He is the one to undertake what the prophet undertook without adding anything to it or striking away from it. He is the one to establish the strictures as the prophets established them, to govern as God has ordered, to collect the excess monies of people as this was done in the days of the prophet and organize the treasury and be trusted with it (Khomeini 1979:55–56).

To sum up, Khomeini in *Kashfal- Asrar* in line with the majority *ulama* had recognised the monarchy institution as de facto and did not oppose it but had tried to push for the conformity of the regulations in the country with Sharia. In Islamic Government his main concern first, was 'who is entitle to rule, second, what prerequisites are demanded by sharia for such a person." As a result, his definition of Islamic government took a radical departure from Shia thought. According to his new theory Islamic government is the one that not only its rulers should enjoy from specific characteristics which are requested by Sharia but also the manner of grabbing power, the structure of political system and method of administration of the country is defined by the texts too. He had, therefore, concluded monarchy is by its nature illegitimate. What makes his definition different from the other proponents of Guardianship of the Jurists theory is his emphasis over necessity of revolution to form such a government; an assertion that was not made by any of his predecessors.

Before the Revolution and even after it, Khomeini's theory of government faced rejection by a majority of ayatollahs. Some openly opposed it, including Ayatollah Al-Qasim al-Khu'i and Ayatollah Kazim Shariatmadari, while others, such as Ayatollah Gulpaygani, Ayatollah al-Qummi, al-Shirazi, and Ayatollah al-Najafi al-Mar'ashi, maintained a discreet distance.

The Islamic Republic of Iran and the Kurds

The opposition forces in the Iranian revolution of 1979 were a diverse alliance, including radical left-wing, secular nationalists, moderate Islamic groups, and Khomeini's followers, all united in their opposition to the Shah's regime, which they viewed as aligned with foreign interests. Against the odds, power eventually concentrated in Khomeini's hands, partly due to his resolute leadership rooted in self-reliance and his unique theory of government.

Khomeini and his followers benefited from the disarray among left-wing and moderate Muslim groups, who failed to analyse the essence of Islamist policy and struggled to unite. They did not recognize the need for a theoretical framework for the post-monarchy Iranian state and underestimated the impact of Khomeini's political Islam and its unifying force. Even after their disintegration due to repression by the new Islamic order, they failed to grasp the departure in Shia thought regarding government introduced by Khomeini.

The Kurds actively participated in the 1979 Revolution and, following the fall of the monarchy, non-Persian ethnic and national groups demanded democratic rights and self-rule. Under pressure from these groups, especially the Kurds, the Provisional Government acknowledged the country's multi-ethnic character. The initial optimism after toppling the monarchy led to hopes of reconstructing society on democratic foundations, potentially granting autonomy to minorities.

During the revolution, the Kurds gained control of two Kurdish-populated provinces, Kurdistan and West Azerbaijan, in northwestern Iran, filling the power vacuum. They briefly enjoyed de facto autonomy in these provinces. However, fundamentalists gradually advanced to take control of the entire country.

Secular forces lacked intellectual depth, failed to promote democracy, and embraced anti-imperialist rhetoric, allowing fundamentalists to rise. By autumn 1979, fundamentalists ousted moderate Muslims and liberal nationalists, dissolving the Provisional Government. They later marginalized left-wing and radical groups, and by the early 1980s, they also dealt with liberals, radical Mujahedin, leftists, and ethnic opposition in various regions. The situation in Kurdistan was different.

The Kurdish national resistance, rooted in secular and democratic principles, clashed with the fundamentalists' strategy. While the Kurds sought democratic and pluralistic political structures with regional autonomy, the fundamentalists prioritized religious values over ethnicity and language. The Provisional Government, deriving authority from Khomeini, failed to offer a political resolution to the Kurdish question. The Kurds, as a national minority, advocated for "Democracy for Iran and Autonomy for Kurdistan" under the leadership of Dr. A.R. Ghassemlou. They needed a credible alliance but couldn't find one among existing Iranian forces at the time.

Overall, the Kurds emerged as the main opposition to the Islamists and their Islamisation project. They fought to prevent a looming tragedy in Iran. The KDPI persisted in its strategy: democracy for Iran and autonomy for Kurdistan. Kurdistan was the last bastion against the impending catastrophe orchestrated by the Islamists. The Kurds fought hard, and Iranian Kurdistan remained a warzone during the Iran-Iraq War, facing attacks from both Iraqi and Iranian forces. Iranian Kurds endured isolation from the rest of the world, including other Kurds, particularly those in Iraq.

