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## Security and Sovereignty: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Regional Stability and Homeland defense in Masrour Barzani's Discourse

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### Abstract

This study scrutinizes how the political language of Masrour Barzani has developed and legitimized the narratives of security, sovereignty, Homeland defense, and regional peace in the Kurdistan Region. This study explores the linguistic and ideological strategies employed to shape public perceptions of authority, unity, and national resistance in ways that are typically regarded as internal socio-political phenomena rather than external conflict. The study explores the extent to which political language weaponizes security and stability as cornerstones of national identity and governance under a lens of political sensitivity and regional complexity. The Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) study is grounded on the key socio-cognitive model provided by Teun A. van Dijk, integrating three analytical levels: first: discourse structures, linguistic devices like modality and personal hyperbole are used; second: cognitive models, ideological models as the positive self-representation and the negative other-representation are employed; and third: social practices, analyses how discourse produces power relations and social control. This multi-level framework enables the examination of the interrelationship between the way Barzani uses discourse to both reflect and construct social realities and mental representations. Using this approach, the research reveals how discourse both embodies and constructs cognitive beliefs and social power relations. It is concluded that Masrour Barzani frames ideological representations about leaders, people and enemies in a way that legitimizes Kurdish leadership, advocates for a united Kurdish front, and preserves resilience through the use of discourse. Furthermore, his speech incorporates this larger communal identity, centered on regional stability and the constitutionality of his rule, pre-conditioning public consciousness for the provision of justifications and the establishment of a lasting peace in the Homeland.

**Keywords:**  
Critical Discourse Analysis,  
Homeland Defense,  
Masrour Barzani,  
Security,  
Sovereignty.



### About the Journal

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## 1. Introduction

Security, sovereignty, and regional stability are three of the most oft-expressed and invoked ideas across many national political discourses, particularly in areas where the national or regional situation is fraught with competing internal dynamics and factional governance challenges (Clingendael Institute, 2023). These motifs are particularly meaningful in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, where questions over political unity, sovereignty and social cohesion persist.

These are the issues that a political leader, such as Masrour Barzani, alludes to in his public speeches, offering security and homeland defense as the indispensable pillars of the Kurdish nation's existence and progress. A close analysis of how he constructs and communicates these themes in his speeches provides insights into the details of nation-building and governance in contested regions.

This study addresses the following research questions:

1. What are the implications of Masrour Barzani discourse to construct security-sovereignty-stability themes in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq?
2. What are the linguistic and ideological strategies to shape public perceptions around authority and national unity?
3. What role do these discourse strategies play in reinforcing social cohesion and legitimizing political power?

Accordingly, this research studies selected texts, speeches, interviews and formal statements delivered by Masrour Barzani sourced from public media Based on confirmed social network sites, official Kurdistan Regional Government sites, and spoken addresses made on television between calendar years of 2021 and 2025 as the main sources of data collection, (Kurdistan Regional Government, 2021; Kurdistan Regional Government, 2024, Kurdistan 24, 2024; Kurdistan 24, 2025). Using the principles of Critical Discourse Analysis and the socio-cognitive model of Teun A. van Dijk, the study examines how the intersections of language, cognition, and social power act in relation to a social entity.

The value of this study lies in revealing how Masrour Barzani's political discourse legitimizes authority, shapes public perceptions, and fosters resilience and unity in the Kurdistan Region. Its value also stems from analyzing discourse structures, underlying mental models, and social implications, showing how political language is key to the functioning of government, social order, and the national identity.

## Theoretical Background

Drawing on critical discourse analysis, security discourse theory, and a socio-cognitive approach developed, the research establishes the conceptual tools used to examine how language constructs sovereignty, security, unity, and political authority in the Kurdistan Region.

*Critical Discourse Analysis* (CDA) is an interdisciplinary field of research that focuses on investigating and analyzing the properties of language as a form of social practice where power, dominance, and inequality are constructed, challenged, and reproduced. The objective of CDA is to make the hidden ideologies that often permeate discursive practices visible (Fairclough, 1995; Wodak & Meyer, 2009). CDA, both as a theory and as a methodology, considers the role of language in the creation of social and political realities. Therefore, it both examines how discourses operate to preserve power, fail to challenge certain readings/meanings of how to interpret concepts like security or sovereignty, and reproduce mutually agreed upon conceptions of power relations. Since CDA sees discourse in relation to society (reflection and construction), it seems appropriate to use CDA in the analysis of political communication, national rhetoric, and even institutional discourse.

Critical Discourse Analysis is used in this study to examine what language is for and how meaning is created, so it will be used to introduce the political rhetoric of this project of Masrour Barzani. It helps analyze the use of language as a tool for creating national identity, rationalizing security practices, and establishing political leadership authority. CDA holds a social view of discourse in which discourse has an essential role in constituting an image of reality to the public, particularly during crises and conflicts (van Dijk, 2006; Fairclough, 2003). It shows how rhetoric can construct normalcy of control, justify specific meanings of sovereignty, and offer a desired narrative of stability and resilience in the Kurdistan Region.

Furthermore, *Security Discourse* is the purposeful use of language to format an issue, actor, or event as a threat to the public well-being or integrity [not to be confused with unity achieved through manipulation of language] of a community or state. Security as a speech act. The Copenhagen School of Security Studies deconstructed the idea of security as merely a reaction to an objective danger, instead identifying security as a 'speech act', in which political actors announce something to be a security problem to legitimize exceptional measures (Buzan, Wæver, & de Wilde, 1998).

Additionally, *Sovereignty* is conventionally defined as the highest authority within a given territory and is generally exercised by the highest executive power of a given state over its people without external interruption. In fact, it is modern political theory that is beginning to consider sovereignty more as a construct, a discursive and representational entity (Agnew 2005). In this perspective, sovereignty is understood as a symbolic and performative act, with language being the focal point in making assertions of sovereignty, legitimacy, power, and dominion.

