Chapter 2

Kurdish Leadership Style and Internal Disputes

Despite differences in their personalities, Talabani, Iraqi president and leader of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), and Barzani, president of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and leader of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), stand almost shoulder to shoulder to defend the Kurdish issue. While Talabani is described as a liberal and Massoud Barzani as a conservative, both stand accused by the Gorran Party leadership of turning the regional government into a family business, empowering and enriching members of their own families, relatives, close associates, and party members and alienating nonpartisan Kurds. The two parties alternated the premiership of the KRG between members of their own families and relatives. While Massoud Barzani had a firm grip on power in the region, through the KDP, Talabani was increasingly losing power to Gorran, which splintered from the PUK in 2006.1

According to James Calderwood, reporter for the National United Arab Emirates, Masroor Barzani, son of President Barzani, had stated that “he eventually wants to hold his father’s position as the elected leader of Iraqi Kurds.”2 He added that he had his own ambitions to become the KDP leader and work for his people. He had also said, “I think the Kurds deserve to have their own independent state, like any other nation.”3 Hopefully, Masroor Bazani wants to replace his father through the ballot box and not through inheritance and family tradition like other Middle Eastern rulers who faced large-scale uprisings in 2011, leading to the downfall of Bin Ali in Tunisia, Husni Mubarak in Egypt, and Mu’ammar Qadhafi in Libya.

Despite differences in the two leaders’ educational backgrounds, upbringing, and mannerisms, both Barzani and Talabani have shown
good quality of leadership for building the fundamentals of a semblance of a modern state. Barzani appeared to be a fast learner and a capable individual for being able to muster the skills required for administering his region and handling its foreign affairs. While projecting himself as a democrat, he continued to exercise a large degree of authoritarianism.

Talabani and Barzani have become more alike over time, as evidenced by their survival instincts and pragmatism during 1991–2011. Yet, suspicion and mistrust between the PUK and the KDP led to the emergence of shadow governments and institutions in the Kurdistan Region. Matt Frazer, *Press TV* reporter, opined, “In KRG, all the institutions of government—whether military, national resources, or education—fall under the direct control of either of the two ruling parties.”4 The PUK-controlled Sulaimaniya province has established numerous educational institutions, similar to those in the KDP-controlled provinces of Arbil and Duhok, leading to misallocation of resources.5

Instead of duplicating each other, some of these educational institutions with similar programs ought to be combined in order to create centers of excellence in specialized areas, making better use of the limited financial and academic resources to prepare students to deal with real-life problems, conducting rigorous research, and encouraging them to travel from one province to another.6 This would help in bringing the Kurds of different regions closer together, harmonizing their relationships, improving public communication, and preventing regionalism. Students from Sulaimaniya should seek curriculum offered by the universities in Arbil and Duhok and vice versa.

Despite many attempts to reunify Kurdistan’s administrations following the 1994–1998 civil war, Sulaimaniya was still controlled by the PUK and Arbil and Duhok by the KDP. The reunification process was slow and painful due to the lack of trust between the KDP and the PUK. Sulaimaniya, the PUK power base, is increasingly coming under the influence of Gorran because of its anticorruption stand.

**Interparty Disputes Boil to the Surface**

The simmering tension between Nawshirwan Mustafa, Gorran leader, and Massoud Barzani and Jalal Talabani came to the open on February 17, 2011, shortly after the uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt against their repressive rulers. Under the pretext of organizing demonstrations in solidarity with Egyptian and Tunisian demonstrators, Mustafa’s followers revolted against the KRG, hoping to bring down the Barzani-Talabani-led government. About 3,000 demonstrators took to the streets of Sulaimaniya