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**THESIS**

**PROSPECTS FOR AN INDEPENDENT KURDISTAN?**

by

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March 2008

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**PROSPECTS FOR AN IDEPENDENT KURDISTAN?**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

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## **ABSTRACT**

The last ninety years of Kurdish history demonstrates their political progression towards statehood. Examination of this history and US policy during this period allows us to analyze the circumstances that prevented Kurdish statehood. The three levels of analysis utilized allows analysis of Kurdish history with regards to the individual, the state and the international system. Such analysis assists in determining the prospect for independence of the Iraqi Kurds today.

An Iraqi Kurdish declaration of independence would directly influence U.S. foreign policy for the Middle East. American policy decisions would depend upon the effects of other foreign policy objectives for the region. Recognition of Kurdish sovereignty is a policy decision that requires analysis of Kurdish history within the context of US foreign policy objectives.

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## I. PURPOSE/RESEARCH QUESTION

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the evolution of the prospects for an independent Kurdistan during the last century. Since the institution of the no-fly zone over Northern Iraq in 1991 and the 2003 invasion of Iraq, significant political progress has been made by the Kurds of Iraq. The probability of ongoing ethnic and religious strife within Iraq creates an opportunity for the Kurdish nationalists to realize their aspirations and declare independence. The impact of such a declaration, and how the United States should respond, is of great importance, not just in Iraq, but in other culturally diverse states as well.<sup>1</sup>

This thesis addresses four questions:

1. Have the Kurds gained enough political maturity to assert viable claims to independence?
2. What level of permissiveness for an independent Kurdistan exists among the regional powers?
3. What is the possibility that the Iraqi Kurds will declare independence from Iraq?
4. How should the United States shape its foreign policy in the event of such a declaration?

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<sup>1</sup> Example of such states within the region include Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Turkey.

To frame answers to these questions, the thesis will review Kurdish history during the last century. This background is crucial to understanding diplomatic options for the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in addressing the issue of independence. The concluding chapter assess whether an independent Kurdish state is consistent with U.S. foreign policy objectives. While Kurdish independence does not rely upon United States' permission or support, cooperation with the U.S. and careful diplomacy with regional actors are of vital importance to the promotion and maintenance of stability in the region.<sup>2</sup>

**A. WHY THE DISCUSSION OF PROSPECTIVE KURDISH STATEHOOD IS IMPORTANT**

There are two reasons why this thesis is important. First, the success of the Iraqi Kurds in their attempt to maintain autonomy and/or gain independence is a direct concern to the national security of its neighboring countries, particularly Turkey. Second, since 1991, the United States has been the key enabler to the Kurds' establishment of autonomy and its subsequent growth.

The Turks see the potential of U.S. policy and support of the Kurds in Iraq potentially leading to "the creation of a separate Kurdish state in Northern Iraq."<sup>3</sup> Such an event could further fuel autonomous desires among Turkey's

---

<sup>2</sup> As the case of Kosovo demonstrates, it is highly important to have U.S. support before declaring independence. Ultimately, it will boil down to the approval of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council to be successfully recognized.

<sup>3</sup> F. Stephen Larrabee and Ian O. Lesser, *Turkish Foreign Policy in an Age of Uncertainty*, Santa Monica, CA: Rand, 2003, xii.

own indigenous Kurds, which could "threaten the country's territorial integrity."<sup>4</sup> Hence, the United States needs to contemplate policy choices that are consistent with their overall foreign policy objectives for the region. Any decision to recognize or not recognize any independence action by the Kurds must be carefully weighed against overall U.S. strategic concerns.

## **B. LITERATURE REVIEW**

The literature focusing upon democracy in the Middle East has burgeoned since 2003. This literature, however, has not necessarily led to any solid definition of democracy in the Middle East. Reflecting upon this confusion, one author notes: "Iraq suffers from a lack of clarity and agreement over how to define and assess the idea of democracy itself."<sup>5</sup>

Several books written since the 2003 U.S. invasion deal specifically with the future of the Kurds in Iraq and the challenges they face. *The Goat and the Butcher: Nationalism and State Formation in Kurdistan-Iraq since the Iraqi War*, by Robert Olsen discusses how the developments and evolution of Kurdish nationalism and state formation in Kurdistan-Iraq have been "influenced by relations between Iraq, Kurdistan-Iraq, and Turkey."<sup>6</sup> *The Kurdish Question*

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<sup>4</sup> Bill Park, *Turkey's Policy Towards Northern Iraq: Problems and Perspectives*, New York: Routledge, 2005, 12.

<sup>5</sup> Eric Davis, "The Uses of Historical Memory," *Journal of Democracy* 16.3 (2005), 54.

<sup>6</sup> Robert Olson, *The Goat and the Butcher: Nationalism and State Formation in Kurdistan-Iraq Since the Iraqi War*, Costa Mesa, California: Mazda Publishers, 2005, 22.

and the 2003 Iraqi War, edited by Mohammed M. A. Ahmed and Michael M. Gunter, contains essays written by scholars on Kurdish issues, including David McDowall, Michael M. Gunter, and Robert Olson.<sup>7</sup> Another book, *The Future of Kurdistan in Iraq*, edited by Brendan O'Leary, John McGarry, and Khahled Salih, is also a compilation of essays by various authors.<sup>8</sup> Other articles written and studies compiled since 2003 focus on the reorganization of Iraq's central government and the creation of a democratic/federalized system. Opinions vary on the suitability of Iraq for democracy. Based upon data collected and analyzed for transitioning to democracy from an authoritarian regime, "Iraq has a reasonably good set of 'building blocks' to make the transition successfully."<sup>9</sup> While democratic reforms are the preferred choice, what Iraq needs, above all, is "a stable and decent government."<sup>10</sup> What form that government eventually takes is irrelevant as long as it provides and maintains peace and security.

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<sup>7</sup> Mohammed M. A. Ahmed and Michael M. Gunter, eds., *The Kurdish Question and the 2003 Iraqi War*, Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 2005. The essays predominantly focus on the Kurds in Iraq, but several of the essays discuss the impact of the 2003 war with respect to Kurdish issues in neighboring countries.

<sup>8</sup> Brendan O'Leary, John McGarry, and Kahled Salih, *The Future of Kurdistan in Iraq*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005. The essays in this book are an eclectic collection, focusing on a wide range of issues. These issues include: federalization of Iraq, historical legacies imprinted on the Kurds

<sup>9</sup> Robert J. Barro, "Detriments of Democracy," *Journal of Political Economy* 107.6.2 (December 1999) quoted in Daniel Byman, "Constructing a Democratic Iraq: Challenges and Opportunities," *International Security* 28.1 (2003), 70.

<sup>10</sup> Daniel Byman, "Constructing a Democratic Iraq: Challenges and Opportunities," *International Security* 28.1 (2003), 48.

An article summarizing the situation of the Kurds is "The Fate of the Kurds," by Graham E. Fuller.<sup>11</sup> Although written in 1993, the main points still ring true today. Fuller's article focuses on the internal problems of the Kurds and the external influences that affect them. A key point made by Fuller is that under the current international system, "it is far more preferable that the Kurds be able to achieve their ethnic and cultural aspirations without... tak[ing] apart three nations."<sup>12</sup> Fuller argues that change is inevitable for the borders of these countries "if the states involved [Iran, Iraq, and Turkey] are unable to make the necessary political and cultural changes."<sup>13</sup> He also makes the observation that if the governments do not allow a little more flexibility with their ethnic minorities, ethnic conflicts are unavoidable.

### C. METHODOLOGY

Kenneth Waltz developed a theory to help to analyze the causes of war in his book *Man, the State, and War*.<sup>14</sup> Waltz's theory analyzes the causes of war, managed under three headings: "within the man, within the structure of the separate states, [and] within the state system."<sup>15</sup> His book laid the groundwork for further studies.

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<sup>11</sup> Graham E. Fuller, "The Fate of the Kurds," *Foreign Affairs* 72 (Spring 1993).

<sup>12</sup> Fuller, 120.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Kenneth N. Waltz, *Man, the State, and War: A Theoretical Analysis*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1959.

<sup>15</sup> Waltz, 12.

The first scholar to utilize Waltz's levels was David Singer. In a 1961, he published an article entitled "The Level-of-Analysis Problem in International Relations."<sup>16</sup> Simply referred to now as "levels of analysis," other theorists, both within the International Relations community and other communities, have adapted and applied these levels to other topics.<sup>17</sup>

This thesis will apply the same basic levels of analysis as Waltz in *Man, the State, and War*, using the individual, the state, and the international system as the foundation for the basis behind lack of state formation for the Kurds. State formation can be explained in much the same manner as the causes of war. For a nationalist movement to begin, a strong individual or group of individuals must ignite the spark. That spark spreads and the desire for a state naturally follows. Once that movement is internationally recognized and sovereignty is established, a new state is born. This explanation is basic, but the main idea is that the formation of a state derives from the desires of individuals, an organization at a state level, and recognition at the international level.

The goal with the application of this methodology is two-fold. The first is to provide an insight as to why a

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<sup>16</sup> J. David Singer, "The Level-of-Analysis Problem in International Relations," *World Politics* 14.1 (October 1961), 77-92.

<sup>17</sup> Examples of application of the levels of analysis include: Gleditsch, Nils Peter and Havard Hegre, "Peace and Democracy: Three Levels of Analysis," *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 41.2 (April 1997), 283-310; Bruce J. Avolio and Bernard M. Bass, "Individual Consideration Viewed at Multiple Levels of Analysis: A Multi-Level Framework for Examining the Diffusion of Transformational Leadership," *Leadership Quarterly* 6.2 (1995) 199-218; and James Lee Ray, "Integrating Levels of Analysis in World Politics," *Journal of Theoretical Politics* 13.4 (2001), 355-388.

Kurdish state does not exist. The second is to examine whether prospects for a sovereign state of Kurdistan have increased to the point where a declaration of independence by the Iraqi Kurds is feasible.