A further associated term, arguably even broader than protection, is homeland defense, defined as "the national effort to protect territorial integrity and maintain domestic stability. In a political sense, this idea also serves not just as a defence policy, but as a careful deployment of language - leaders tie together the phrases 'homeland defence' through very specific language, metaphors, and rhetorical devices designed to legitimate authority, galvanize popular opinion, and convey particular images of collective vulnerability or solidarity (Van Dijk, 2002). It includes both material practices (e.g., military defense) and discursive strategies (e.g., public narratives of threats, unity, or resilience). Homeland defense can thus be represented rhetorically as a moral obligation, a national mission, or a historical inevitability linked to any number of political narratives.

Moreover, in political discourse, *Regional Stability* and/or *Internal Unity* are often used to underscore the necessity of establishing order and continuity and maintaining coherence in a particular space or territory or political entity. These ideas are frequently exploited to provide justification for the exercise of power and the silencing of voices by painting stability as a public good and instability as a public menace. Fairclough (2003) states that political discourse tends to interpret constructs like stability, peace, and unity in the service of institutions. These discourses are often predicated on binary oppositions of unity and fragmentation, resilience and collapse, which in turn, offer citizens, institutions, and leaders privileged identities and roles.

This study examines the image that is constructed by Masrour Barzani's discourse of the Kurdistan Region as a fragile yet resilient, threatened yet united. Much of his rhetoric has strategically appealed to emotions, a sense of historical pride, and a strong sense of moral obligation to ensure that the community avoids splitting into tribes. As Lazar and Lazar (2004) also observe, unity-focused discourse often relies upon emotional and historical narratives, where appeals to patriotism, sacrifice, and loyalty become part of a wider political project. Such discourses effectively influence the manner in which social actors understand their loyalties and obligations to the state or other "authority."

The final component of this framework is the *Socio-Cognitive Approach* by Teun A. van Dijk

(2006), which provides an integrated model for the analysis of political discourse on the three interrelated levels of discourse, cognition, and society. The power of this model is far-reaching in connecting linguistic form to ideologies and sociopolitical agency (van Dijk, 2006), which explores political discourse on three interrelated levels and poses some key questions across each of these analyses:

- 1) **Discourse Level:** The focus is on how language in many ways constructs the message itself. A closer look reveals the linguistic features of modality (the expression of necessity, obligation, or possibility) and hyperbole (a means of emphasizing and expanding ideas). These devices are informative in that they showcase how Barzani empowers his arguments and communicates urgency in his rhetoric. For instance, he employs modality and hyperbole, as in “We must protect our homeland at all costs” and “Our unity is the only shield that can prevent the total collapse of our nation,” to emphasize obligation, urgency, and moral significance.
- 2) **Cognitive Level:** The direct attention will be on the mental representations and ideologies that Barzani wants to trigger in the minds of his audience. This is done through employing the positive self-representation and the negative other-representation linguistic strategy. This level reveals the deeper ideology of the discourse, as he employs both positive self- and negative other-representation to shape audience mental models and exposes the underlying ideology of the discourse.
- 3) **Social Level:** It looks at the way the rhetoric works in a larger political and social context. So, at this level, the themes of security, internal unity, stability, and state resilience are constructed and analyzed to reinforce legitimate authority, social unity, and determine the duty of every citizen (van Dijk, 2006)

These functions, together with different levels of language (discourse/textual, cognitive, social), form a conceptual framework to examine all levels of Masrour Barzani’s language, from word choice to textual function and ideological and social function, revealing the discursive strategies behind the construction and maintenance of political power and identity.

## 2. Literature Review

Political discourse, security, and sovereignty in contested regions have been studied in-depth, particularly given the relevance of such issues to be used as insights for the analysis of Masrour Barzani's rhetoric.

First, an article by Smith (2019), in the *International Journal of Political Communication* (London), entitled “*Political Rhetoric and National Security in Post-Conflict States*”, investigates how political leaders in post-conflict societies employ discourse to justify security policies and to rebuild state legitimacy. It examines how language constructs a public image of a security threat in a situation of fragile politics. The Issue: Ensuring Security While Preserving Democracy Employing CDA together with securitization theory, Smith illustrates that political discourse tends to oversimplify complex security concerns and is used to legitimize authoritarianism and elite power consolidation. The research is mostly centered on post-conflict nation-states with less emphasis on semi-autonomous regional contexts. It is concluded that political leaders in post-conflict states employ oversimplified security narratives as a justification for the re-imposition of authoritarian control, and rhetorical framing ultimately preserves elite power.

Ahmed and Karim (2021), *Middle East Journal of Communication* (Cairo), in “*Sovereignty Narratives and Identity Construction in Kurdish Political Discourse*”, explore how sovereignty claims are constructed and defended by Kurdish political elites in contested political spaces. This study seeks to understand how regional authority is discursively legitimized in the context of

challenges directed at the authority of the center. The problem is that over legitimacy and statehood are claimed through using a discourse-historical method, the authors show how narratives of resilience and displacement are used to capture support and stabilize political sovereignty. However, the study focuses more on the construction of identities than on security or homeland defense discourse. It is concluded that Kurdish political elites are said to narrate an understanding of resilience and victimhood for legitimacy over regional sovereignty against the backdrop of a central-state challenge and contested legitimacy.

Third, Lopez (2020), "*Discourse of Stability and Power: A Critical Analysis of Middle Eastern Leadership Speeches*," *Journal of Middle Eastern Politics* (New York), analyses how leaders perform political stability in order to justify their rulership. The aim is to seek to expose the linguistic techniques used to marginalize and legitimize authoritarian rule. Lopez employs CDA in conjunction with political psychology; he concludes that stability discourse is a way of creating a narrative that positions leadership as a necessity while repressing opposition and maintaining asymmetries of power. The results of their analysis and studies led to the conclusion that the stability discourse is used to stigmatize the opposition and that once the consequences of state collapse are presented as dire, the necessity of leadership is represented as the need for an optimal solution that renders authoritarian regimes as the only game in the Middle East, total output normalisation of authoritarian rule.