By 1984, the Islamic Republic of Iran had militarily prevailed, with immense Kurdish casualties and a death toll exceeding 50,000, mostly civilians. Tens of thousands were displaced, some still living as refugees in dire conditions in Iraq's Kurdistan Regional Government[i]. Iranian Kurds constituted the majority of the 100,000 victims affected by chemical weapons attacks during the Iran-Iraq War. The Iranian regime also assassinated numerous Kurdish Leaders and activists, including Dr A.R. Ghassemlou and Dr Sadegh Sharafkandi.

The Islamic regime's pursuit of an Islamic government led to the terrorization, expulsion, and killing of members of various social groups. Kurds bore a significant share of this policy of liquidation. While Western officials recognized the potential geopolitical disaster of the Islamic Republic, they neither supported Kurdish resistance nor condemned the regime's policy of ethnic cleansing during the 1980s.

The Kurdish struggle for freedom in Iran continues to this day. Despite the regime's military victory, it lost the ideological and political battle against the Kurds. The Iranian regime claims to have resolved the Kurdish issue by suppressing Kurdish resistance. However, the Kurdish question remains a significant political challenge for the regime over the past 43 years. The recent "Woman, Life, and Freedom" uprising demonstrated that Kurds continue to oppose Islamism in Iran. In a region dominated by political Islam since the Iranian revolution, the Kurds, not only in Iran but also in Turkey, Iraq, and Syria, have emerged as the leading force advocating for a secular and democratic alternative to political Islam.

The Kurds and the West: A Century of Predicament

The history of Kurdistan from 1918 to the present day revolves around a predicament brought about by the policies of Western powers in the region. The aftermath of World War I marked a significant turning point in Kurdish history, resulting in a division that had never been achieved by any war, invasion, or occupation in over 1,000 years of Kurdish existence.

While some scholars and Middle East experts believe that the establishment of an independent Kurdish state had a fleeting opportunity after World War I, a closer examination of the great powers' policies and true intentions suggests otherwise (Edmonds 1957; McDowall 2000:50–115; O'Leary, McGarry, and Salih 2006:4). Despite strong convictions, proponents of this interpretation cannot ignore the contradictory actions of the great powers during the critical period between the Treaty of Sèvres (1920) and the Treaty of Lausanne (1923), which dashed Kurdish aspirations.

Between 1918 and 1923, the Allied powers sought the support of Kurdish forces, proclaiming protection for the Kurds. However, by 1920, circumstances had changed, with the withdrawal of the US president from peace talks and French reluctance regarding Kurdish self-determination. British policy toward the Kurdish question remained implicit. Consequently, the focus shifted from Kurdish rights to Kurdish protection. This ambiguous policy is reflected in Articles 62 and 64 of the Treaty of Sèvres in 1920. Article 62 envisaged "a scheme of local autonomy for the predominantly Kurdish areas," while Article 64 stated that within a year, the Kurdish people within this scheme would have the right to petition the League of Nations for independence. Many scholars who support the mentioned interpretation rely on Article 64 to support their argument. However, the British soon backed down and informed the Turkish delegate that: "In regard to Kurdistan, the Allies would be prepared to consider a modification of the Treaty in a sense in conformity with the existing facts of the situation, on condition of facilities for local autonomies and the adequate protection of Kurdish and Assyro-Chaldean interests"[ii].

In reality, "the League of Nations did not express any internationally valid general definition of the rights of minorities. Instead, it dealt with the problems and the protection of minorities on a case-by-case basis" (Chaliand 1994:90). The protection of minorities guaranteed by the League of Nations quickly collided with the principle of state sovereignty and ultimately depended on each state's goodwill.

By mid-1923, the Western powers had succumbed to pressure from Kemalist forces and abandoned even the idea of Kurdish protection. In the Treaty of Lausanne (1923), the clauses concerning minority rights only mentioned non-Muslim religious minorities, such as

Armenians, Greeks, and Jews. Astonishingly, the Kurds, the largest ethnic and linguistic minority in the region, were not even mentioned in the treaty. From that day forward, Turkish governments used the claim of sovereign territorial authority to commit genocide against the Kurds in Turkey.

