Beat: Politics

Kurdistan should never be treated as a bargaining chip

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USPA NEWS - A State That Starves Its Own People Cannot Claim to be fair-- Kurdistan should never be treated as a bargaining chip.

To the people of Iraq and the international community we say: the time for silence has long passed. What is happening to the people of Kurdistan is not a bureaucratic hiccup or a fleeting financial dispute; it is a calculated campaign of economic repression targeting an entire population for who they are, not for what they've done. In short, this is a collective punishment, in all but name!

This is the same population that played a pivotal role in shaping Iraq after 2003. Kurds were frontline defenders against ISIS, opening their homes to over a million displaced Iraqis. They helped draft the 2005 constitution—the very document now being violated with impunity. That constitution represented a promise to all Iraqis. Today, it is being abused or ,at best, ignored, as if it were never more than ink on paper.

On May 28, 2025, with a single letter signed by Iraq's top financial official, salaries were cut for 1.2 million civil servants, retirees, and families of fallen heroes in the kurdistan Region. These are not just numbers on a spreadsheet—these are lives. According to Kurdistan's Ministry of Finance, salaries have been delayed or withheld repeatedly for more than two years, leaving families struggling to afford the very basic needs. Public services, be they schools or hospitals, are buckling. Teachers, doctors, university professors—pillars of any functioning society—are forced to wait indefinitely, while Baghdad hides behind feeble legal pretexts and manipulates the Federal Supreme Court to justify these politically driven measures.

Meanwhile, millions of Kurdish citizens across Erbil, Sulaymaniyah, Duhok, and Halabja wait for their earnings. Hundreds of schools and clinics are on strike. The people of Kurdistan are not asking for special treatment—they are seeking equality, as guaranteed under Article 14 of the Iraqi Constitution. Yet, their rights are recklessly disregarded, and their livelihoods used as leverage.
A government that claims to represent a united nation cannot, under any moral or legal standard, starve part of its own population. A monthly salary is not a political weapon. It is a right. To deny it is to deny people their dignity. And to deny Kurds their basic rights is to continue a long legacy of marginalization—a legacy that many thought had ended with the fall of the old regime.

It is especially painful to witness this injustice carried out under the banner of reform. Since when did "reform" mean hunger? Is the strength of a political partnership now measured in meetings and handshakes, while children in Kurdistan go to bed on empty stomach?
Let's be clear, the Kurdish people have never been a burden on Iraq. They have been a source of strength and resilience. Reports from the United Nations and Human Rights Watch consistently affirm that Kurds are not a minority; instead, they represent one of the basic building blocks of Iraq's fabric. And under Article 112 of the Iraqi Constitution, they have the right to manage their natural resources. Baghdad's systematic effort to strip away this right—while simultaneously blocking oil exports and cutting budget transfers—has not only weakened Kurdistan's economy but also hurt Iraq's position in the global energy market.

And yet, despite all this, Prime Minister Masrour Barzani has chosen dialogue over escalation. He has engaged in intense discussions at home and abroad, visiting Washington, Berlin, and London to advocate for peaceful, constitutional resolutions. In May 2025, the U.S. State Department underscored the importance of honoring oil agreements and protecting the federal structure that guarantees Kurdistan's autonomy under Article 117.

The salary agreement reached in February 2025—ensuring a full year of wages for public servants in the region—was not a gift. It was the result of months of difficult negotiations and unrelenting public pressure. But even that agreement is now being diluted and delayed, exposing Baghdad's unwillingness to treat Kurdistan as an equal partner in Iraq's future.
Let's not be naïve- what is happening is a political punishment that threatens not only Kurdistan's stability but Iraq's as a whole. As the

World Bank and Transparency International noted, no country could thrive—let alone survive—without justice, equity, and true partnership between Its people.

Prime Minister Al-Sudani and other leaders in Baghdad must understand that Kurdistan is not a budget line to be negotiated away. It is a strategic partner that has contributed to the very foundations of Iraq's post-2003 recovery. This is where resistance against ISIS began. This is where humanitarian corridors were created. And this is where many Iraqis found refuge when their own cities fell to chaos.

To reward such sacrifice with economic coercion is not only unjust—it is dangerous. It is a ticking time bomb in front of our eyes. Courage and leadership are badly needed now more than ever!
Kurdistan is not just about salaries. It is about dignity. It is about the right to live, to work, to raise a family without fear or deprivation. It will remain the cornerstone of any Iraq that aspires to be fair, stable, and united.

True partnership is not built on punishment. If justice and equality are not at the heart of Iraq's federal structure, then there is no partnership at all.

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