In the journal *Comparative Political Studies* (Berlin), Chen and Roberts (2022) examine how elites use security discourse as a justification for political authority in fragile states in "*Security Discourse and Political Authority in Fragile States: A Comparative Study*". This study seeks to understand how existential threats are constructed discursively in order to maintain control. The problem concerns contested legitimacy and fragile governance. Based on CDA and securitization theory, the authors highlight these consistent themes of threat and resilience. It is concluded that the legitimization of political authority in fragile states is made by the construction of existential threats, which uses similar rhetorical topoi, such as those of danger, resilience, and control.

The other article is by Harruti and Rahman (2023), published in *Zanco Journal of Human Sciences*, Salahaddin University-Erbil, titled "*Mustafa Barzani's Role in Forming and Leading Political Organizations and Institutions (1945–1975)*". The study provides a history of the course of Mustafa Barzani's leadership in the establishment of the political organizations of the Kurds, such as the Free Committee (1945), KDP (1946), and the Revolutionary Command Council (1964). The article applies a historical-analytical lens and emphasizes Barzani as instrumental in cementing the emerging Kurdish political identity and identity formation. While he focuses on a different period, it helps contextualize the ideological and institutional inheritance that seeks to make Masrour Barzani's language of security, sovereignty, and stability a reality in the Kurdistan Region of today. It is concluded that the legacy of Mustafa Barzani as the founding father of the contemporary Kurdish identity politics remains valid and relevant in the following sovereignty and security discussions as well.

Although the studies above provide useful nuances about political discourse, sovereignty, and security in general, the current research stands alone through its implementation of van Dijk's socio-cognitive CDA framework by focusing on internal elements of security, homeland defense, sovereignty, and regional stability that refer to and are concerned with Masrour Barzani's rhetoric in the Kurdistan Region. This study addresses this so far less researched context in an important way by offering a multi-level, fine-grained analysis of discursive structures, cognitive models, and social practices, an approach that serves to close a major gap in discursive research on language and political conflicts.

### 3. Methodology and Data Collection

This study adopts a qualitative research design grounded in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), operationalized through Teun A. van Dijk's Socio-Cognitive Approach. The methodological orientation is interpretivist, as it seeks to understand how political meaning is constructed, negotiated, and internalized rather than measured quantitatively. CDA is particularly suitable for examining political rhetoric because it enables the systematic analysis of linguistic structures while simultaneously linking them to broader ideological formations and sociopolitical contexts.

The research follows a single-case study design, focusing on Masrour Barzani as a central political actor within the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. A case-study approach allows for an in-depth, context-sensitive examination of discourse within a specific political and historical setting. Rather than aiming for statistical generalization, the study seeks analytical generalization, contributing to broader discussions on security discourse, sovereignty construction, and political legitimacy in contested or semi-autonomous regions.

The data corpus consists of selected public speeches, televised addresses, press conferences, official statements, and interviews delivered by Masrour Barzani between 2021 and 2025. These texts were collected from: official publications and transcripts available on the Kurdistan Regional Government website; verified social media accounts associated with official institutions; and broadcast speeches aired on recognized regional television platforms. The timeframe (2021–2025) was selected due to its political relevance, encompassing periods marked by regional security concerns, economic challenges, and governance reforms. These contextual dynamics provide fertile ground for examining how themes of security, sovereignty, and stability are discursively constructed.

A purposive sampling strategy was employed. Texts were selected based on the criteria of being explicit references to security, sovereignty, homeland defense, unity, or stability; formal political context (official speech, policy address, crisis communication); and public accessibility and verifiability of source material. This ensures that the selected data directly corresponds to the study's research questions and theoretical framework.

The analysis follows a structured approach grounded in Critical Discourse Analysis and Teun A. van Dijk's Socio-Cognitive Approach. Each speech is first contextualized politically and temporally, followed by structural analysis to identify overarching themes and argumentative patterns. Linguistic analysis then examines modality, pronouns, metaphors, hyperbole, and other rhetorical devices, while ideological analysis uncovers patterns of positive self- and negative other-representation. Finally, findings are interpreted in the broader socio-political context to link discourse to governance, legitimacy, and authority in the Kurdistan Region.

The study relies exclusively on publicly available materials and does not involve human subjects, interviews, or confidential data. As such, no personal privacy concerns arise. The analysis remains focused on discourse practices rather than personal attributes, ensuring academic neutrality and ethical responsibility. Thus, methodological rigor is ensured through transparent selection criteria, clear operationalization of categories, theoretical triangulation, and direct textual evidence, maintaining coherence between theory, data, and analysis.

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1 Discourse structure

This stage analyzes the discourse structure of Barzani in the construction of unity, sovereignty, stability, and homeland defense.

### 4.1.1 Modality

Barzani presents varying levels of certainty, obligation, and possibility about regional events through modality, frequently emanating from modal verbs. The stage focuses on how Masrouf Barzani uses Language to convey his message of Unity, Security, and Constitutional Order.