The only prominent figure who openly condemned this act was Nelson Mandela in 1992, while he was still president of South Africa. He declined the Atatürk Peace Prize offered by Turkey for his lifelong struggle for freedom. Mandela confronted the Turkish government for its hypocrisy and rejected the prize. However, he was immediately labelled a "terrorist" due to his support for the Kurdish cause and was also called an "insolent African" for turning down such a prestigious award.

Following the Treaty of Lausanne, the British, the dominant player among the Allied powers in the region, followed a similar course of action in Iraq. As McDowall aptly puts it, "Britain found itself a compromised accomplice in Iraq's determination to integrate Kurdistan, deprived of any special status. It was a disappointing end to the lofty promises with which British political officers had entered Kurdistan in 1918"(McDowall 2000:117).

The British justified their policy toward the Kurds with what I call a "Catch-22 Theory," borrowing the term's connotation from Joseph Heller's satirical war novel[iii] . This theory posits that the UK's role in Iraq was divided between two perspectives. On one side, the Kurds were seen as an ethnic group with a distinct history, culture, and tradition separate from the Arabs. On the other side, proponents argued, and continue to do so, that Kurdish self-determination would endanger British strategic interests in the region. As one critic noted, "The British could have achieved the same objective by creating a Kurdish State under their own mandate and control. They actually toyed with the idea for a while and gave half-hearted support to Kurdish autonomy, too. But they did not proceed for several reasons, with the most important being their fear that the creation of a Kurdish state would antagonize Turkey and Iran, upset the balance and stability in the region, and ultimately benefit the Soviet Union more than anyone else"(Atarodi 2003:210).

Beyond the political aspects, this Catch-22 theory also has a hidden epistemic dimension. The United Nations Covenants on Human Rights declared, "All people have the right of self-determination." However, it has often been argued that it is not clear who should be considered a people, especially apart from former colonies. This ambiguity in the declaration allows some to question the principle of self-determination and its ethical role in addressing the question of minorities in multi-national countries, adopting a pragmatic and political approach instead.

To address this ambiguity, one can emphasize the ethical aspect of the principle of self-determination and ask what it means not to be self-determining. The answer is clear: it means living under a form of government determined by others, an absence of a particular kind of freedom. Applying this approach to the Middle East, there are national minorities that, since the end of World War I, have been denied this freedom and have been forced to live under governments determined by others. The Kurds and Palestinians, notably, fall into this category as the largest groups facing this predicament.

In international law, the term "self-determination" may carry ambiguity, but those who take a pragmatic approach cannot deny that the Kurds and Palestinians should be regarded as

distinct peoples. However, as the peacemakers of 1918 recognised, the principle of self-determination was a double-edged sword, and given the complexity of the region, it could come at a high cost. To navigate this issue concerning the Palestinians and Kurds, they employed the Catch-22 theory: paying lip service to the rights of these minorities but taking no practical action to defend their rights and causes. They often discussed the two-state solution for the Israel-Palestine conflict but never took concrete steps to resolve it.

In practice, they relegated the principle of Kurdish self-determination to a general notion of human rights within the national jurisdiction of the four sovereign nations of Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria. However, this scheme and objective have not been realized over the past century, and the Kurds have come to realize that it is ineffective. The reason is that all covenants of the UN on Human Rights combine the three notions of human rights, freedom, and self-determination. One cannot defend the human rights of a group of people while discouraging or denying their right to self-determination. As Seyla Benhabib recently argued, "the right to self-government is not just a right alongside all other rights. It is the condition for enjoying any right as a right rather than as a privilege that some authority might give or take away at will"(Benhabib 2017:33).

Thus, the tragic history of the Kurds continues. Geographically situated around the borders of the established nation-states of Turkey, Syria, Iraq, and Iran, the Kurds have faced persecution for their beliefs, culture, politics, and even language. On their path to political self-determination, they have experienced bitterness and a sense of betrayal by the West. Recently, events like the Iraq War in 2003 and the Arab "Spring" have brought war and instability back to the Middle East. Bringing stability to the region is a challenging and costly endeavour. Recognizing the necessity of democracy and human rights is a general statement, it doesn't apply to some countries with national minorities.