#### **D. PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SOURCES**

Primary sources used for this thesis are reports from U.S. government publications and websites, Iraqi governmental reports, and Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) reports, as well as various websites built by Kurdish political groups. Among the primary sources is an email interview conducted with the Head of the Department of Foreign Relations for the Kurdistan Regional Government, Minister Fallah Mustafa Bakir. Secondary sources come from books and articles pertaining to Kurdish aspirations for political autonomy and independence.

The majority of the scholarly writings on this particular issue were completed in or earlier than 2005. Additional sources used in this thesis include blogs posted on various websites. Because these blogs reflect dynamic current events, traditional peer-reviewed and scholarly analysis is not yet available. While these sources are not scholarly works, they provide an important insight into newly occurring or resurrected aspects of a distinctly Kurdish culture. The minor use of such sources is necessary to show current trends in nationalist movements.

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## II. THE STATE, NATIONALISM, AND THE KURDS

### A. DEFINITIONS

Before discussing the Kurds' lack of statehood using the three levels of analysis, it is necessary to define and qualify some of the terms used in this paper: state, nation, and ethnicity. These terms are difficult to define as many scholars have their own interpretations.

Ernest Gellner defines state as the agency or group of agencies that controls a nation.<sup>18</sup> Another widely accepted definition comes from Max Weber: "a state is a human community that [successfully] claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory."<sup>19</sup> This definition implies that for a geographic region to become a state, that one community or group must control the legitimate use of force, be it the military and/or police within the confines of the area of the state. Essentially, the state is an internationally recognized political entity encompassing and controlling a territorial boundary or nation of people.

A nation is a group of people that must fulfill three requirements: a common culture, a consciousness of shared identity, and political organization toward national

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<sup>18</sup> Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1983, 3.

<sup>19</sup> John Baylis and Steve Smith, eds. *Essential Readings: The Globalization of World Politics: An Introduction to International Relations* 2nd ed, New York: Oxford University Press, 2001, 34.

goals.<sup>20</sup> An ethnicity is "a group with a common cultural tradition and sense of identity which exists as a subgroup of a larger society."<sup>21</sup> The key differentiation between a nation and an ethnicity is the idea of higher political objectives. For this thesis, "nation" refers to the political aspirations of people bound together by ethnicity or other common cultural identity. A nation need not have territory, just the desire that it might one day attain sovereignty over its own territory.

## **B. DEFINING THE KURDS**

Sources vary on dates of origin of the Kurds, but most sources agree that as long as 3,500 to 4,000 years ago, "groups that have been identified as Kurds or the ancestors of the Kurds..." appear in the writings of the Sumerians.<sup>22</sup> But who are the Kurds and how do they differ from other neighboring peoples?

Examples of traits that define ethnic groups include some or all of the following: language, religion, and the common idea of a homeland. The Kurds are considered their own distinct ethnic group, since these traits, to one degree or another, applies to them.

The Kurdish language is a trait that sets them apart from their neighbors, and is "probably the most common bond

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<sup>20</sup> Jack David Eller, *From Culture to Ethnicity to Conflict: An Anthropological Perspective on International Ethnic Conflict*, Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1999, 144.

<sup>21</sup> Walker Connor, *Ethnonationalism: The Quest for Understanding*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994, 101.

<sup>22</sup> Eller, 153.

shared among Kurds."<sup>23</sup> Their language belongs to the Indo-Iranian family group. It is similar to the Iranian language of Farsi (Persian), yet it has its own distinct characteristics. The only problem with defining the Kurds as an ethnicity by their language alone is that there are several major dialects within the Kurdish language that are not universally understood among the Kurds.

One might think that religion is a trait that helps to define the Kurds as an ethnicity. This is not the case. Most Kurds are Muslim, as are all of the other ethnicities that border the region of Kurdistan.<sup>24</sup> Like their neighbors, the Kurds branch off into the Sunni and Shiite sects of Islam. The Kurds of Iran are predominantly Shiite while the Kurds of Iraq and Turkey are mostly Sunni.<sup>25</sup> In addition, about 5 percent of the Kurds are Yazidis, which is a "mixture of Islamic, Christian, Jewish, and pagan beliefs."<sup>26</sup>

While the Kurds have populated the Kurdish region for many centuries, taking an accurate census of the Kurds is difficult. Figure 1 below illustrates the region dominated by the Kurdish ethnicity. Kurdish sources tend to have higher numbers while the numbers in the countries in which Kurdistan is located tend to have lower numbers. This

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<sup>23</sup> Hassan Arfa, *The Kurds: An Historical and Political Study*, New York: Oxford University Press, 4.

<sup>24</sup> Kurdistan is a geographical term referring to the lands where the Kurdish ethnicity is the majority, which consist of the eastern portion of Turkey, the western portion of Iran, the northern portion of Iraq, and a small segment of northeastern Syria.

<sup>25</sup> Eller, 147.

<sup>26</sup> Eller, 149.

disparity can be explained by looking at the population from a political viewpoint.



Figure 1. Predominantly Kurdish Inhabited Areas 2002<sup>27</sup>

The various Kurdish groups who desire statehood or greater autonomy want the population to appear larger for obvious political reasons. The states that have Kurdish minorities want those numbers as small as possible in order to "underplay the size of the Kurdish population."<sup>28</sup> States can enact fewer policies and allocate fewer resources to appease the smallest ethnic minorities within their borders.

A summary detailing the population of Kurdistan in the Middle East and those Kurds in diaspora is found in Table

---

<sup>27</sup> Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection, [http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/middle\\_east\\_and\\_asia/turkey\\_ne\\_2002.jpg](http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/middle_east_and_asia/turkey_ne_2002.jpg), website accessed on 9/8/2007.

<sup>28</sup> Gerald Chaliand, ed., *People Without a Country: The Kurds and Kurdistan*, London: Zed Press, 1980, 14.

1. Many of the population sources found in Table 1 are Kurdish sources so the numbers may be slightly inflated, but overall, these numbers generally agree with those from other sources.

Country	Estimated number	Source	Country	Estimated number	Source
<a href="#">Turkey</a>	14,941,800	<a href="#">CIA factbook</a>	<a href="#">France</a>	100,000 - 120,000	<a href="#">Kurdish Institute</a>
<a href="#">Iran</a>	6,250,000	<a href="#">CIA factbook</a>	<a href="#">Netherlands</a>	70,000 - 80,000	<a href="#">Kurdish Institute</a>
<a href="#">Iraq</a>	3,994,200 - 5,325,600	<a href="#">CIA factbook</a>	<a href="#">Switzerland</a>	60,000 - 70,000	<a href="#">Kurdish Institute</a>
<a href="#">Syria</a>	1,619,000 - 1,904,600	<a href="#">CIA factbook</a>	<a href="#">Belgium</a>	50,000 - 60,000	<a href="#">Kurdish Institute</a>
<a href="#">Kuwait</a>	233,500	[1]	<a href="#">Austria</a>	50,000 - 60,000	<a href="#">Kurdish Institute</a>
<a href="#">Azerbaijan</a>	200,000	<a href="#">khrp.org</a>	<a href="#">Sweden</a>	25,000 - 30,000	<a href="#">Kurdish Institute</a>
<a href="#">Lebanon</a>	80,000	<a href="#">Kurdish Institute</a>	<a href="#">United Kingdom</a>	20,000 - 25,000	<a href="#">Kurdish Institute</a>
<a href="#">Armenia</a>	75,000	<a href="#">khrp.org</a>	<a href="#">Greece</a>	20,000 - 25,000	<a href="#">Kurdish Institute</a>
<a href="#">Georgia</a>	40,000	<a href="#">khrp.org</a>	<a href="#">Denmark</a>	8,000 - 10,000	<a href="#">Kurdish Institute</a>
<b>Sub Total Asia</b>	<b>26,076,500 - 27,690,500</b>		<a href="#">Norway</a>	4,000 - 5,000	<a href="#">Kurdish Institute</a>
<a href="#">United States</a>	15,000 - 20,000	<a href="#">Kurdish Institute</a>	<a href="#">Italy</a>	3,000 - 4,000	<a href="#">Kurdish Institute</a>
<a href="#">Canada</a>	6,000 - 7,000	<a href="#">Kurdish Institute</a>	<a href="#">Finland</a>	2,000 - 3,000	<a href="#">Kurdish Institute</a>
<a href="#">Germany</a>	500,000 - 600,000	<a href="#">Kurdish Institute</a>	<b>Sub Total Europe<sup>A</sup></b>	<b>912,000 - 1,092,000</b>	
Note A: Excluding Turkey			<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>	<b>27,006,500 - 28,809,200</b>	

Table 1. Kurdish Demographics 2002<sup>29</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Demographics of the Kurdish Peoples, <http://www.answers.com/topic/demographics-of-the-kurdish-people>, website accessed on 3/17/2007.

The Kurds have been able to keep their language and blood lines relatively intact over the centuries.<sup>30</sup> Their geographical location put them at the crossroads of many empires in the Middle East. What sets the Kurds apart from many of the other people conquered by these empires is that the Kurds were never actually conquered; they were simply included within the boundaries of these empires.<sup>31</sup> For that reason, areas inhabited by the Kurds remained relatively isolated throughout the centuries.

### **C. APPLYING THE THREE LEVELS OF ANALYSIS TO THE KURDS**

Analyzing the Kurds in terms of individual leadership, the state/nation level, and the international system provides insight into the reasons why they have not achieved statehood and likely will not within the current international nation-state system.

The individual level of analysis is the most clear-cut of the three to examine the why the state of Kurdistan does not exist. Throughout the twentieth century, the Kurds lacked strong, unifying leadership. This not to say that the Kurds did not have leadership; they did. The leadership was simply not a unifying force for all the tribes, much less for state formation. The Kurds lacked an effective leader, such as Kemal Ataturk of Turkey in the 1920s, when such leadership could have forcefully asserted Kurdish claims for statehood in the aftermath of the World

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<sup>30</sup> N. Kasrian, Kurdistan, Östersund, Sweden: Oriental Art Publishing, 1990, 13.