1. *"We cannot demand unity and move in two different directions..."* Modality – cannot – to express inability and impossibility. This negation naturally rules out division and, at the same time, calls for solidarity and unity, while reinforcing the need for national political will and unity (Kurdistan Regional Government, 2021).
2. *"We must all set a specific goal and reach a mutual understanding of our priorities."* "Must" indicates a strong obligation. This command emphasizes on agreeing and collective responsibilities to maintain political stability (Kurdistan Regional Government, 2021).
3. *"We must protect all the people of Kurdistan and ensure that our people live freely and with dignity."* "Must" again indicates obligation. Emphasizes moral and political obligation to safeguard rights and freedoms, bolstering his legitimacy as a defender of the people (Kurdistan Regional Government, 2021).
4. *"I must alert you to the conspiracies aimed at undermining and dismantling the Kurdistan Region..."* "Must" has a sense of obligation and urgency. Regional security threats are addressed, referring to external and internal threats, and consolidating the narrative of vigilance and homeland defense.
5. *"We must all try to ensure that our constitution best represents the will of the people of Kurdistan."* There are specific nuances associated with must, which indicates obligation or necessity, denoting a collective responsibility. It connects constitutional integrity with political legitimacy and stability (Kurdistan Regional Government, 2024)
6. *"Unity should lead us all to a common state, equally the same for all of us."* The use of "should" denotes obligation and suggestion, underscoring the output that unity is meant to achieve. This reflects the normative expectation of unity as essential for social and political cohesion, since divisiveness is harmful to both (University of Kurdistan Hewlêr, 2021).
7. *"We can't ask for unity while moving in two different directions."* "Can't" indicates a modality - it suggests an inability and impossibility, which is made clearer by the contradiction of division with unity. As he points out, true consistency and unity require mutual commonality of aims, which is the central aspect of regional security (University of Kurdistan Hewlêr, 2021)
8. The modality seems to be evident in the sentence *"[w]e will not give up our constitutional rights."* This claim uses the strong deontic modality "will" + "not" and conveys a non-negotiable position. Not a prediction but a statement of intent. Using such a construction in the statement, Barzani is attempting to convey a sense of unshakeable dedication to the sovereignty and constitutional rights of the KRG. The strength of this assertion bolsters the legitimacy of Kurdish leadership and implicitly casts any attempts to challenge these rights as illicit or illegitimate (Scholars, 2019). This plays a role in creating the narrative of a strong, honest government in the eyes of the public. (Kurdistan24, 2024)
9. Likewise, in this statement, *"[w]e must protect the stability of the Kurdistan Region,"* the modal verb "must" expresses a high degree of obligation and necessity and connects the act of protecting stability with moral duty as well as existential imperative. In this case, modality frames stability as a collective moral obligation. It elevates the policy matter and grounds it firmly as a fundamental element of national identity and survival, motivating the audience to view regional stability as an act of divine obligation, not merely a desirable endgame. (Kurdistan24, 2024)
10. Barzani states: *"[w]e cannot allow our enemies to dictate our future."* It combines negative epistemic and deontical modality to create an urgent banning. The phrase "cannot allow" suggests that enemies are in the midst of trying to do so, and it calls for united opposition. The effectiveness of this modality serves to suggest the idea of external threat and present the government in the role of protector of self-determination. This rhetorical approach demands

alertness; it also makes such unity over political control and strict social regulations allowable in the name of national security (Kurdistan24, 2024).

#### 4.1.2 Hyperbole

Hyperbole is an exaggeration that is used to emphasize emotional intensity or ideological significance. Such hyperboles by Barzani magnify both the injustice against and the heroic position of the KRG.

1. *"This collective punishment will end, and this unconstitutional and illegal decision to cut the salaries..."*, *"...those terrorists come and blow up our fields..."* Both *"Collective punishment"* and *"unconstitutional and illegal decision"* are straightforward examples of hyperbolic construction, mixing feelings with linguistics to heighten the degree of the crisis. For framing as a political disagreement to humanitarian injustice, Barzani invokes legal and moral outrage, in turn producing an image of repression of this apparent humanitarian injustice by the federal government as intrinsically illegitimate.
2. *"Unity is a term we often hear, but it is not just a concept..."* This indicates how unity is much more than something theoretical. It reframes the audience to see unity as an immediate and tangible imperative (Kurdistan Regional Government, 2021).
3. *"Throughout our history, there are many examples of unity in Kurdistan..."* That generalization can be considered a gentle hyperbole. It implies a powerful, ongoing tradition of unity through the vicissitudes of history. (Kurdistan Regional Government, 2021).
4. *"This government must be a government of the people, a government that provides services to every single Kurd, no matter their background or position."* *"Every single Kurd"* exaggerates inclusivity. It gives an impression of all-round governance that is the basis for internal peace and stability (Kurdistan Regional Government, 2024).
5. *"The Constitution of Kurdistan should protect the equal rights of every citizen of Kurdistan, where no one is above the other."* This emphasizes total equality, an idealistic portrayal. At its core, the vision of fairness is fundamental to social cohesion and stability (Kurdistan Regional Government, 2024).
6. Other examples of dramatic language include the phrase *"Kurdistan stands as a beacon of peace in a troubled region."* This can be considered a case of hyperbole where a metaphorical extension idealizes the Kurdistan Region. Through this depiction of Kurdistan as a *'beacon'*, Barzani reinforces the image of the Region as an oasis in a war-torn region, and also frames Kurdish governance as principled, aspirational, and exceptional Both as a means of internal pride and unifying nationalist sentiment, but also as a source of political gain and moral high ground for Kurdistan in the Middle East. (Kurdistan24, 2024)
7. The warlike metaphor, *"Our Peshmerga forces are the shield of the nation,"* calls up hyperbole again. This endows the Peshmerga with a symbolic role—that of a *"shield"*—and turns the Peshmerga away from the world of military defense and into the realm of national identity and affective attachment. With this exaggeration, Barzani mythologizes the Peshmerga not just as a defense mechanism but as the resilience of the nation. It is based on sentiments of history and sacrifice, reminding us that the legacy of the homeland will survive by virtue of bravery and fidelity. (Kurdistan24, 2024)

Using these discourse-level devices, Masrour Barzani not only builds policy narratives but also philosophical or ideological significances. Modality and hyperbole jointly, therefore, influence both cognitive and emotional factors that strengthen the public facilities for the outcome of seamless Kurdish political unity, endurance, and sovereignty. These themes help provide a sense of commonality, or regionalism, justifying Barzani's linguistic support of a stable and secure region, which is in line with the larger purposes of this study in uncovering how these types of discourse function at a larger scale.

