The West should support Kurdish independence – with conditions

By Geoffrey Clarfield

In the light of America's just war against the Islamic tyranny of Iran it seems that the US with help from Israel, may be on the verge of supporting a Kurdish uprising in the Kurdish dominated part of Iran.
As Iran is a multi ethnic country, any future and fair government will have to take into account these regional ethnicities which includes Turkish speaking Azeris in the northeast of the country. Some time ago I wrote an article on Kurdish independence with my former conservative colleague, Salim Mansur (who has gone back to the Tucker Carlson crowd after a few brief years among real conservatives). Nevertheless, the article stands and is relevant today. By the way, after WWI, the League of Nations and Britain (who held the mandate for Palestine and Mesopotamia) promised the Kurds independence but then reneged. They have and continue to pay a heavy price for this betrayal.

> *From the National Post October 17th 2017 by Geoffrey Clarfield and Salim Mansur: The world's major powers need to recognize that the historical project called Iraq has failed*
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> *Last month, Iraqi Kurds voted overwhelmingly to separate from Iraq. This week, the Iraqi government responded by sending troops in to take control of Kirkuk – a city that Kurdish fighters seized from ISIS three years ago – as well as several oil fields.*
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> *The world's major powers, including Canada, need to recognize that the historical project called Iraq has failed and support Kurdish independence. At the same time, the international community should take steps to ensure that the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) will do right by its*

citizens if it does become a national government.

Members of the Iraqi forces stand next to rocket launchers heading to Kurdish peshmerga positions on October 15, 2017, on the southern outskirts of Kirkuk. The presidents of Iraq and Iraqi Kurdistan held talks to defuse an escalating crisis. PHOTO BY / AFP PHOTO / AHMAD AL-RUBAYEAHMAD AL-RUBAYE/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Kurdistan is one of three regions of Iraq. Like the Catalans of Spain, the Kurds yearn for independence that would liberate them from their traditional status as second-class citizens of Iraq, an Arab League state. Although Muslim, the Kurds are not Arabs, and they lean towards secularism. They lived in their mountainous homeland for thousands of years before the Arabs came to Iraq from Arabia.

Iraq was fabricated at the whim of the Hashemite dynasty and British interests in the 1920s. Faisal, son of Sharif Husayn of Mecca, was installed by Britain as king in Baghdad, to rule over the majority Shia Arab tribes of lower Mesopotamia, the minority Sunni Arab tribes of central Mesopotamia, and the Sunni Kurdish tribes of the north along the Turkish frontier. In effect, modern Iraq became a country of three disparate tribal groups held together as a nation-state, to

which none of the constituent parts owed any loyalty.

After the second Gulf War of 1991, Kurdistan and its newly established government, the KRG, acquired military, economic and de facto political autonomy from the rest of Iraq and the Arab political elites of Baghdad.

Today, there are more than 2,500 foreign companies doing business in the Kurdistan Region, and the area is home to 31 independent diplomatic missions. There is nearly non-stop construction in Kurdistan's cities, and the first stock market is opening soon.

Like many Arab states, Kurdish society is tribally based; it's a place where family, lineage and clan carry a lot of political and economic clout. The two largest tribal groupings are the Barazani and Talibani clans. There is a historic rivalry between the Barzani clan's Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), and the Talibani clan's Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). The external support of Iran for the KDP, and of Turkey for the PUK, makes KRG's internal situation difficult. A proxy war resulting from the competing interests of Tehran and Ankara could tear the Kurds apart if the West – and the U.S. in particular – does not send a message that this would be unacceptable.

Since then, the Kurdistan Region's economy has exploded and frantically modernized, largely due to the vast oil and natural gas reserves in the region. Every day, Kurdistan produces approximately 400,000 barrels of oil, which it exports directly to Turkey (although the Turks are now threatening an economic blockade, because they too oppose Kurdish independence). In defiance of the ongoing Arab League boycott of Israel, the KRG also sells oil to Israel, which has supported the Kurdish struggle for independence since the 1960s.

Kurdistan is an oil-rich region. As in many Middle Eastern

countries, oil has proven to be both a blessing and a curse. It has allowed the tribes or factions that control the oil to spend their wealth however and on whomever they want, without accountability to all citizens.

It is estimated that the KRG spends more than US$700 million per month of its oil wealth on salaries and pensions for roughly 1.4 million "civil servants," who serve a population of just eight million.An administrative sector that grows at the expense of the productive sector is a familiar malady of such economies, and has brought ruin to many developing countries. If Kurdistan is to avert this problem and emerge as a successful democracy, it will have to overcome the tendency to put as many people on the public payroll as possible, without any thought as to whether it's good for the state and economy.

The U.S., the U.K., Canada, and their international allies should be willing to recognize Kurdish independence in exchange for certain concessions. They should demand that the Barzani and Talibani clans rise above their tribalism, and insist upon military modernization that crosses tribal and ethnic lines. They should insist that the KRG undergo external auditing, and be transparent in administering Kurdistan's oil resources (ensuring that the poor are not left behind). And they should urge government reforms to reduce a bloated public sector.

Under the right conditions, the Kurdistan Region has the potential to be a prosperous, successful nation. Our own government would be wise to responsibly support their efforts in a region that is otherwise littered with failed political opportunities.

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