<sup>31</sup> Kasrian, 13.

War I peace settlement. Instead, Ataturk torpedoed efforts to create a Kurdish homeland.<sup>32</sup> The Kurds had no one to challenge Ataturk. Lacking a strong leader, the Kurds proved unable to successfully influence the League of Nations in its final disposition of former Ottoman territories.

Since 1923, several individual leaders have unsuccessfully tried to unify the Kurds. One such leader was Mullah Mustafa Barzani from Iraq. In the 1940s, he made an effort to spread the ideas of his newly formed political party, the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP), among the Kurds of Iraq and then onto Kurds in Iran.<sup>33</sup> A more detailed discussion of Mustafa Barzani and other individuals is provided in Chapter IV.

The second level of analysis, the state, provides an explanation why no individual could unite all of the Kurds.<sup>34</sup> This level of analysis looks within the state to find plausible reasons for a lack of unity. Three main factors interfere with possible unity among the Kurds: language, politics, and the division of Kurdistan between the other states of the Middle East.

As mentioned before, the Kurdish language is not consistent throughout Kurdistan. The inability to communicate "cuts further lines of division across a

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<sup>32</sup> Ewan W. Anderson, *The Middle East: Geography and Geopolitics*, London: Routledge, 2000, 124.

<sup>33</sup> Eller, 186.

<sup>34</sup> One exception to this is the Kurds of Iraq. Barzani and Talibani have consolidated power in their respective parties (the KDP and the PUK), but have split the Kurdish region into two separate subdivisions within the KRG. More on this topic will be discussed in Chapter IV.

simplistic idea of a Kurdish nation."<sup>35</sup> Since the vernacular is not consistent, it is not surprising that there is no standard written form of the Kurdish language.<sup>36</sup> In fact, the Kurds' printed media takes several forms, which include Arabic, Cyrillic, and Persian. Without a common spoken and written language, the Kurdish dream of statehood will likely remain just that, a dream.

While the "parent governments" (Iran, Turkey, and Iraq) might not consider it as a good idea, the Kurds could use the methods Israel employed to unify through language. One of the first steps Israel took to unify its people was to teach and use Hebrew rather than have a nation that spoke German, Russian, Arabic, etc. Since the fall of Saddam Hussein, efforts like this are taking place in Iraqi Kurdistan.

Language and religion are not the only differences within the Kurdish nation. Politics is even more diverse. In Turkey, there are more than 25 recognized Kurdish political parties.<sup>37</sup> During the December 2005 Iraqi elections, seven officially recognized Kurdish parties were represented on the ballot. Six of the seven Kurdish parties (KDP, PUK, Kurdistan Communist Party, Kurdistan Labour Party, Kurdistan Islamic Group of Iraq, and Kurdistan Socialist Democratic Party) combined and ran as

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<sup>35</sup> David McDowall, "The Kurdish Question: A Historical Review," in *The Kurds: Contemporary Overview*, London: Routledge Press, 1992, 11.

<sup>36</sup> Eller, 146.

<sup>37</sup> Robert Olson, ed., *The Kurdish National Movement in the 1990's: Its impact on Turkey and the Middle East*, Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1996, 2.

part of the Kurdistan Alliance (KA).<sup>38</sup> The other party, the Kurdistan Islamic Union, ran on its own. While some of the groups have tried to rally others behind their cause, as Barzani attempted, these parties seem more inclined to fight as hard amongst themselves as they do against the states to which they belong. This political division only detracts from the possibility of statehood.

The distribution of Kurds among the states of the Middle East contributes to the disagreements of the political organizations. Turkey, Iran, and Iraq have contrasting state systems that deprive the Kurds of the opportunity to develop a single political culture or structure.<sup>39</sup> As treatment of the Kurds varies from state to state, the goals of the Kurdish political parties and organizations differ accordingly.

Because Kurdistan lays over the boundaries of several states, this issue also falls into the third level of analysis, the international system.<sup>40</sup> The Kurds are not fighting for independence from one state; they are struggling to break free of established regional states.

Solving the Kurdish dilemma is not as simplistic as redrawing borders. Other ethnicities with similar desires for self-determination could view it as an opportunity to seek independence. Figure 2 shows the ethno-religious

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<sup>38</sup> "Guide to Iraqi political parties," BBC News, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/middle\\_east/4511450.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/middle_east/4511450.stm), website accessed on 2/18/2008.

<sup>39</sup> Fuller, 110.

<sup>40</sup> Kurdistan is a geographical term for the land in the areas previously mentioned in the Kurds are the dominant ethnicity.

breakdown in Iran.<sup>41</sup> There is no current data to support that either the Iranian Kurds or the Azeris have any large nationalistic movements. This, however, was not true in the 1940s, as both ethnicities fought against the Iranians for independence.<sup>42</sup> Thus, future uprisings among these ethnic groups should not be discounted. A redistribution along ethnic lines would not sit well with the Iranians and potentially (if not likely) cause ethnic conflict in the region.

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<sup>41</sup> Note that the entire northwestern third of the country is not ethnic Persian.

<sup>42</sup> In the case of the Kurds, they in fact won their independence for a brief time when they formed the Mahabad Republic. The Azeris also contemplated their own republic within Iran in the 1940s. See John Bulloch and Harvey Morris, *No Friends But the Mountains: The Tragic History of the Kurds*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1992, 104-108.



Figure 2. Ethnoreligious Distribution of Iran - 2004<sup>43</sup>

**D. CHAPTER SUMMARY**

Although the Kurds are a nation with a common culture, a shared identity, and have political organizations that pursue nationalistic-type goals, they still do not have an internationally recognized state. The history of the Kurds, examined in the next two chapters, provides insight into the reasons the Kurds have been unable to achieve statehood, but have made significant progress toward that end.

<sup>43</sup> Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection, [http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/middle\\_east\\_and\\_asia/iran\\_ethnoreligious\\_distribution\\_2004.jpg](http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/middle_east_and_asia/iran_ethnoreligious_distribution_2004.jpg), website accessed on September 8, 2007.

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### III. THE KURDS AFTER THE COLLAPSE OF THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

The period between 1916 and 1923 saw many treaties and conferences come and go as the allies sought to work out the aftermath of their victory in World War I. The borders that were established during this period, even those which were completely arbitrary, remain to this day.<sup>44</sup> The victorious Western allies did not create these states with all the newly emancipated peoples and nations in mind; they had their own economic and imperialistic ideas.

One such nation directly affected by the distribution of the Ottoman Empire by the Western Allies was the Kurds. The Kurds had as legitimate a case for independence as any other ethnic groups of the region. To this day, the Kurds remain the largest ethnicity in the world that have their never had their own nation-state.<sup>45</sup>

Hopes for an independent Kurdistan were high in 1920, but diminished by the middle of 1923. This chapter will perform two functions. The first is to discuss the border-creating process during the period from 1916 to 1923. The second will utilize the three levels of analysis as they apply to state formation the Treaty of Lausanne.

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<sup>44</sup> The countries that were created under the Mandate system, which subsequently became independent states, have the same borders that were created during the 1920s. The only two real exceptions to this are the creation of Israel in 1948 and the combining of the Yemeni states in 1990. See F. Gregory Gause, III, "Sovereignty, Statecraft and Stability in the Middle East," *Journal of International Affairs*, 45.2 (Winter 1992), 442.

<sup>45</sup> The one exception to this statement is the short-lived Republic of Mahabad in Iran during the late 1940s, discussed in Chapter IV.

## A. SYKES-PICOT AGREEMENT

As World War I progressed, the British, French, and Russians already assumed victory was inevitably theirs. As early as 1916, secret agreements were in the works on how to divide the remnants of the Ottoman Empire. The majority of the territories of the former empire were to go to Britain and France.<sup>46</sup>

The Sykes-Picot Agreement was to divide the Ottoman territories into British and French mandates. Figure 3 is a map of the agreement, representing the division of the spoils after World War I between the two victorious powers. The British would take custody of the regions that would become Iraq, Jordan, Israel, and parts of Saudi Arabia. The French mandate included areas that would become Syria, Lebanon, and parts of Turkey.<sup>47</sup> Sykes-Picot made no provision for the Kurdish areas. The first mention of a possible free Kurdish state came several years later in the Treaty of Sevres.

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<sup>46</sup> The only mention of Russia, in the agreement, is that the sides would compare notes regarding a previous meeting.

<sup>47</sup> Please note the area designated as an "international zone" in the agreement. This is the area that would later become Israel. It would appear that at least a year before the Balfour declaration, there was some intention of creating an additional state in that area.