## 4.2 Cognitive Analysis: Mental Representations and Ideologies

At the second level of the analysis, which is the cognitive analysis, Barzani discursively sites himself and his government as stability protectors, resilience agents, and international value partners. As the following samples prove that idea:

1. Positive self-representation: Kurdish Politicians as Accountable, Constitutional, and Legitimate. He pointed out that the "*Kurdistan Region's constitutional right to manage its budget as a federal entity*" is constitutional. It puts Kurdish leadership in the sense that they are an actual and constitutionally recognized governing authority, to also emphasize the whole legal and rightful part. Barzani paints Kurdish leaders as protectors of legal rights and federalism, presents them as responsible characters willing to preserve the constitution. Demonstrating this positive self-representation fosters trust and unity among Kurds by highlighting legal sovereignty and regional autonomy. (Kurdistan24, 2025)
2. Negative Other-Representation: Internal Political Parties as Disloyal and Obstructive: Here, "*Unfortunately, it was internal parties here who filed complaints and demanded that Baghdad directly interfere...*" and "*They said that if salaries were returned to Baghdad, we would no longer have a problem... I don't know where those voices are now.*" In this view, internal Kurdish political opponents are cast as disruptive forces to regional unification and sovereignty. This negative image delegitimizes what they do, undermines their allegiance to the people, and depicts them as traitors and disseminators of instability.
3. Negative Other-Representation: Out-group 'Terrorists' as Saboteurs "*Those terrorists come and blow up our fields and stop oil production.*" As not mere actors of violence but as purposeful disruptors who jeopardize the economic security and the sovereignty of Kurdistan. The clarity of the enemy outside Kurdish society created by this language evokes vulnerability, but also the desire and necessity for solidarity and defense. (Kurdistan24, 2025)
4. Kurdish leaders are represented positively as protectors of economic stability, "*We are not prepared to relinquish our constitutional rights,*" and "*We have a constitution, and we have constitutional rights...*" Barzani shows Kurdish leadership as protectors of the region, its property, sovereignty, and its future stability by positioning himself as following steadfastness and noted constitutional protection, thereby reinforcing a politically induced perception of public confidence and resilience. (Kurdistan24, 2025)
5. Kurdish and Regional Leadership as Credible, Responsible Partner are represented positively as Self: KRG-Positive Identity, "*...the Kurdistan region that's been a very credible partner with the United States in the fight against terrorism and also in promoting peace and developing the shared values and principles that we have with each other.*" And here, Barzani positions the Kurdistan Region in a very positive peace as a solid and friendly partner in fighting terror and ensuring stability in the region. This supports the research objective in demonstrating the way the rhetoric reinforces Kurdish leadership and regional stability as essential and responsible stakeholders within the international realm. It further creates a mental model that portrays Kurdish actors as reliable and collaborative, thus justifying sovereignty and security in a good and positive light. (Kurdistan24, 2024)
6. Negative Other-Representation: Other Threats and Risks, "*...we are worried, and we are concerned about what's happening. We don't want Iraq to be dragged into this war.*" Barzani frames looming geopolitical struggles (e.g., the possibility of new warfare, pressuring Israel) as instabilities within the region. It triggers this cognitive frame where external actors and conflicts are dangers that the Kurdish leadership needs to protect homeland security from. (Kurdistan24, 2024)
7. Faithful Identity as positive self-representation: Kurd Forces are Still the First Line of Defense, "*We have that first experience here in Kurdistan, and now, Peshmerga, we're fighting ISIS.*" This point directly at the Kurdish agency and the active defense of homeland security by its forces, by naming Peshmerga directly as the force that defeats terrorism. This positive self-

representation reinforces that Kurdish sovereignty is not only symbolic but in action, and is working towards peace and stability in the region. (Kurdistan24, 2024)

8. Negative Other-Representation: Reference to Terrorism, *"We don't think that terrorism has come to an end. We think that ISIS is still intact and they have active members."* Terrorism is present as a lingering, constant threat that never fully stays resolved and represents the ultimate negative other in the model of the mind. This framing into current events has found new urgency—Kurdish security forces are aware of their precarious position and the need for international assistance, relying on support from novel threat vectors. (Kurdistan24, 2024)
9. Negative Other-Representation, Unfair of Baghdad Burden on the Production of Kurdistan, *"To tell us to reduce production, it's not fair because... the overall Iraqi production needs to be reduced according to quotas designed for Iraq."* Barzani reframes the demands of Baghdad as politically biased against Kurdistan, effectively staging Baghdad as an agent attempting to impose unnecessary limits. Kurdistan responds with its positive self-image by emphasizing political and economic marginalization, and this creates Kurdish assertiveness; the claim is that Kurds deserve to be treated more evenly and to have autonomy. (Kurdistan24, 2024)
10. Positive Self-Representation by showing openness and balance in foreign relations,

*We have good relations with the United States and with all of our western friends, but that doesn't mean that we can't have good relations with China or any other country..... with Russia also, we have normal relations. We have Russian companies operating in Kurdistan..... We have good relations with Turkey... encouraged by the fact that Turkey is looking at peaceful ways... (Kurdistan24, 2024)*

Barzani presents Kurdistan as having normal, practical, and cooperative relations with nearby forces, concentrating on stability and constructive inclusion. This creates a cognitive lens of an independent, diplomatic, peace-promoting, and economy-enhancing entity of Kurdistan functioning similarly to the surrounding states in a narrative of regional stability and homeland security. Thus, it propagates a framework of the transnational nature of the Kurdish and the importance of the international position of Kurdistan, both of these solidifying nationalist positions and regional stability. (Kurdistan24, 2024)