In these countries, bi-nationality is not possible. For example, saying the Palestinians and Jews both have the right to self-determination lacks substance, when the two movements are fundamentally incompatible and making either a two-state solution or a bi-national democratic structure unrealistic. Similarly, discussing democracy and human rights in Turkey and Iran, for example, lacks substance when rulers and dominant ideologies deny the bi-national character of these countries and maintain alleged homogeneity through force.

However, in the tumultuous past quarter-century of the region, Kurdish factions have emerged as formidable opponents of extremism, offering a potential for stability in a region torn apart by war and tyranny. It is our hope that progressive forces and liberal trends in Western countries will set aside their negative stereotypes of the Kurds and embrace their rights and aspirations for modernization and freedom.

Conclusion: The Kurdish Predicament and the Way Forward

Over the past four decades, political Islam has prominently featured in public discourse regarding the politics, ideology, and culture of the Middle East. However, as Oliver Roy observes, political Islam has not achieved success. Why? There are two key reasons. "Firstly, it is primarily an intellectual failure, as modern Islamic thought is built on a foundational premise that undermines its own innovative potential. Secondly, its failure extends to the political and

historical realms, as it has not offered a viable alternative in Iran or the wider region"(Roy 1994:ix).

In reality, political Islam has ceased to be a major geostrategic force. People throughout the region are resisting calls for the unity and reform of "Islamic" countries. "While North-South tensions will persist and can take on Islamic dimensions, the era of the Islamic revolution is now behind us" (Ibid: x). Consequently, the prospect of a democratic future for the region lies beyond Islamism. To embrace this potential, it is crucial for world leaders and diplomats to take action, facilitate dialogue, and broker a comprehensive reconciliation agreement. This agreement must address the legitimate concerns and aspirations of minorities in the region, leading to a fair resolution that paves the way for coexistence and mutual respect.

However, it is important to acknowledge that the international community has often failed to confront the grim realities of the region and take decisive action. The West has maintained a distance when urgent intervention was needed to protect innocent lives and ensure their safety. Consequently, the West's policy and achievements since the Gulf War have been unimpressive.

At the same time, the Kurds have consistently demonstrated their enduring role in the Middle East. They have embodied modern and democratic ideals during the last decades of the 20th and early 21st centuries. With Turkey's secular, parliamentary, and constitutional system declining, the West should recognize the Kurds as an alternative for democracy in the region. However, a question arises: will the West finally come to terms with Kurdish rights and abandon its policy of catch-22 to support Kurdish self-determination?

One may rightfully question whether I am overstating the role of the West while neglecting the complacency of Kurdish leaders and intellectuals in this ongoing struggle and tragedy. It is undeniable that Kurdish nationalist leaders and intellectuals have, in certain ways, collaborated in the continuation of the Kurdish tragedy. However, their complacency must be seen as a consequence of Western policies in the region. The actions of Kurdish political leaders and intellectuals, while not excusable, were constrained by certain Western perspectives. Perhaps they have never learned from Fyodor Dostoevsky's wisdom, in Crime and Punishment when he says: "To go wrong in one's own way is better than to go right in someone else's."

To illustrate, first, I will argue that from the end of World War I to the 1940s, they sought to gain support from Britain and France. They were promised support, only to be betrayed, leading Kurdistan to fall victim to Persian, Turkish, and Arab nationalisms. Second, after World War II, due to the legacy of the Kurdistan Republic resulting from Soviet policy in Iran, they turned to Russian Marxism. From 1947 to the end of the Cold War, they attempted to connect the unresolved and protracted Kurdish question with the ideology of Russian Marxism, tying Kurdish self-determination to the issue of socialism in these four countries. While this approach appeared powerful and alluring, it ultimately led to a political disaster for the Kurds, as it generated ideological and political inflation. In this context, inflation refers to a situation where individuals perceive greater value in their actions than actually exists. Kurdish intellectuals and most political leaders celebrated their approach, believing they possessed unique insight, while in reality, they were receiving standard treatment with inflated egos. Third, in the aftermath of the Cold War, realizing the impasse they faced, particularly in Iraq, Kurds once again sought support from Western powers, this time primarily from the USA as the dominant superpower, instead of Britain and France. This shift reproduced the same ideological and political inflation.

