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CHAPTER TWO: THE KURDS' RELATIONSHIP WITH THE WEST

NARRATOR:

While the Kurds have a long history of learning to live with their enemies, they have an equally long history of being betrayed by their allies. Sadly, even the great democracies of the west have not always lived up to the promises they've made to the Kurds.

During the nineteen-seventies the United States supported Kurdish autonomy in northern Iraq in order to pressure Saddam Hussein during his negotiations with Iran. But as soon as agreement was reached the Kurds were unceremoniously abandoned by their U.S. allies and exposed to the full fury and vengeance of Saddam's regime.

Later, in the nineteen-eighties during the Iran/Iraq War, the Kurds were again caught up in the struggle between nations. And again the world stood by as Saddam destroyed over four thousand Kurdish villages, unleashing poisonous gas assaults against not only the people, but the forests and the wildlife as part of his 'Anfal' campaign to obliterate the Kurds and their way of life.

INTERVIEW: DR. ALI SAEED MOHAMMAD

Through this Anfal campaign more than one hundred eighty thousand young men, women, children and old people – they were all taken by military vehicles and transported into the middle and the south of Iraq and later they disappeared, to be found after the Operation Iraqi Freedom in mass graves.

INTERVIEW: JANO ROSEBIANI, KURDISH FILM MAKER

The Anfal meant killing all the men – and the women and the property are yours to keep. But it came to a point where they couldn't even do all of that. They just started killing everyone in groups...men, children, women, elderly...and sometimes not even killing, just burying them alive. That was the Anfal.

NARRATOR:

In nineteen ninety-one, at the end of the first Gulf War, America encouraged the people of Iraq to rise up and overthrow Saddam. In response, Saddam sent out his helicopter gunships to annihilate the Kurds who had answered the call and taken America at its word. This time a million and a half refugees streamed into the mountains where over five hundred a day proceeded to die from starvation and exposure during harsh winter storms.

INTERVIEW: PROFESSOR NAZAR AMIN

A large number of people died. A large number of people got ill. People went and stepped on mines, and mines exploded on them.

It is extremely painful. It is extremely stressful. As I said, you forget about yourself. You are trying your best to do something for your children, and yet you cannot do anything. It is really frustrating. You feel impotent. You cannot do anything.

NARRATOR:

Secretary of State, James Baker, flew into the mountains of Kurdistan and saw with his own eyes the Kurds' desperate condition.

At the behest of then British Prime Minister John Major, Britain, the United States and France responded by creating a safe haven for the Kurds with a 'no fly' zone north of the 36th parallel, and a brand new era for the Kurdish people began.

INTERVIEW: DR. ALI SAEED MOHAMMAD

People for the first time in Iraq had access to satellite dish. People could watch CNN, UN news, BBC, every channel. People could go to any shop and photocopy a letter, which was not allowed before without the knowledge of security. People could use a mobile phone.

NARRATOR:

For these past fourteen years America and Britain have proven to the Kurds that they are at last the friends they always hoped they would be. And the Kurds have proven that they are, indeed, a committed force for freedom and democracy in a part of the world that desperately needs it.

When Iraqi Kurds finally gained regional autonomy and the ability to choose their own form of government, they chose democracy.

NARRATOR:

For the first time in history the Kurds set up their own civil democratic structures, and further developed their judiciary, police and security forces.

Over the next thirteen years of freedom they worked tirelessly to become a relative oasis of law and order, winning the reputation of being the safest region in all of Iraq.

So strong has Kurdish security become, fewer than two hundred coalition troops are currently stationed throughout the entire Kurdistan Autonomous Region. And as of the spring of 2005, not a single coalition soldier has lost his life on Kurdish soil.

INTERVIEW: DR. ALI SAEED MOHAMMAD

We hate this terrorism which is present in the middle and the south, and the Kurdistan region can be regarded as a very safe place where you are welcome.

INTERVIEW: JANO ROSEBIANI, KURDISH FILM MAKER

The Kurdish people in general are secular. They're less attached to religion than, let's say, the Shittes of the south or the rest of Iraq.

INTERVIEW: IAN KLAUS, TEACHER

Any image of Islamic extremism, any image of some sort of crisis or conflict between religions of the west, say Christianity, and Islam just doesn't exist here.

INTERVIEW: PROFESSOR NAZAR AMIN

If you look at the university campus, forty-five point five percent of the students are females. And the same is true...most of the teachers are females.

INTERVIEW: IAN KLAUS, TEACHER

I teach classes where there are as many women as there are men. Where women are no more hesitant, or just as likely, to raise their hands and offer an opinion as are the men.

I could not live for an extended period of time in a place where women weren't part of society, part of daily life, and weren't given at least a good opportunity, and an opportunity that was improving.

NARRATOR:

It should not be surprising that for Kurds human rights are paramount, given that for over thirty years their most basic right to life was so cruelly abused. Of all peoples, the Kurds have no desire to return to the horrors of the past.

But neither will they ever forget them. Their memories are embedded deep in the lines on the faces of the elders, along with an unshakable gratitude to their friends in the outside world –

To those who have at last made it possible for this generation of Kurds to emerge from the shadows of history and create a place where the wounds of war are being healed, and newly elected leaders are working together to build a democratic, pluralistic and prosperous country.

The Kurds and their friends bore witness to the fruits of Kurdistan's struggle against tyranny when in the summer of 2005, Masoud Barzani, a Peshmerga and a modern Statesman, became the first President of the Kurdistan Region.

In his inauguration speech President Barzani said, "This is a golden opportunity to benefit from the mistakes and the futile attempts of former regimes and bring about a brighter future in this country on the basis of fraternity and equality.

At his side was another Kurdish survivor of Saddam's tyranny, Iraq's new President, Jalal Talabani. Both presidents signify the pivotal role of the Kurds in the new Iraq.

Today the people of Kurdistan welcome the world to the 'other' Iraq, a region where disputes are solved with dialogue, not disorder...

(singing children)

...where children are being educated, not indoctrinated...

...where thriving businesses support hopeful families ready to realize the dream and lead the way toward a free, federal, democratic Iraq.

ENDS



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