11. Positive Self-Representation: Kurdish leadership advocating rights of women and equality, *"In Kurdistan... women have always had greater freedom, and they have had more rights... many women in parliament, ministers, administrators, and successful businesswomen."*, and *"Equal pay for equal work... absolutely."* Barzani frames the Kurdish region as forward-looking and committed to gender equality, depicting Kurdish governance as morally enlightened, democratic, and equitable. In pitching the Kurdish leadership this way, this positively reinforces the image of the Kurdish leadership as socially responsible and progressive, and presents an image of internal political stability and social justice. (Kurdistan24, 2024)
12. Negative Other-Representation, Societal and Political Fragmentation of Iraq: *"Lack of trust... history has proven when communities don't trust each other... stronger players dictating and disrespecting others... democracy only rules of the majority."* Barzani identifies the root of regional problems as mistrust and inequality, a phrase that can only refer to Iraqi and even wider regional sociopolitical dysfunction. Such a pejorative representation of fragmentation and injustice strengthens the Kurdish self-image as a place of justice, equality, and social cohesion. (Kurdistan24, 2024)
13. Positive Self-Representation, vision of union based on common goals: *"Before being united, we need to unify our ultimate goals. Unity should lead us all to a common state, equally the same for all of us."* It signals a Kurdish leadership demand for a unified strategy and ideology as a condition of unity. This portrays a rational, strategic, and inclusive political project of Kurdistan, reinforcing positive self-representation as organized and visionary. Stress on equality, "equally the same for all", breeds narratives around justice and social cohesion that are important for regional stability. (University of Kurdistan Hewlêr, 2021)

14. Negative Other-Representation, the implicit criticism of disunity and political fragmentation, *"We cannot demand unity and move in two different directions... one side cannot ask for independence while another aims for something else."* This frames internal political division as an impediment to unity and progress, implicitly criticizing factions with conflicting priorities. Then it refers to such a division as no rationality, no stability; therefore, such a division is a threat to national sovereignty and regional stability. (Kurdistan Regional Government, 2021)
15. Positive Self-Representation, a call for cooperation and shared progress, *"We have called and continue to call on all government parties to be united in the service of the people... Help us where we fall short so that we may all improve, and celebrate our successes as your own so that we may grow."* this is a unifying tone that inspires trust and shared accountability. It helps shape a mental framework of integrated action towards national resilience and peaceful coexistence, which connects directly to the current study of homeland defense and regional stability (Kurdistan Regional Government, 2021)

Masrour Barzani presents Kurdish unity as a notable success and a vital instrument in the process of safeguarding and securing the region in the future. That leadership requires working together toward common goals. Meanwhile, he cautioned that divisions and disagreements could be detrimental to progress. This allows the public to perceive its Kurdish leaders as trustworthy and legitimate law-abiding individuals, while treating internal divisions and foreign meddling as a concern. He concludes by discussing outside challenges to justify why it is imperative to "keep defending the homeland and keep being strong and strong". The emphasis on inclusion, democracy, and respect for other groups, combined with calls for unity and respect for the constitution as the foundation for peace and stability in Kurdistan - all of which should be added to where possible - cannot go unnoticed. He asserts the importance of togetherness and law as the building blocks of the region's future, backing it up with history and clear, plain examples. These mental models are all created by the use of positive self-representation and negative other-representation within his discourse.

### 4.3 Social Level Analysis: How Discourse Produces Power, Resistance, and Legitimacy

The third stage of van Dijk's socio-cognitive framework, the social level, deals with discourse in its overall political and social context. In the case of the rhetoric of Masrour Barzani, this interpretive depth at this level of analysis reveals how elements such as the internal unity, the security, the sovereignty, and the national are discourse-localized, helping to provide social solidarity, legitimation of government authority, and definition of collective duties. By use of emotive and charged terms and repeatedly invoking constitutional rights and historical experiences of regional marginalization, Barzani portrays the Kurdistan Regional Government as a legitimate but subjugated camp defender of the will of its people.

#### 1. Unity and Collective Memory

Barzani repeats the same demand for unity as a basis for the Kurdish political identity and cohesion among the Kurdish society. The legacy of the Uprising of 1991 - a slogan his government has employed to justify its political machinations right up to the present moment.

*At the beginning of the 1991 Uprising, we witnessed what Kurdish parties could accomplish when united. Together, we established an internationally recognised constitutional entity, where we now peacefully coexist* (Kurdistan Regional Government, 2021).

He goes on to call for inclusive unity - across ethnicity, religion, and politics:

*I earnestly appeal to all political parties in the Kurdistan Region to rise above narrow partisan interests for the greater good... fostering unity among all ethnic, religious, and political groups...* (Kurdistan Regional Government, 2024).

Barzani connects the past to the political aims of the present and invokes a sense of collective responsibility by stating: Calls to *"be united in the service of the people... Help us where we fall short so that we may all improve, and celebrate our successes as your own so that we may grow"*

rhyme with the functional need for unity to maintain political stability and social cohesion, to sustain shared identity from the past and present (Kurdistan Regional Government, 2021; University of Kurdistan Hewlêr, 2021).

## 2. Constitutional Legitimacy and Inclusive Governance

The constitutional framework constitutes one of the major pillars in Barzani's rhetoric to legitimize political authority. He points out institutional values that sustain cooperation and constitutional fidelity: *"There must be checks and balances to lean on each other, a framework that promotes cooperation and defines fundamental principles that protect the Kurdistan region's constitutional integrity"* (Kurdistan Regional Government, 2021). He relies on legal rights to anchor KRG claims, unlike interference by the federals: *We have a constitution, and we have constitutional rights... we are not prepared to relinquish our constitutional rights.*" (Kurdistan24, 2024). Additionally, Barzani makes mention of inclusive governance and rights, which he describes as fundamentals of the constitutional values, stressing pluralism, coexistence, and peaceful representation:

- The constitution must: *"reflect this diversity, our commitment to peaceful coexistence, and religious tolerance"* (Kurdistan Regional Government, 2021).
- The government has to represent *"every single Kurd, no matter their background or position."*
- Disputes are portrayed as battles for *"national and territorial rights,"* adding a bark of desperation that goes beyond simply economic conflict, to a matter of core constitutional rights. (Kurdistan Regional Government, 2021; 2024)

## 3. External Threats and Sovereignty

Indeed, Barzani frames a discourse of existential threat that fundamentally revolves around actions by the federal government perceived as undermining the status of Kurdish autonomy:

- *"I must alert you to the conspiracies aimed at undermining and dismantling the Kurdistan Region... even more so when such agendas find internal support within Kurdistan..."* (Kurdistan Regional Government, 2024).
- He invoked as an example Baghdad's demands to *"hand over everything you have to us"* are characterized as efforts to undermine the Kurds' autonomy and independence/sovereignty (Kurdistan24, 2024).