Undoubtedly, the Kurdish desire for self-determination has had a significant impact on the Middle Eastern states. However, one must question the extent to which and for how long the Kurds should bear the consequences of Western policy mistakes in the Middle East. For instance, when the expectations of the US and Britain, including the revitalization of Iraq and the installation of a pro-Western government, were not realized, they pivoted to appease the governments of Baghdad and Ankara instead of supporting the Kurds. Kurdish intellectuals should have realized by now that in situations where Western policy rationality and ethics diverge, they stand to lose the most. Consequently, the third perspective, currently followed by a considerable number of Kurdish leaders, may yield more disastrous outcomes than the previous two perspectives, as it is rooted in stronger self-deception.

It is now time for Kurdish intellectuals to chart their own course, free from external influences. They must challenge the security-based approaches constructed and maintained by Turkish, Iranian, Iraqi, and Syrian governments regarding the Kurdish question. Instead, they should demonstrate that the security of the entire region is, to some extent, contingent on the peaceful resolution of the Kurdish question. Furthermore, they must dismantle the catch-22 theory constructed by Western powers and make it clear that if the prolonged issue, the Kurdish question, remains unresolved, it will have truly massive regional and international consequences. Thus, they need to construct their own theory for emancipation. I hope this centre engages in this endeavour.

One might question again whether I am being overly ambitious and idealistic. I acknowledge that this summary of the Kurdish predicament and the proposed solutions may appear distant from the current political reality. However, we have gathered here to launch a research centre aimed at studying and finding a resolution to the mentioned Kurdish predicament. This entails producing a theory or knowledge capable of embracing Kurdish desires and aspirations, while also addressing the fear, danger, and denial that surround their biopolitics. Such a theory depends on reconciling the antagonism between these different elements, as articulated by Foucault:

> Knowledge is an 'invention' behind which lies something completely different from itself: a play of instincts, impulses, desires, fear, a will to appropriate. It is on the stage where these elements battle one another that knowledge is produced... It is produced not as a result of the harmony or happy equilibrium of these elements, but rather as the result of their antagonism, of their dubious and provisional compromise, of a fragile truce that they are always prepared to betray. Knowledge is not a permanent faculty; it is an event, or perhaps a series of events (Foucault 1989:13–14).

In closing, I leave you with this quotation and extend my congratulations for this initiative. May it open new horizons for an event that addresses the Kurdish predicament.

Notes:

i.   Sept Ans d'Aide Medicale au Kurdistan d'Iran 1981–1987', unpublished document housed in library of the Kurdish Institute, Paris, GEN. 1158, p. 28, and 23.
ii.   FO 371/6467 E 3357.

iii.   Catch-22 is a satirical novel that published in 1961. The novel is set from 1942 to 1944. It mainly follows the life of Captain John Yossarian, a U.S. Army Air Forces B-25 bombardier. Most of the events in the book occur while the fictional 256th US Army Air Squadron is based on the island of Pianosa, in the Mediterranean Sea west of the Italian mainland. It also includes episodes from basic training at Lowry Field in Colorado and Air Corps training at Santa Ana Army Air Base in California. The novel examines the absurdity of war and military life through the experiences of Yossarian. Increasingly consumed by fear, Yossarian plots a way out of the war or at least out of combat. A defining moment came to him when he feigns illness and spend his days in the hospital. But that comes with its own problems. Being in the hospital means being in close proximity to other men. Some of whom are seriously wounded and only compound his fear. Others he just can't stand. Then there's the complete lack of sympathy for his situation from Dr Daneeka who refuses to ground him. The Doctor explains to Yossarian that even faking insanity won't save him. 'You mean there's a catch?' 'Sure, there's a catch,' Doc Daneeka replied. 'Catch-22. Anyone who wants to get out of combat duty isn't really crazy.' As a result, there was only one catch and that was Catch-22, which specified that a concern for one's own safety in the face of dangers that were real and immediate was the process of a rational mind, or was crazy and could be grounded. All he had to do was ask; and as soon as he did, he would no longer be crazy and would have to fly more missions. In other words, a catch-22 is a paradox. In the novel it states that a soldier can return home from war if he's deemed crazy. A soldier would have to be crazy to want to fly planes in war. However, if they're sane enough to know that flying a plane in war is crazy, they are ruled sane. It's a real conundrum. The term catch-22 entered the English language meaning a problematic situation for which the only solution is denied by a circumstance inherent in the problem.

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