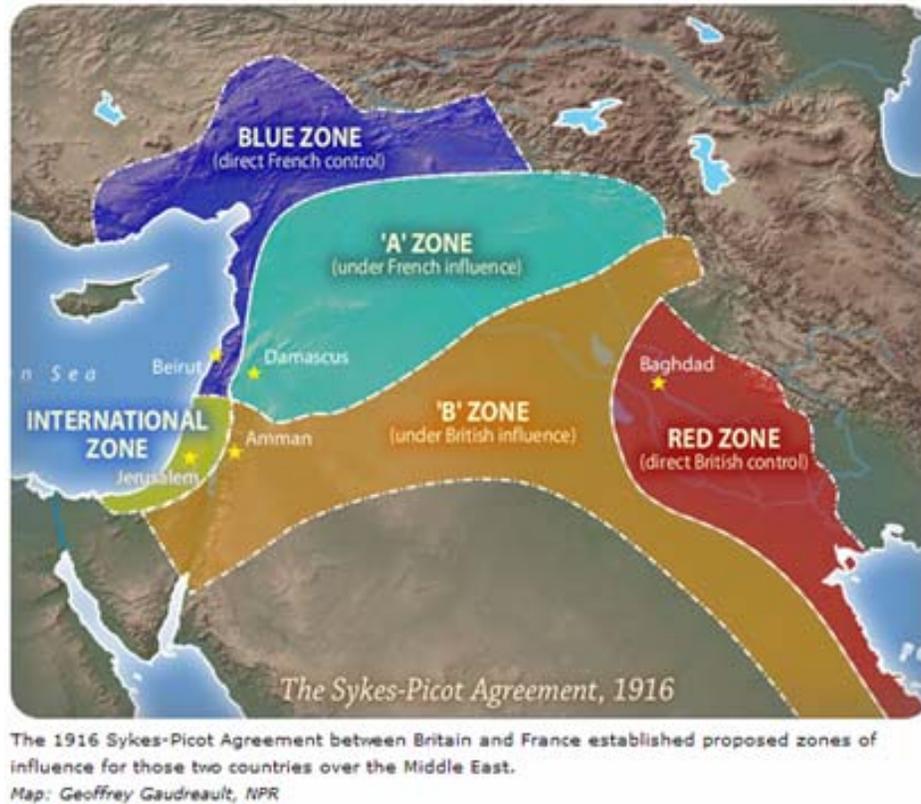


Figure 3. Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916<sup>48</sup>

## B. LEAGUE OF NATIONS MANDATES

Before discussing the Treaty of Sevres, the next step in the distribution came at the conference of San Remo in 1920. Figure 4 shows the actual boundaries as delineated during the San Remo conference. There are two main differences between the final resolutions at San Remo versus the Sykes-Picot agreement. The first is the removal of the mandate that was to be under French influence in

<sup>48</sup>Mike Shuster, "The Middle East and the West: WWI and Beyond," *National Public Radio* website, [www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyID=3860950](http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyID=3860950), website accessed January 9, 2008.

what is now Turkey. The second is the re-designation of the international area on the Mediterranean coast and incorporating that into the Palestinian Mandate.



Figure 4. League of Nations Mandates, 1920<sup>49</sup>

The United States had originally been interested in participating in the Mandate system. The King Crane Commission presented a report that spelled out the possibilities for American mandates in the Armenian and Kurdish regions.<sup>50</sup> President Woodrow Wilson supported an Armenian Mandate in what is today eastern Turkey. He did

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<sup>49</sup> Mike Shuster, "The Middle East and the West: WWI and Beyond," *National Public Radio* website, [www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyID=3860950](http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyID=3860950), website accessed 1/9/2008.

<sup>50</sup> David McDowell, *A Modern History of the Kurds*, London: I.B. Tauris, 1996, 130.

not, however, support a Kurdish Mandate. In fact, he grouped the Kurds and Turks together as peoples and sought to "teach them a lesson."<sup>51</sup>

Congress rejected the idea of the United States accepting any mandates. It did not want to shoulder the responsibility for three main reasons.

The first is that "it would unnecessarily involve the still isolationist United States in the quagmire of world colonial infighting."<sup>52</sup> Just as the United States was reluctant to get involved in World War I, it was still trying to remain on the fringes of world affairs.

The second reason is that "both Armenia and Kurdistan were remote and hardly accessible by sea."<sup>53</sup> During this time-period, the United States was still primarily a sea power. The U.S. had no way to directly supply or protect the region should it accept a mandate in the region.

The third reason was that "it would have been unprofitable, since Britain had decided to annex and keep central Kurdistan and its petroleum wealth."<sup>54</sup> The region surrounding Mosul had already been identified by American and British oil companies as having vast reserves of oil. Since the British had already claimed that region, it did not seem economical to pursue the issue any further.

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<sup>51</sup> McDowell, (1996), 130.

<sup>52</sup> Mehrdad R. Izady, *A Concise Handbook: The Kurds*. Washington, D.C: Taylor and Francis, Inc., 1992, 60.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Izady, 60.

### C. TREATY OF SEVRES

The next step in the boundary distribution process came in late 1920 with the Treaty of Sevres. This Treaty is among the more important, if not *the* most important, aspect in the nationalist movement for the Kurds. Article 64 of the Treaty discusses the creation of Kurdistan.

If within one year from the coming into force of the present Treaty the Kurdish peoples within the areas defined in Article 62 shall address themselves to the Council of the League of Nations in such a manner as to show that a majority of the population of these areas desires independence from Turkey, and if the Council then considers that these peoples are capable of such independence and recommends that it should be granted to them, Turkey hereby agrees to execute such a recommendation, and to renounce all rights and title over these areas.<sup>55</sup>

Figure 5 shows the boundaries of Kurdistan as discussed in Article 64 of the Treaty of Sevres.

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<sup>55</sup> The Treaty of Sèvres, 1920, Section I, Articles 1- 260, [http://wwi.lib.byu.edu/index.php/Section\\_I%2C\\_Articles\\_1\\_-\\_260](http://wwi.lib.byu.edu/index.php/Section_I%2C_Articles_1_-_260), website accessed on Sept. 6, 2007. From *The Treaties of Peace 1919-1923, Vol. II*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, New York, 1924.



Figure 5. Treaty of Sevres - 1920<sup>56</sup>

The other important portion of Article 64 details that the vilayet of Mosul is included within the boundaries of Kurdistan.<sup>57</sup> It is important to discuss this aspect of the Treaty of Sevres, as it may have been a contributing factor as to why Kurdistan was deleted from the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923. As noted before, this region had great oil potential, therefore Britain did not want to give away its influence over this region.

<sup>56</sup> The Treaty of Sèvres, 1920, Section I, Articles 1- 260, <http://wwi.lib.byu.edu/images/1/14/TreatyOfSevresMapOfTurkey.gif>, website accessed on Sept. 7, 2007. From *The Treaties of Peace 1919-1923, Vol. II*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, New York, 1924.

<sup>57</sup> The Treaty of Sèvres, 1920, Section I, Articles 1- 260, [http://wwi.lib.byu.edu/index.php/Section\\_I%2C\\_Articles\\_1\\_-\\_260](http://wwi.lib.byu.edu/index.php/Section_I%2C_Articles_1_-_260), website accessed on Sept. 6, 2007. From *The Treaties of Peace 1919-1923, Vol. II*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, New York, 1924.

**D. TREATY OF LAUSANNE**

The development of the Treaty of Lausanne is complex. The need for a revision from the borders established in the Treaty of Sevres was necessary to the Turks because it "was quite methodically aimed at carving up the Turkish territories, and was... profoundly unjust and humiliating for the Turkish people."<sup>58</sup> The Ottoman government that signed the Treaty of Sevres was no longer in power at the signing of the Treaty of Lausanne. The Young Turks took over power in Turkey by 1923, and were dissatisfied with the boundaries of the 1920 treaty.

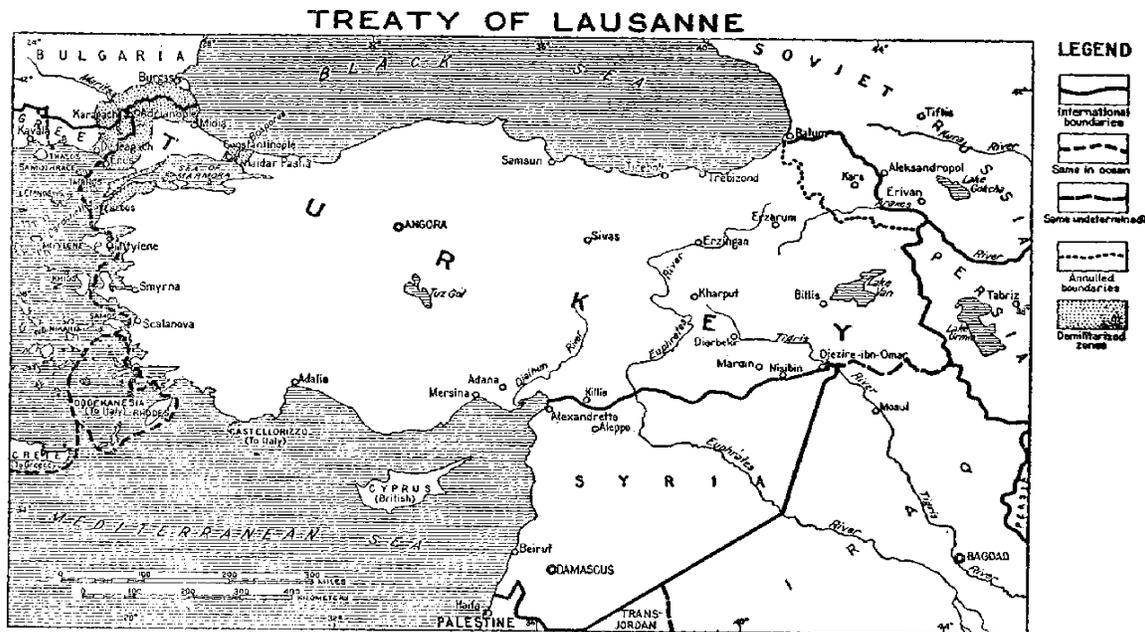


FIGURE 14 TURKEY IN 1923

Compiled by Col. Lawrence Martin

Figure 6. Treaty of Lausanne - 1923<sup>59</sup>

<sup>58</sup> Gerald Chaliand, ed., *People Without a Country: The Kurds and Kurdistan*, London: Zed Press, 1980, 44.

<sup>59</sup> The Treaty of Lausanne, <http://www.hri.org/docs/lausanne/turkey.gif>, website accessed on September 7, 2007. From *The Treaties of Peace 1919-1923, Vol. II*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, New York, 1924.

The misunderstanding between the West and the peoples of the Middle East are just part of the explanation as to why the state of Kurdistan does not exist. Other factors are also involved. One way to analyze these factors is to apply the three levels of analysis.

After the fall of the Ottomans, all of the former subjects were able to establish their own states, or at least have a mandate over them, which would eventually lead to independence.<sup>60</sup> "The only exception was the Kurdish people, largely because of the political incompetence and historical backwardness of its leaders."<sup>61</sup>

One reason for the absence of strong leadership may have to do with the situation in Kurdistan following the war. During World War I, battles between the Russians and Ottomans swept through the northern and western portions of Kurdistan.<sup>62</sup> Devastation from the war, as well as "looting and destruction of crops by Russian, Ottoman, and British [troops]... caused severe famine in the area."<sup>63</sup> In such dire conditions, it was the central focus of all tribal leaders to rebuild their village/tribal infrastructure in order to provide for their own people. Major nationalist or political movements were not foremost in their minds; survival was the necessity.