These elements amount to an 'us versus them' narrative that rationalizes both vigilance and resistance, bolstering in-group cohesion and justifying a range of political behaviors to defend political and geographic space.

## 4. Strategic International Alliances

Barzani contextualizes Kurdish regional security into a larger geopolitical structure by recognizing important international players: The USA is portrayed as a key factor, using political cards to affect regional stability: *"By acknowledging the importance of U.S. elections and administrations, he situates Kurdish and Iraqi security concerns within the global political landscape."* (University of Kurdistan Hewlêr, 2021). Relations with the neighbor, Turkey, are described as constructive and improving: *"We have good relations with Turkey... I would characterize our relations with Turkey as good and even better."* (Kurdistan24, 2024). Dealing with Russia is a realist move, economically and politically, as Russian energy companies are already present in Kurdistan: *"We have Russian companies operating in Kurdistan..."* (Kurdistan24, 2024). On the influence of Iran, Barzani tactically recognizes the geopolitical situation while refusing to conflate Kurdistan: *"Iran has a lot of influence in Iraq... Iran is an important neighbor."* (Kurdistan24, 2024).

## 5. Economic Strategy: Stability and Diversification

Political stability and security are methodically connected to economic growth: *"The more development in the region means more stability, and more economic stability leads to more political*

*stability and definitely to more security*” (Kurdistan24, 2024). While Barzani does acknowledge the risks of becoming dependent on oil, he does also refer to diversification efforts. *“Depending on oil as the only revenue... is always going to be problematic... That's why we try to diversify our economy”* (Kurdistan24, 2024). Such economic policies highlight a comprehensive model of governance where economic, social, and political stability are closely interlinked.

## 6. Women’s Rights and Social Modernization

Kurdistan has a political identity, and Barzani believes that progress is part of this identity.

*In Kurdistan... women have always had greater freedom and they have had more rights... we have tried to give more power to women by promoting their participation in the parliament... many ministers and administrators that are now women... businesswomen, very successful businesswomen* (Kurdistan24, 2024).

This narrative of progress presents the Kurdistan region as a leader in gender equality and modernization, while simultaneously using social inclusion as a tool for political legitimacy.

At the social level of van Dijk's framework, Barzani's rhetoric itself creates and maintains power, legitimacy, and social cohesion in Kurdistan. His calls for national cohesion based on common history and appeals to inclusivity create a collective identity that withstands internal assaults and external dangers. In terms of discursive power, constitutional means legitimizing the authority of the Kurdistan Regional Government as constitutional and rightful, and delegitimizing the interference of the federal center and dissent in the internal affairs of KRG.

Barzani combines the notion of an 'us v them' dichotomy with it, which he uses to explain why there is a need to remain vigilant against forces of change acting as a negative external condition, thus justifying the in-group solidarity and the defence of ethos and borders. His focus on strategic international partnerships and economic diversification as pillars of stability is another thing his speech does well. Wider social modernization, including the advancement of women, buttresses political legitimacy by associating voice, equality, and social justice with progressivism and democracy in a broader sense. Overall, Barzani’s social rhetoric does not merely reflect but rather defines political and social realities, affirming authority, unity, and resilience against these intense challenges.

## 5. Conclusion

In examining Masrouf Barzani’s discourse through van Dijk’s socio-cognitive framework, it becomes clear that his use of discourse structures serves a deliberate ideological purpose. At the linguistic level, he strategically employs modality and exaggeration to construct his ideology. Words such as “must,” “cannot,” and “will” emphasize obligation, urgency, and collective responsibility, framing himself as a rational, resolute leader committed to unity, security, and constitutional legitimacy. Simultaneously, his use of hyperbole enhances emotional impact and moral clarity, presenting Kurdistan as a morally upright actor and its leaders as ethical figures.

These linguistic strategies generate distinct cognitive effects. Barzani systematically profiles the Kurdish leadership as constitutionally legitimate, resilient, and internationally credible, while portraying internal divisions, terrorism, and external pressures as threats to unity and stability. By appealing to shared values such as democracy, gender equality, and cooperative foreign relations, his rhetoric reinforces loyalty to the nation and the constitution as the foundation for protecting the homeland and securing lasting peace.

At the socio-political level, his discourse reinforces power, legitimacy, and endurance by presenting the Kurdistan Regional Government as a historically grounded and democratically supported institution, committed to inclusive governance, peaceful coexistence, and legally defined self-

determination. Through appeals to collective memory, constitutional rights, and social responsibilities, Barzani crafts a collective identity that resonates emotionally and serves as a shield against fragmentation and external threats. Moreover, references to strategic international alliances, economic diversification, and social modernization, including women's empowerment, further bolster Kurdistan's image as a progressive, sovereign actor.

Overall, Barzani's discourse not only mirrors the political realities of Kurdistan but also actively works to forge social unity, legitimize authority, and envision an idealized future of nation-building and equity in the region. By intertwining historical memory, constitutional legitimacy, and shared values, his rhetoric seeks to cultivate a collective consciousness that transcends immediate political challenges, fostering resilience, social cohesion, and a vision of Kurdistan as a stable, progressive, and ethically grounded society poised to navigate both internal and external complexities.

