

Reflecting on the Centenary of the Treaty of Lausanne: The Kurdish Struggle and Unyielding Resilience

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Brief Analysis

The Treaty of Lausanne, signed a century ago, is often analyzed through the lens of geopolitics and its impact on borders and regional power dynamics. Now, it is crucial to shift our perspective and recognize the immense human suffering that resulted from this historic agreement.

The Treaty of Lausanne, signed on July 24, 1923, holds immense historical significance as the treaty that ended the First World War and dissolved the Ottoman Empire. However, the treaty's effects on stateless Kurds are often overlooked. For Kurds, Lausanne is a historical injustice that is full of poignancy and tragedy. By replacing the 1920 Treaty of Sèvres, which had promised the creation of a Kurdish state in the Middle East, the Treaty of Lausanne represented a crushing blow to Kurds' aspirations for self-determination.

The drawing of new borders and the consolidation of power by regional states in the aftermath of the treaty left the Kurdish population fragmented across Iraq, Iran, Turkey, and Syria. This denial of statehood entrenched the Kurdish struggle for recognition and autonomy, setting in motion a series of tragic and horrifying events that would profoundly impact the lives of millions of Kurds for decades to come.

When examining the consequences of the Treaty of Lausanne, it is vital to transcend the traditional focus on geopolitical considerations. While geopolitical stability is important, it should not overshadow the human suffering endured by millions of Kurds as a direct result of the treaty.

Under the regimes of Iraq, Iran, Turkey, and Syria, Kurdish communities have endured persecution, displacement, and oppression. These governments have implemented discriminatory policies, stifled cultural and political rights, and launched military campaigns against the Kurdish people for years. Particularly in Iraq, the Kurdish population was subjected to systematic persecution, discrimination, and violence for decades.

In 1988, Kurds even faced the horrors of genocide at the hands of Saddam Hussein, who unleashed a reign of terror against Iraqi Kurds, resulting in mass killings, forced relocations, and the infamous chemical attacks on my hometown Halabja, killing at least five thousand people and wounding more than ten thousand. Miraculously, my family and I survived these atrocities, though we witnessed the loss of countless loved ones and endured unimaginable suffering, while vowing to keep their memory alive.

Like many others, my family also experienced the heart-wrenching reality of displacement multiple times, torn from our homes and forced to seek safety in unfamiliar lands. I have been a refugee four times, three of them before the age of eleven. Each displacement only deepened the wounds, leaving scars that endure to this day and profoundly impacting my identity and sense of belonging. Yet as survivors, we have navigated the challenges of adapting to new environments—struggling to rebuild our lives with each uprooting while carrying the weight of the atrocities witnessed and mourning the loss of loved ones.

The experiences of my own family as three-time refugees, and the remarkable resilience displayed in the face of adversity best exemplifies the far-reaching consequences of the treaty signed by foreign powers to serve their own interests at the expense of millions of Kurds.

As we reflect on the significance of this centenary, it is peremptory that the international community acknowledges the injustices suffered by the Kurdish people and stands in solidarity with our cause. Governments and organizations must actively work towards addressing the grievances of the Kurdish community, promoting peaceful resolutions and supporting efforts for justice, reconciliation, and the establishment of a homeland that respects their rights and aspirations. The resilience of the Kurdish spirit should serve as an inspiration for the world, reminding all of the indomitable human will to survive and overcome adversity.

To move forward, it is imperative to recognize the human cost of political decisions so that we can develop a more holistic understanding of historical events and their long-lasting impacts. Accordingly, we should reposition our perspectives and prioritize human experiences. This entails challenging the dominant narratives that focus solely on geopolitics and instead recognizing the interconnectedness between political decisions and their human impact. In this way, we can only foster a greater sense of empathy and understanding, and we can ultimately work towards more peaceful and inclusive solutions.

The Treaty of Lausanne cast a dark shadow over the aspirations of the Kurdish people, denying us our rightful place in the international community. The subsequent oppressive policies implemented by the Iraqi, Iranian, Turkish and Syrian regimes have left an indelible mark on the lives of millions of Kurds. Yet, our resilience and determination remain unbroken.

The struggle for recognition and self-determination continues to drive the Kurdish people's collective spirit. If we are not given statehood, then it's the responsibility of the international community to at least ensure that our political, economic, and cultural rights are granted and protected within the current political borders that forcibly divide the Kurds. As a survivor of genocide, I call upon the international community to stand in solidarity, acknowledging our history and working together to create a world where the Kurdish people and all oppressed communities can thrive with dignity and peace. ❖

RECOMMENDED

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Hamdi Malik

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