Ironically, this is an example of a "golden opportunity" wasted.<sup>64</sup> This, of all times in a nation's

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<sup>60</sup> Chaliand, 44.

<sup>61</sup> Chaliand, 44. The Armenians were able to gain their own state, but it was almost immediately absorbed into the Soviet Union.

<sup>62</sup> Izady, 58.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 59.

<sup>64</sup> Izady, 58.

history, begged for the need for strong, unifying leadership. "Tribal loyalty was greater than the urge for Kurdish nationalism."<sup>65</sup>

Tribalism may be the primary reason that the Kurds were unable to become a recognized state. Good leadership may have been present, but fear that one clan or tribe would become too powerful in relation to the other tribes prevented unification of all the tribes. They historically fought amongst themselves to maintain some semblance of balance with respect to tribal power.

There were three main political agendas among the Kurds: "pro-Turkish, pro-Allies, and... a desire for complete independence from all outside interference."<sup>66</sup> The problem, as McDowell points out in *A Modern History of the Kurds*, is that "these [political] strands were not distinct" and "many Kurds, perplexed by the uncertainties involved, did not wish to commit themselves irretrievably to one course or action."<sup>67</sup> Faced with a seemingly untenable situation, most Kurds decided to do nothing.

Additionally, even before Kurdistan was split into the different states that exist today (Iran, Iraq, Turkey, and Syria), the Kurds were divided between different empires. The Ottomans governed the western portion of Kurdistan and the Persians governed the eastern part. This division also precluded any unity among the Kurds as a whole nation.

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<sup>65</sup> Edgar O'Balance, *The Kurdish Struggle: 1920-1994*, New York: St. Martin's Press, Inc., 1996, 13.

<sup>66</sup> McDowell (1996), 125.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

The first of these explanations finds its roots in the economics of the region. As noted before, oil was one of the major reasons that the vilayet of Mosul was ceded to the British as part of the Iraq mandate. The only remaining Kurdish region left for its own state now was the region in eastern Turkey.

As explained previously, Ataturk was the strongest regional leader during this treaty process. He used his military influence to gain more territory for Turkey. In order to solidify Turkish control of the Kurdish and Armenian region of Anatolia, he used the threat of a Christian invasion to rally a large Kurdish force to fight along side the Turks.<sup>68</sup> The Christian threat came from the Greeks, who had landed at Smyrna, and the Armenians from the north.<sup>69</sup> The use of Islam as a rallying point was ingenious for Ataturk, who favored and implemented a secular government in Turkey.

Another possible international influence that caused a drastic change between the treaties of Sevres and Lausanne, was Russia's influence in the region. The Western Allies saw a larger and stronger Turkish state as "a possible south-eastern bastion" against the communists.<sup>70</sup> If this were true, the reasoning for the omission of Kurdistan had little to do with the Kurds, but rather the importance of establishing a buffer between the East (Russia in this case) and the West.

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<sup>68</sup> O'Balance, 14.

<sup>69</sup> McDowell (1996), 126 and 134.

<sup>70</sup> O'Balance, 14.

## **E. CHAPTER SUMMARY**

The treaty process after World War I saw the creation of new states with the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. One group excluded was the Kurds. Using the three levels of analysis, it is clear to understand why the Kurds were left out.

First, there was no strong, central leadership for the Kurds. Second, there was no substantial nationalist movement during that time-period due to the tribal rivalries and the need to meet the basic survival needs of the people. Lastly, there were international influences that were beyond their control that contributed to the omission of a Kurdish state.

The relevance of discussing the treaty process in the early 1920s deals with the historical memory of the Kurds. They were promised their own state in the Treaty of Sevres, but that promise was disregarded. The desire for sovereignty and the exclusion within the Treaty of Lausanne provided the catalyst for nationalist movements that occurred in the following decades.

#### **IV. KURDISH NATIONALISM AND NATIONALIST MOVEMENTS: 1920S TO PRESENT**

The previous chapter summarized the plight of the Kurds after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire at the in World War I and the treaty process that followed. This chapter will examine some of the more prominent uprisings and the role of key figures in Kurdish politics since 1923.

The autonomy that the Iraqi Kurds presently have is a culmination of developments over the last ninety years. Breaking down the progress at each level of analysis is difficult because some of the events are combinations of one or more of each of these levels. This chapter will break down the developments by each decade rather than each level of analysis in order to provide a more logical flow. Each level of analysis can be seen during each decade through the leadership of the more renowned Kurds, the formation and development of political parties at the 'state' level, and how international influence continued to have a direct impact upon the Iraqi Kurds.

##### **A. 1920S**

The British administered the Iraqi Mandate through the local traditional leaders during the 1920s as it did in its other colonies around the world.<sup>71</sup> The leader they chose to administer the Kurdish area of the Iraqi mandate was a prominent Kurd, Mahmoud Barzanji, considered both an agha

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<sup>71</sup> Edgar O'Balance, *The Kurdish Struggle: 1920-1994*, New York: St. Martin's Press, Inc., 1996, 19.

and sheik.<sup>72</sup> He served as governor of the region under Ottoman rule, yet the area that the British gave him was much larger than it had been under the Ottomans. Because of the tribal nature of Kurdish society, his appointment "brought him into conflict with other Kurdish aghas and sheiks."<sup>73</sup> Soon after his appointment, he began to question the British authority and was sent to exile in India.

The British soon realized the necessity of Mahmoud Barzanji to help "stabilise" the region due to the encroachment of Ataturk and Turkish troops in British areas of the Kurdish region.<sup>74</sup> Upon his return from exile, Barzanji's method of stabilization was not what the British had intended. He immediately began negotiations with the Turkish authorities and "turned against the British in rebellion."<sup>75</sup> After the Royal Air Force (RAF) drove Barzanji out of the region, "an uneasy peace settled on the Iraqi Kurdish region,"<sup>76</sup> which lasted until the early 1930s.

## **B. 1930S**

Based upon the agreement in the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty of 1930, which was implemented in 1932, Britain gave Iraq its independence.<sup>77</sup> In the treaty, "Iraq had promised to respect the language and customs of the Kurds," but

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<sup>72</sup> Aghas are spiritual leaders. Sheiks are tribal leaders.

<sup>73</sup> O'Balance, 19.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>77</sup> O'Balance, 20.

promised "little else."<sup>78</sup> Mahmoud Barzanji called for a revolt in support of a "United Kurdistan," but was soon defeated.<sup>79</sup> In a futile attempt to gain international support, the Kurdish "rebels sought to remind the League of Nations of its promises concerning an autonomous Kurdish administration."<sup>80</sup>

The response was not what the Kurds had desired or anticipated. The "relevant Council committee [within the League of Nations] declared that the discussion of the question of the autonomy of certain minorities in Iraq did not fall within its ambit."<sup>81</sup> Essentially, the League of Nations chose to ignore a plea from one of the minorities specifically mentioned in its own mandate system. While their plea with the League of Nations was unsuccessful, "this was... the first real evidence of popular Kurdish separatist aspirations in Iraq."<sup>82</sup>

The "next Kurdish separatist leader of some note was Mullah Mustafa Barzani," the grandson of Mahmoud Barzanji.<sup>83</sup> Mustafa Barzani carried on his grandfather's "clashes with central authority, but was also forced to surrender."<sup>84</sup>

The 1937 Saadabad Treaty was intended to stifle any Kurdish nationalist movements.<sup>85</sup> Turkey, Persia, and Iraq

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<sup>78</sup> O'Balance, 20.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Gerald Chaliand, ed., *People Without a Country: The Kurds and Kurdistan*, London: Zed Press, 1980, 163.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> O'Balance, 20.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> O'Balance, 20.

<sup>85</sup> Chaliand, 163.

signed the treaty targeting Kurdish movements, although the Kurds are not specifically mentioned within the text. It "was aimed against the formation and activity of associations, organizations, or armed bands seeking to overthrow established institutions," but it did little to stop Kurdish movements.<sup>86</sup>

The first, well-organized Iraqi Kurdish political parties was created late in the 1930s. The Hewa Party (originally called the Hope Party) was founded between 1939 and 1942, depending upon the source.<sup>87</sup> The Hewa's "objective was to promote the freedom of Kurdish people and the liberation of Kurdistan," and its constituents hailed mostly from the "Iraqi Kurdish intelligentsia."<sup>88</sup> Hewa was unable to gain large popular support "because the average [Kurdish] peasant simply could not relate Hiwa nationalist rhetoric to his/her own highly circumscribed world."<sup>89</sup> The party eventually merged with the KDP in 1952 to form the United Kurdistan Democratic Party (UKDP).<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Chaliand, 163.

<sup>87</sup> Edmund Ghareeb, *The Historical Dictionary of Iraq*, Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press, Inc., 93; O'Balance, 26; and McDowall, 289. Hewa is also spelled Hiwa and Heva depending upon the source.

<sup>88</sup> Ghareeb, 93 and O'Balance, 23.

<sup>89</sup> McDowall (1996), 290. Hewa is spelled different ways depending upon the text.

<sup>90</sup> O'Balance, 36.

### C. 1940s

In 1944, "the first formalization of cross-border Kurdish nationalism" came in the form of "the Peman I Se Senur, or the Pact of the Three Borders."<sup>91</sup> Kurdish representatives from Iran, Iraq, and Turkey met "to pledge mutual support and sharing of resources."<sup>92</sup> While this agreement "gave heart to the Kurds," it "was no more than a symbolic gesture."<sup>93</sup> The Pact never led to a unified front for Kurdish nationalist movements between the three countries, but it did provide a preview of events soon to follow in Iran that demonstrated that Kurdish nationalist ideals were not unique or isolated to any single country.

