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Attacking the victims

Kani Xulam

Blaming the Kurds for the dispute over Kirkuk is to miss the forest for the trees, says Kani Xulam in his response to Sheth Jerjis
1 - 08 - 2007

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Editor's note: As language is invariably tied up in debates over place and identity, the article has retained the Kurdish and Arabic transliteration of the city's name, Kirkuk.

I could not finish reading - at least in one sitting - Sheth Jerjis's piece, "[The fate of a city](#)". It was not the length of the article that threw me off, nor was it its strident pro-Turkmen sentiment. What put me off was the startling conflation of culprits, the misidentification of Kurds as "new" Baathists and, worse, a longing, albeit unstated, for the good old days of Saddam Hussein and his bloodthirsty thugs. My disagreement aside, terrorism.openDemocracy deserves kudos for providing a forum for such of views, for they are much less dangerous aired than kept within.

Mr. Jerjis has one thing right: the [wealth](#) of the city, the oil that lies under it, is the source of its grief. But anybody who calls himself a human rights researcher needs to approach this issue with the scalpel of a physician rather than the saw of Mr. Jerjis. That means putting the wrongs of Saddam Hussein under the microscope alongside those of the Kurds, if the latter ask for more than their fair share. And it is not just history that needs to be aired in a dispassionate fashion here, but human nature as well. But don't look for these things in Mr. Jerjis's piece.

Kani Xulam is a Kurdish activist and director of the [American Kurdish Information Network](#).

He is responding to Sheth Jerjis, "[The fate of a city](#)," 24 July 2007.

According to Mr. Jerjis, the city of Kirkuk doesn't belong to the Kurds. His source for this "declaration" is his own very website. Imagine if I said the world belongs to me - with apologies to Descartes here - not because I understand it, but because I say so. This kind of language can be expected from a bigot who mistakes his rancour for logic, but Mr. Jerjis is the chairman of the Iraqi Turkmen Human Rights Research Foundation, a non-profit in Holland.

What does he read at that foundation? Has he ever bothered to look into the eight [Anfal](#) campaigns that targeted the Kurds for extermination in Iraq? Does he know the Arabic word, *wafidin*, a reference to the Arab "newcomers", who were brought to Kirkuk on the [orders](#) of Saddam Hussein? Alas, his pen has no ink for them; whatever it has is reserved for the Kurds. Can Kirkuk ever make the leap to "peace and stability", the things that he says he wants, with such fuzzy analysis?

Light must be shed on some of his most glaring omissions. The Kurds were the only supporters of the invasion and occupation of Iraq, he says. Does he really mean that? He pays the Kurds a big compliment in so saying. I have some good news for him: we are not as strong as he thinks! [Ahmad Chalabi](#) is not a Kurd. Nor is [Sayyed Abdul-Aziz Al-Hakim](#), the head of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq. These men played a bigger role in bringing Uncle Sam to Baghdad. The Kurds simply became the accidental beneficiaries of a botched policy. But, alas, such an explanation does not fit the conspiracy theories that

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abound in west Asia, which Mr. Jerjis, it seems, subscribes to as well.

But finger pointing will not get us anywhere. When Saddam Hussein was in power, neither the Kurds nor the Turkmen counted for much in Kirkuk, which the dictator called "at Tamim". Now that Americans are in Baghdad, the city has regained its old name, and though it has been stumbling, there has been some progress. The [elections](#) of January 30, 2005, questioned by Mr. Jerjis - and this writer will not second guess him by saying they were "free and fair" - were, nevertheless, if analysed in their proper contexts, the fairest and the freest in the history of Iraq. In the city of Kirkuk, 26 of the 41 contested council seats went to the Kurds. Turkmen won nine seats and Arabs got the remaining six. It is the job of these elected deputies, with the help of those of us who call ourselves human rights activists, to find common ground in shaping the future of the city.

But it is not Mr. Jerjis alone who opposes the Kurdish claims to their lands or the scheduled referendum to ratify their gains. The congressionally mandated [Iraq Study Group](#) has urged for a delay as well. Somewhat gratuitously, the [International Crisis Group](#) has gone even further and asked for a revamp of [Article 140](#) of the Iraqi Constitution to placate the Sunni Arabs at the expense of the Kurds. Turkey has also joined the fray and declared Kirkuk a part of its sphere of influence.

Why this enmity and indifference towards the Kurds? If I could paraphrase Winston Churchill, I would say: never have so many tried so hard to deny so few their most basic human rights. It makes a sad commentary on the state of affairs in west Asia.

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