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## تاسايش و سهروهري: گوتار شيكاربييهكي پهخنهگرانه بڼه قامگيري ناوچهيي و بهرگري له ناوځو له گوتاري مهسرور بارزانيدا

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### پوخته

ټم ليکولنهويه به وردی له وه دهکولته وه که زماني سياسي مهسرور بارزاني چون پره و شهريه تي داوه به گوتاره کاني تاسايش، سهروهري، بهرگري نيشتمان، و تاشتي ناوچهيي له هريمي کوردستاندا. ټم ليکولنهويه به دواواچوون بڼه ستراتيژيه زمانه واني و نايديولژيانه دهکات که بڼه دپشتني تيرواينه کاني گشتي بڼه دهسلات، په کگرتوبی و بهرځوانی نه ته وهی به کارده هينرين که به شيوه يه کي تايبت وهک دياردهی کومه لايه تي و سياسي ناوځويي سهير دهکرين نهک وهک مملاني دهريه کي. تويښنه وه که ليکولنهويه له وه دهکات که تا چهند زماني سياسي تاسايش و سه قامگيري وهک بهردي بناغهي ناسنامه ي نه ته وهی و هوکمراني، له ژير ناري هسپاري سياسي و نالوذي ناوچه ييدا، به هينز دهکات. گوتار شيکاري په خنه يي (CDA) له سه ر بنه ماي موديلي سه ره کي کومه لايه تي-مه عريفي که له لايه ن تيون ټي قان دايکه وه دابينکراوه به کارده هينرين وهک ميتود، که سي تاستي شيکاري تیکه ل کردوه: په که م: پيکه اته ي گوتار، نامرازه زمانه وانيه کاني وهک موداليتي و زيادره وي که سي به کارده هينرين؛ دوهم: موديلي مه عريفي، موديلي نايديولژي وهک ټه ريني خوځونه رايه تيکردن و نه ريني نوينه رايه تيکردن ټوانيتير به کارده هينرين؛ و سنيهم: پراکتيزه کومه لايه تيبه کان، که شيکاري چوڼيه تي به کارهيناني گوتار دهکات له دروستکردن په يوه نديبه کاني هينز و کونترولي کومه لايه تيدا. به هوي ټم چوارچيوه فره تاسته ده توانريت خوځنده وه بکريت بڼه په يوه ندي نيوان شيوزي به کارهيناني گوتار له لايه ن بارزاني بڼه رهنگانه وه وه هم بنياتاني واقيعه کومه لايه تيبه کان و نوينه رايه تيبه عه قليب ه کان. به به کارهيناني ټم ريبازه، تويښنه وه که ټه وه روونده کاته وه که چون گوتار بيروباوهري مه عريفي و په يوه نديبه کاني هينزي کومه لايه تي بهرجه سته دهکات و هم بنيات دهنيت. به و ټه نجامه دهگهين که مهسرور بارزاني به به کارهيناني وتار نوينه رايه تيبه نايديولژي به کان دهکات سه باره ت به سه رکرده و خه لک و دوژنمان به شيوه يه ک چوارچيوه داده نيت که شهريه ت به سه رکردايه تي کورد بدات و بانگه شه بڼه بهرهبه کي په کگرتوي کوردي بکات و خوراگري بپاريزيت. جگه له وهش، له وتاره که يدا ټم ناسنامه يه کومه له فراوانه ده به ستيته وه، که سه نته ري سه قامگيري ناوچه يي و ده ستورويوني ده سلاته که يه، به پيشمه رجکردن هوشيار گشتي بڼه دابينکردن پاساوه کان و دامه زراوه کاني تاشتيه کي به رده واه له نيشتماندا

**وشه سه ره کيبه کان:** گوتار شيکاري په خنه يي، مهسرور بارزاني، تاسايش، سهروهري، بهرگري نيشتمان.

### الأمن والسيادة: تحليل نقدي لخطاب الاستقرار الإقليمي والدفاع عن الوطن في خطاب مسرور بارزاني

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### المخلص

تدرس هذه الدراسة بالتفصيل كيف طورت لغة مسرور بارزاني السياسية وشرعت خطابات الأمن والسيادة والدفاع الوطني والسلام الإقليمي في إقليم كردستان. تدرس هذه الدراسة الاستراتيجيات اللغوية والأيدولوجية المستخدمة لتشكيل التصورات العامة للقوة والتماسك والمقاومة الوطنية التي يُنظر إليها عادةً على أنها ظواهر اجتماعية وسياسية داخلية وليست صراعات خارجية. تدرس الدراسة مدى تعزيز اللغة السياسية للأمن والاستقرار كحجر زاوية للهوية الوطنية والحوكمة، تحت ستار الحساسيات السياسية والتعقيد الإقليمي. تم استخدام تحليل الخطاب النقدي (CDA) استنادًا إلى النموذج المعرفي الاجتماعي الرئيسي الذي قدمه تيون أ. فان دايك كطريق دراسي، والذي يجمع بين ثلاثة مستويات من التحليل: أولاً: يتم استخدام بنية الخطاب والأدوات اللغوية مثل الوسيلة والمبالغة الشخصية؛ ثانياً، يتم استخدام النماذج المعرفية والنماذج الأيدولوجية كتمثيل ذاتي إيجابي وتمثيل سلبي للآخرين؛ وثالثاً، الممارسات الاجتماعية، التي تحلل كيفية استخدام الخطاب في إنشاء علاقات القوة والسيطرة الاجتماعية. يُنتج هذا الإطار متعدد المستويات قراءة العلاقة بين استخدام بارزاني للخطاب لعكس وبناء الحقائق الاجتماعية والتمثيلات الفكرية. ومن خلال هذا النهج، تُشرح الدراسة كيف يُجسد الخطاب ويُبنى المعتقدات المعرفية وعلاقات القوة الاجتماعية. ونخلص إلى أن مسرور بارزاني يستخدم الخطابات لتأطير التمثيلات الأيدولوجية للقادة والشعب والأعداء بطريقة تُضفي الشرعية على القيادة الكردية، وتدعو إلى جبهة كردية موحدة، وتُحافظ على المقاومة. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، يربط في مقاله بين هذه الهوية الجماعية الواسعة، التي تُعدّ جوهرية للاستقرار الإقليمي ودستورية النظام، من خلال تهئية الوعي العام لتوفير المبررات والمؤسسات اللازمة لتحقيق سلام دائم في الوطن.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** تحليل نقدي للخطاب، مسرور بارزاني، الأمن، السيادة، الدفاع عن الوطن.