In the summer of 1945, Mustafa Barzani founded the Freedom Party, which was renamed the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP).<sup>94</sup> The goal of the KDP was "to bring about cooperation between the tribes in the Barzan region then between all Kurdish tribes."<sup>95</sup> The KDP's nationalist propaganda was easy to understand by the Kurdish peasantry. Thus, it gained more support from the lower classes than did its predecessor, the Hewa. Although the two parties

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<sup>91</sup> John Bulloch and Harvey Morris, *No Friends But the Mountains: The Tragic History of the Kurds*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1992, 100-101.

<sup>92</sup> McDowall (1996), 237.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid, 101.

<sup>94</sup> O'Balance, 26.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

needed to, and did work together because of the different party bases, it also led to friction between the two parties.<sup>96</sup>

In August of 1945, a spontaneous revolt erupted in Iraq between the Iraqi police and members of the Barzani clan.<sup>97</sup> By October, Mustafa Barzani and his followers were forced to flee across the border into Iran.

The events in Iran and the establishment of the Mahabad Republic in 1946 are beyond the scope of this thesis. It is, however, important to note that it was the Iraqi Kurds, led by Mullah Mustafa Barzani, who played a large role in the formation of the republic. The reputation earned by Barzani during this period is significant as it helped solidify his role as a military leader in the Iraqi Kurdish movements in the late 1950s.<sup>98</sup>

#### **D. 1950S**

In 1952, Hewa Party and the KDP combined to form the United Kurdistan Democratic Party (UKDP).<sup>99</sup> Even though he was still in the Soviet Union, Mustafa Barzani was nominated as the chairman of the new party in absentia.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> O'Balance, 27.

<sup>98</sup> After being forced to leave Iran, Mustafa Barzani was able to evade arrest and managed to escape to the USSR, where he remained for the next eleven years. See Chaliand, 163, Bulloch, and Morris, 116.

<sup>99</sup> O'Balance, 36 and McDowall (1996), 300.

<sup>100</sup> O'Balance, 36.

Immediately after the successful coup d'etat in 1958, Karim Qasim (the new leader of Iraq) pardoned many of the Kurds imprisoned during the revolts against the Iraqi monarchy.<sup>101</sup> Qasim needed the cooperation of the Kurds to unify Iraq and since the Kurds did not initially want to cooperate Qasim, he sought the assistance of Mustafa Barzani. He allowed Barzani to return to Iraq if he took charge of the Kurds and helped Qasim consolidate power.<sup>102</sup> The plan was advantageous to both as it did help control the Kurds to some extent and allowed Mustafa Barzani to strengthen his role as the leader of the Iraqi Kurds.

As the 1950s closed, Qasim had consolidated power with the help of the Kurds. It should come as no surprise that Barzani and the Kurds would become Qasim's "next target."<sup>103</sup> The Kurds and Barzani's KDP were the only "organized, legal, political structure capable of opposing the regime."<sup>104</sup>

## **E. 1960S**

In 1960, Barzani insisted that the UKDP revert to the original KDP to further his leadership of the Kurds.<sup>105</sup> He was re-elected to the position of party chairman at the Fifth Congress of the KDP in 1961. As his strength grew within the Kurdish region, ties with Qasim became strained.

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<sup>101</sup> O'Balance, 37.

<sup>102</sup> McDowall (1996), 303.

<sup>103</sup> Bulloch and Morris, 122.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> O'Balance, 40.

Even though the animosity between the two was growing, neither Barzani nor Qasim openly "sought direct conflict" between Kurdish and Iraqi forces, however it was unavoidable <sup>106</sup>

In the summer of 1961, Qasim launched the "First Offensive" by "moving troops into Kurdish areas and bribing anti-Barzani tribes to fight on the government's side, which caused disagreement among the members of the KDP. One faction wanted to "delay action as long as possible to enable the KDP to build up strength."<sup>107</sup> Another faction, led by Jalal Talibani, an emerging figure in the KDP, favored immediate action as he felt that "Qasim had lost the confidence of his army" and that the KDP could quickly meet the Kurdish objectives.<sup>108</sup>

In February 1963, Qasim's Free Officers turned on him and mounted another coup d'etat that brought the Ba'ath party to power. Jalal Talibani, was sent as the Kurdish negotiator with the new government. The Ba'ath regime felt that the "question of Kurdish autonomy was a side issue" and that "the question of Arab unity" was the most important issue to attend.<sup>109</sup> Overall, the negotiations were a failure and the remainder of the 1960s continued with a series of five more offenses staged by the Iraqi government against the Kurds.

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<sup>106</sup> McDowall (1996), 309.

<sup>107</sup> McDowall (1996), 309.

<sup>108</sup> O'Balance, 49 and McDowall (1996), 310.

<sup>109</sup> McDowall (1996), 313.

## F. 1970S

After almost a decade of fighting, two factors led to a 1970 Peace Accord. The first was the inability of the Iraqi armed forces to decisively defeat Mustafa Barzani and his Peshmerga. The other was that the Iraqi government had also begun to worry about Iranian intervention on behalf of the Kurds, since Iran had been supplying the Kurds with arms for the better part of the decade, and they were unable to secure the Iran-Iraq border.<sup>110</sup>

The most important aspect of the accord was the "recognized... existence of the Kurdish nation" within Iraq.<sup>111</sup> This remained "the best deal the Kurds of Iraq had been offered" and "remained the Kurd's favorite foundation stone for future relations with the rest of Iraq" until the late 1990s.<sup>112</sup>

The peace did not last long. Skirmishes between Kurdish peshmerga and Iraqi troops were constant throughout the early 1970s, culminating with the 1974-75 war.

The Iraqi government forged a friendship treaty with the USSR in 1972 "as a counterbalance to the close Iran-USA relationship that was developing."<sup>113</sup> It should not be surprising that as Iraq shifted its focus toward the Soviet Union, the Kurds shifted theirs to the West. In 1971, and

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<sup>110</sup> McDowall (1996), 326 and O'Balance, 87.

<sup>111</sup> Chaliand, 168. In Chapter II, the difference between the definitions of a nation and a state were discussed. This distinction is important here as it shows that the Kurds were recognized not as a mere minority, but as a nation.

<sup>112</sup> McDowall (1996), 327.

<sup>113</sup> O'Balance, 97.

again in 1972, Mustafa Barzani "appealed to the United States for aid."<sup>114</sup> The United States was wary of becoming involved. It was not until after Iraq signed the "Iraqi-Soviet Treaty of Friendship" that the U.S. decided to provide aid.<sup>115</sup> The aid was not direct and came through U.S. allies in the region, including Iran and Israel. The United States even went as far as sending CIA operatives into Iraq "to advise the Kurds, so that as hostilities once again built up, Barzani's peshmerga were in a better condition than ever before to present a real challenge to the Iraqi forces."<sup>116</sup>

Iran supported the Kurds because it had hoped the war might lead to an overthrow of the Ba'ath.<sup>117</sup> Iran had to be careful with its support of the Kurds because the "Shah had his own Kurdish minority" and "had vivid memories of the trouble caused by the Mahabad Republic."<sup>118</sup> Even with that memory, the Shah found himself doing what he knew might cause rebellion in his own country, overtly backing the Kurdish forces.<sup>119</sup>

Before events escalated between Iran and Iraq, the Shah and Iraq's vice president, Saddam Hussein, were able to reach an agreement regarding issues unrelated to the Kurds. The agreement, however, involved a complete withdrawal of Iranian support for the Iraqi Kurds. The

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 330.

<sup>115</sup> McDowall (1996), 331.

<sup>116</sup> Bulloch and Morris, 135.

<sup>117</sup> McDowall (1996), 337 and Bulloch and Morris, 136.

<sup>118</sup> Bulloch and Morris, 136.

<sup>119</sup> McDowall (1996), 337-338.

supplies stopped "within hours of the agreement," leaving the Kurds "shattered by the sudden turn of events."<sup>120</sup>

Within a month, the Kurds "decided to abandon the fight" and more than 100,000 Kurds fled northern Iraq.<sup>121</sup> Mustafa Barzani was among those who fled to Iran and eventually moved to the United States, where he died in 1979.<sup>122</sup> After Mustafa Barzani's death, his son Masoud returned to Iraqi Kurdistan, was accepted "by most of the factions of the KDP-PL," and was elected as the provisional leader.<sup>123</sup>

The 1975 defeat also had political ramifications within Iraqi Kurdistan. With the "influence of the [Mustafa] Barzani from the region,... the field was left open for left-wing groupings."<sup>124</sup> In June of 1975, Jalal Talibani completely broke from the KDP to form one such left-wing party; the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK).

Uprisings against the Iraqi government did not stop after the defeat in 1975. While not as organized as the Mustafa Barzani-led revolts, the Kurds pestered Iraqi forces using guerilla warfare tactics through 1980. Additionally, in-fighting among the Kurds began centering on the disagreements between the two dominant political parties – the KDP and the PUK.

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 338.

<sup>121</sup> McDowall (1996), 338.

<sup>122</sup> Bulloch and Morris, 141.

<sup>123</sup> Gareth R. V. Stansfield, *Iraqi Kurdistan: Political Development and Emergent Democracy*, New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003, 87. The KDP-PL (provisional leadership) was the branch of the KDP that left Iraq and returned in the late 1970s. The PL was dropped in October 1979.

<sup>124</sup> Stansfield, 79.

## G. 1980s

September 1980 marked the beginning of the Iran-Iraq War. The Kurds in both Iran and Iraq "sought to exploit" the Iran-Iraq War to their own advantage."<sup>125</sup> While they were successful to some extent, the governments in Tehran and Baghdad were the ones to take advantage of the Kurds. To complicate matters, Kurds from both countries "were conscripted into the Iranian and Iraqi armed forces."<sup>126</sup>

When Iran began its counter-offensive in 1982, most of the leaders of the different Kurdish factions were approached by Saddam Hussein for help holding off Iran. Hussein's objective was two-fold: one, he wanted to seal off the Iran-Iraq border in the Kurdish provinces in order to protect the oil fields at Kirkuk, and two, he wanted to create internal dissent among the Kurdish factions.<sup>127</sup> He was successful with both objectives.

