

Shells and Shrapnel Put to Good Use

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Kurds build homes and make tools with remnants of weapons Saddam once used against them.

Bakir Mustafa, 41, was leaning against one of the pillars supporting his balcony, looking at the sun rising over the mountains in the Penjwen area of northeastern Iraq.

The only thing disturbing the serene setting was the fact that the pillars were made out of shrapnel from exploded mortar shells.

"When we returned to our area after the 1991 uprising, construction materials were very expensive," Mustafa said. "So to rebuild our houses, we resorted to military equipment and items left from the Iraq-Iran war."

Many Iraqis find pieces of artillery, rockets and other equipment - relics of years of conflict that litter the countryside - useful in their peacetime, civilian lives.

It's ironic that many in the northern Kurdish region are using military detritus for civilian purposes as they are the remnants of arms used to attack Kurds during the Saddam Hussein regime.

For years, Ghareeb Aziz, a 67-year-old farmer, has used a burnt artillery gun barrel to water his small field. "I had no other choice," said Aziz, who is from Sharbazher, located just north of Sulaimaniyah.

Shilan Abdu-Qadir, 28, uses artillery shell cartridges as vases, which now hold yellow and red flowers. "Because they are long and yellow, they are fit to serve as vases," she said.

Hussein Wali, 42, makes a living driving a Russian military truck used by the former Iraqi Republican Guard. Wali found the vehicle at the Salam military camp in Sulaimaniyah. In need of repair, he fixed it and now uses it to transport food.

"I don't know how many Kurds have been Anfalised with this truck," said Wali, referring to the 1988 campaign in which 182,000 Kurds disappeared and 4,000 villages were destroyed by the former regime. "But I know that with this truck, I can make a living for my family."

Haji Masifi, general manager of Mine Affairs in the Sulaimaniyah administration, has warned that using leftover shells and rockets for civilian use was unsafe for the population.

"We don't think it is a good thing at all for civilians to handle bits of explosives and weapons for whatever purposes, because this may ultimately result in their death," said Masifi.

But with basic raw materials expensive, such warnings appear to have little impact.

While much of the military litter is utilised for practical purposes, there are some who have found more

creative uses for it.

Artist Zeerak Meera, 24, came up with an original idea for a sculpture when he turned up at a deserted Iraqi army base near Kirkuk following the American-led invasion of the country.

He came across several thousand military boots. But instead of selling them, he turned them into a seven-metre sculpture of Saddam and placed it where a bronze statue of the former president used to stand.

"I did that to prove that military boots are more valuable than the dictators who use their power to oppress and dishonour human beings," he said.

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Location: [Iraqi Kurdistan](#)
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