Jalal Talibani was the only Kurdish leader to entertain the idea of a cease-fire with Baghdad. His reasons for agreeing were to gain some "breathing space to reorganize," gain access to Iraqi weapons and supplies, and "the possibility of handing to the Kurdish people an acceptable improvement on... [Kurdish] autonomy."<sup>128</sup> If he were successful, he "might replace Barzani as the real

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<sup>125</sup> Stansfield, 123.

<sup>126</sup> Stansfield, 123.

<sup>127</sup> McDowall (1996), 348.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 349.

champion of Kurdish nationalism."<sup>129</sup> Baghdad did not uphold its agreement with Talibani and the cease-fire with the PUK ended in January 1985.

In May 1987, the major Kurdish factions, including the KDP and PUK, joined peshmerga forces to form the Kurdistan National Front (KNF).<sup>130</sup> Backed by Iran, the KNF became a "growing menace for Baghdad."<sup>131</sup> This set the stage for one of the most important and horrifying events in Kurdish history.

To remove the threat of the Kurds, who were assisting Iran, Iraq began the Anfal campaigns in the summer of 1987. Iraq set out on a course to destroy the Kurds of Iraq. According to Gareth Stansfield, "the Anfal campaigns... were characterized by the comprehensive destruction of the rural environment and infrastructure, deportation of the Kurdish population, and the use of chemical weapons against the civilian population."<sup>132</sup> The use of chemical weapons, particularly at Halabja on 17 March 1988, brought the plight of the Kurds to the world's attention.

The Anfal campaigns did not have the desired effect on the Kurds. Since there was "little left for Kurdish leaders to lose, [they] resolved to continue the struggle come what may."<sup>133</sup> The central purpose behind continuing

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<sup>129</sup> McDowall (1996), 349.

<sup>130</sup> McDowall (1996), 351.

<sup>131</sup> McDowall (1996), 351.

<sup>132</sup> Stansfield, 45.

<sup>133</sup> McDowall (1996), 367.

the resistance "was that such operations would tie up large numbers of government troops and have an attritional effect."<sup>134</sup>

Another side effect of "the horrific treatment of Kurdish civilians by the Iraqi war machine... brought the Iraqi Kurdish political parties to realize the need for a comprehensive alliance... if there was any chance of meaningful survival."<sup>135</sup> While the cooperation was slow to develop, the end of the 1980s found a new level of Kurdish political evolution taking place.

#### **H. 1990S**

The 1990s opened with the invasion of Kuwait in August 1990. During the invasion of Kuwait and the subsequent Gulf War, the Kurds "remained nominally passive."<sup>136</sup> Though the memory of the Anfal campaigns was still fresh in the mind of the Kurds, "both the KDP and the PUK sought to dispel speculation that they were willing to participate in a... campaign to overthrow Saddam."<sup>137</sup>

As the Gulf War came to an end, spontaneous Kurdish uprisings occurred in the north. One aspect of this Kurdish revolt that differed from previous uprisings was that this "uprising came from the people themselves."<sup>138</sup> Even Masoud Barzani was surprised and stated, "We didn't

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<sup>134</sup> McDowall (1996), 367.

<sup>135</sup> Izady, 215.

<sup>136</sup> O'Ballance, 184

<sup>137</sup> McDowall (1996), 369.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 371.

expect it."<sup>139</sup> The leaders of the Kurdistan Front "merely followed the people into the streets."<sup>140</sup>

The Kurds had expected the U.S.-led coalition forces to help them; they were wrong. The United States' goal for the liberation of Kuwait did not include a regime change in Iraq or overt assistance for the Shia or the Kurds. The fear was that "the breakup of Iraq and the unleashing of both internal [the Shia and the Kurds] and external [Iran and Turkey] forces that might try to seize parts of the country."<sup>141</sup> The U.S. wanted to keep Iraq in tact to maintain stability in the region. A complete defeat of Iraq would create a power vacuum, thus increasing instability in the Middle East.

While the United States did not directly interfere on behalf of the Kurds, they did enforce the "no-fly zone" over northern Iraq in accordance with United Nations Resolution 688.<sup>142</sup> Saddam tested the resolve of the "no-fly zone" in April 1992, but backed down after strong warnings from the U.S., France, and Britain.<sup>143</sup>

On 19 May 1992, the Kurds held an election for an assembly to administer the Kurdish Autonomous Region (KAR).<sup>144</sup> The election results demonstrated the popularity of Masoud Barzani (KDP) and Jalal Talibani (PUK), each

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<sup>139</sup> McDowall (1996), 371.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> McDowall (1996), 370.

<sup>142</sup> Stansfield, 95. The other important aspect of UN Resolution 688 was that it was the "first to ever mention the Kurds by name," giving them official international recognition as a people.

<sup>143</sup> O'Ballance, 198.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 199.

receiving almost one-half of all the votes.<sup>145</sup> The KAR had been in effect since 1974, but only on paper. This was the first set of elections for a Kurdistan National Assembly (KNA), creating "an historic moment" for the Kurds.<sup>146</sup> This "peaceful, multiparty election... was a symbolic threat to not only Saddam but to all un-elected regimes in the region."<sup>147</sup> During its first assembly in June 1992, the KNA changed its name to the present Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG).

The problem with this new political achievement was that "the KNA was desperately striving to turn a multi-group guerrilla movement into an autonomous administration."<sup>148</sup> The division within the new government was fifty-fifty, which made a majority vote almost impossible.

In 1994, the new regional government faced a dilemma when the KDP and PUK relationship "deteriorated into serious armed conflict."<sup>149</sup> Even though both parties had effectively controlled their own regions prior to 1994, the conflict between the two solidified the divide. (See Figure 7 below.)

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<sup>145</sup> McDowall (1996), 381.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 301.

<sup>147</sup> McDowall (1996), 381.

<sup>148</sup> O'Balance, 201.

<sup>149</sup> Stansfield, 97.

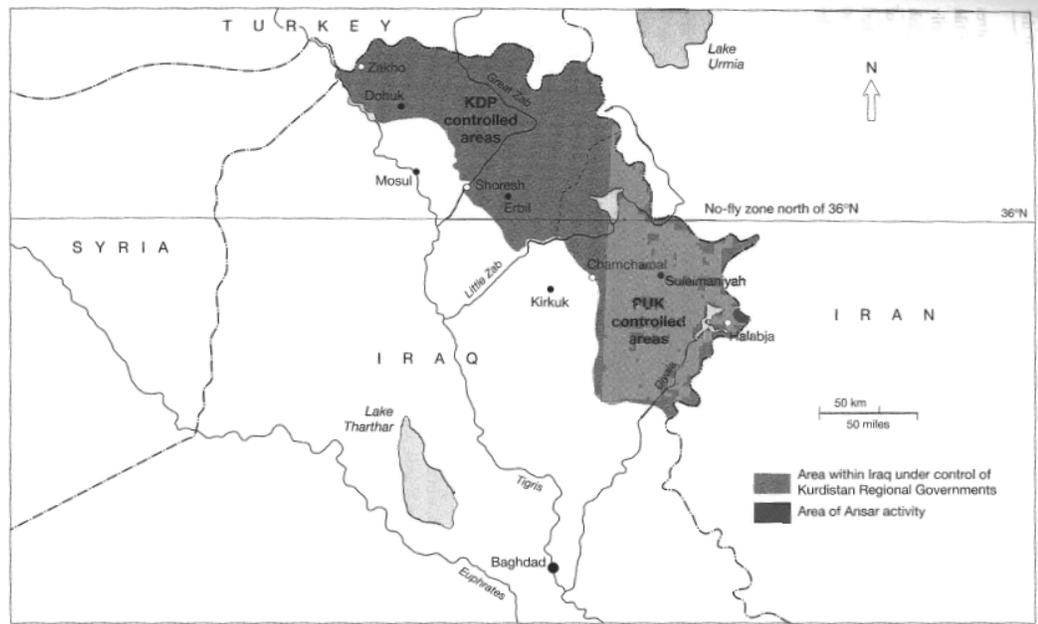


Figure 3.2 Kurdish-controlled Iraqi Kurdistan, 1991-2001

Figure 7. KDP and PUK Controlled Area of KRG from 1991 to 2001<sup>150</sup>

Masoud Barzani and Jalal Talibani decided that the conflict needed to end and embarked upon an "indigenous peace process in... 1997."<sup>151</sup> There are two important aspects to note about the peace process between the two parties: one, the decision to sit down and discuss peace was not forced by an outside actor, and two, it "proved that the KDP and PUK could sit at the same table and discuss technical issues separately from political issues."<sup>152</sup> The Washington Agreement of 1998 established the grounds for political unity among the Kurds of Iraq.

<sup>150</sup> Stansfield, 29.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 100.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

The net result of the Washington Agreement was "preservation of geographical areas of influence and security."<sup>153</sup> Iraqi Kurdistan was divided in two along the existing lines of areas already controlled by each party. Each sub-region would govern its own domestic affairs with the overall representation of the Kurds left to the KRG.

## **I. 2000S**

The Kurdish Provinces under the control of the KRG have enjoyed a greater degree of political autonomy since 1998. The period between 1998 and 2003 brought more compromise and restructuring within the KRG. New cabinets were formed and there were some "power distributions within the parties"<sup>154</sup> The situation did not change drastically from the 1998 agreement and there was still rivalry between Barzani and Talibani.

The U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 had an effect that could be considered surprising: the Kurds did not use this occasion to revolt or strive for independence. There are two plausible contributors to this decision. One is that Iraq's neighbors, specifically Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Iran, feared "the possibilities of an independent Kurdistan emerging" would threaten their national security and/or their regimes.<sup>155</sup> The second is that the U.S. made it well known that they wanted to use the Iraqi Kurds as an example

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<sup>153</sup> Stansfield, 102.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 181.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

of a working democracy and as a model for a new Iraq.<sup>156</sup> The Kurdish leadership quickly realized that it was in the best interest of all Iraqi Kurds to maintain the status quo and to work within the new government rather than against it.

Most Kurdish scholars and politicians acknowledge that a separate state will probably not emerge, so they are becoming more active in Iraqi politics. The Kurds are well-represented within the new Iraqi government. Their representation within the government is proportional to its population in Iraq. With approximately 20 percent of the total population, the number of cabinet positions is commensurate with the population distribution. Seven of the thirty-seven cabinet positions within the new Iraqi government are filled by Kurds, including the president of Iraq, Jalal Talibani.<sup>157</sup> Figure 8 (below) shows the positions and party affiliation of the Kurds within the major positions of the Iraqi government.

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<sup>156</sup> Stansfield, 181.

<sup>157</sup> "Members of the Iraqi Government, as of 12 June 2006," <http://middleeastreference.org.uk/iraqministers.html>, website accessed on July 28, 2007.

Iraqi Government or Cabinet Position	Name	Party Affiliation
President of Iraq	Jalal Talibani	PUK
Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for National Security Affairs	Barham Salih	PUK
Environment Minister	Narmin Uthman	PUK
Minister of Foreign Affairs	Hoshyar Zebari	KDP
Minister of Housing and Reconstruction	Bayan Diza'i	KDP
Minister of Industry and Minerals	Fawzi al-Hariri	KDP
Minister of Water Resources	Abd al-Latif Rashid	PUK
State Minister (without portfolio)	Ali Muhammad Ahmad	KIU
Minister of Youth and Sports	Jasim Muhammad Ja'far	Shi'ite Turkoman <sup>158</sup>

Table 2. Kurdish Members of 2006 Iraqi Government<sup>159</sup>

Overall, the Iraqi region of Kurdistan remains relatively untouched by the current war in Iraq. In fact, Iraqi Kurdistan is actually showing signs of prosperity. With this new-found prosperity, there are some signs of renewed nationalism and the reestablishment of Kurdish culture.

The KRG flag is one way in which Iraqi Kurds are expressing their cultural differences from the rest of Iraq. The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) refuses to fly the Iraqi flag over its buildings because the Iraqi flag has the phrase "Allah Akbar" (God is Greatest),

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<sup>158</sup> Although not a Kurd, Ja'far is a member of the Kurdish Coalition. This points to the political development of the Kurds in that they are searching outside of the Kurds for political alliances.

<sup>159</sup> "Iraqi Cabinet Members," *The Iraqi Foundation*, [www.iraqfoundation.org/iraqi\\_cabinet.htm](http://www.iraqfoundation.org/iraqi_cabinet.htm), website accessed on January 8, 2008.

demonstrating the lack of separation of church and state.<sup>160</sup> Instead, the Kurds are flying their own KRG flag. The symbol on the KRG flag is a twenty-one ray sun disk, which "has long religious and cultural history among the Kurds, stretching to antiquity."<sup>161</sup>

Another reason the Kurds refuse to fly the flag, is as a protest against the atrocities they suffered under the Ba'ath regime. The protest is in hopes that the new Iraqi government will create a new flag that will "reflect the history, geography, struggle, sacrifices, and sufferings of all the people of Iraq without any discrimination as previous national symbols were about."<sup>162</sup>

A similar symbolic movement is occurring in Kurdish schools. In an effort to reestablish Kurdish culture, school names have been changed from Arabic to traditional Kurdish names. These schools are now teaching Kurdish as the primary language in the schools with Arabic as a second language.<sup>163</sup>

What might seem like minor issues on the surface could be symbolic enough to spark further nationalistic ideas. Rallying behind and supporting the KRG flag may further

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<sup>160</sup> "The Other Iraqi Kurdistan Flag Issues," *The Is-Ought Problem* website, <http://theisoughtproblem.blogspot.com/2006/09/other-iraqi-kurdistan-flag-issues.html>, website accessed March 15, 2007.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

<sup>162</sup> Eamad J. Mazouri, "The Flag Controversy in Iraq," *The Is-Ought Problem* website, <http://theisoughtproblem.blogspot.com/2006/09/flag-controversy-in-iraq-by-eamad-j.html>, website accessed on March 15, 2007.

<sup>163</sup> Shabaz Jamal, "Kurds Reassert Linguistic Heritage," *Institute for War and Peace Reporting* website, [http://iwpr.net/?p=icr&s=f&o=167729&apc\\_state=heniicr2004](http://iwpr.net/?p=icr&s=f&o=167729&apc_state=heniicr2004), website accessed on March 15, 2007.

dissolve some of the internal issues among the Kurds and increase harmony throughout the region.

Iraq's trade minister, who incidentally is not a Kurd, recognizes the importance of stability in the Kurdish region of Iraq as it "can be a gateway to Iran and Turkey and may act as a distribution and logistics center."<sup>164</sup> The question will be whether Iran and Turkey will be receptive to a prospering Kurdish region in Iraq. While it would not support an independent Kurdish state, Turkey may welcome a stable and prosperous northern Iraq as it would have a "direct economic benefit to the restless and disadvantaged southeast of Turkey"<sup>165</sup>

#### **J. CHAPTER SUMMARY**

When analyzing the timeline of the Iraqi Kurds in the context of the individual, the state, and within the international system, it is clear that the Kurds in Iraq have made significant progress maturing politically. Progress at the individual level is demonstrated through the success of individuals such as Mahmoud Barzanji, Mustafa Barzani, Masoud Barzani, and Jalal Talibani. Within the state structure, the formation of and the dominance of the two key Kurdish political parties, the KDP and PUK, culminating in the formation and functionality of the KRG, demonstrate a great deal of achievement toward common goals. Internationally, however, the Kurds have not

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<sup>164</sup> Stanley Reed, "The Kurds Embrace a New Cause," *Business Week*, January 12, 2004.

<sup>165</sup> Patrick Theros, "Ruining the Neighborhood: War with Iraq and Its Neighbors," *Mediterranean Quarterly* 14 (2003): 16.

made significant progress. Although their plight is now more widely known, circumstances still do not warrant the creation of their own Kurdish state.

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## **V. U.S. POLICY OBJECTIVES FOR THE MIDDLE EAST AND HOW THEY RELATE TO THE IRAQI KURDS**

Up to this point, this thesis has utilized the three levels of analysis to demonstrate how the prospects for statehood for the Kurds of Iraq have evolved. This chapter will depart from the levels of analysis to discuss how Iraqi Kurdish independence could impact U.S. foreign policy in the region.

The conclusion drawn from analyzing the Iraqi Kurds at the individual level, the state level, and within the international system is that statehood remains unlikely. This is not to say it should be dismissed completely. Though the current prospects for statehood have increased greatly in terms of the first two levels of analyses, they still need international support. Thus, the KRG has conceded that independence is not viable within the "current geopolitical circumstances" and has decided maintaining their autonomy within Iraq is the most logical course of action.<sup>166</sup>

### **A. WHY THE U.S. SHOULD CONSIDER THE POSSIBILITIES OF AN INDEPENDENT IRAQI KURDISTAN**

The situation in Iraq is not yet completely stable. With new elections in the U.S. coming in November this year, the certainty of American troops remaining in Iraq is unknown. Should the United States decide to conduct a

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<sup>166</sup> Falah Mustafa Bakir, Minister, Head of the Department of Foreign Relations, Kurdistan Regional Government, interviewed by Robert Lewis, 2/29/2008, via email. See Appendix.

complete withdraw of troops in Iraq, there is no guarantee that the Iraqi government will be able to maintain stability and security in Iraq.

With its 2003 invasion, the U.S. accomplished the elimination of the legitimate use of force (the "state") within Iraq. What is emerging from the ensuing anarchy is not the same Iraq. While the goal of the U.S. was the removal of Saddam Hussein and the Ba'ath party from power, the U.S. has created an entity not yet capable of meeting the definition of a state. Within the context of the definition of state from Chapter II of this thesis ("the state is an internationally recognized political entity encompassing and controlling a territorial boundary or nation of people"), the current Iraq would not be a state without the presence of outside military forces to help maintain security and stability.<sup>167</sup>

Using the same definition, the Kurds already meet the minimum classification as a state. Gareth Stansfield repeatedly refers to the "de facto state" of Iraqi Kurdistan in his book, *Iraqi Kurdistan: Political Development and Emergent Democracy*.<sup>168</sup> The KRG and its "peshmerga" force are the legitimate force in the three Iraqi provinces of Suleimaniah, Irbil, and Dohuk."<sup>169</sup> The authorization for the use of the Kurdish militia is granted

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<sup>167</sup> Tim Dunne and Brian C. Schmidt, "Realism," in *The Globalization of World Politics: An Introduction to International Relations*, 2nd ed. Eds. John Baylis and Steve Smith (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 150.

<sup>168</sup> Gareth R. V. Stansfield, *Iraqi Kurdistan: Political Development and Emergent Democracy*, New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003.

<sup>169</sup> Peshmerga, translated as "Facing Death," is the name of the Kurdish militia. See O'Balance, 54.

in the Iraqi constitution as well as the KRG's Unification Agreement, which is similar to a state constitution.

The Kurds in Iraq have such a high degree of autonomy that a complete collapse of the new central Iraqi government would create an ideal situation for the declaration of their own sovereign state. Should that occur, the United States ought to look at its overall foreign policy objectives and determine whether it is in the interest of the U.S. to officially recognize or not recognize Kurdish statehood. To come to this decision, policy makers must know and understand the views and goals of the KRG and examine U.S. foreign policy objectives to weigh the pros and cons of an independent Iraqi Kurdistan.

#### **B. THE KURDISTAN REGIONAL GOVERNMENT VIEWS ON INDEPENDENCE**

To ascertain the goals of the KRG, an email interview was conducted with Mr. Falah Mustafa Bakir, Minister of Foreign Relations for the Kurdistan Regional Government. Below is an analysis of Minister Bakir's response to several questions regarding the objectives of the KRG.<sup>170</sup>

The first question posed to Minister Bakir dealt with the obstacles to independence for Iraqi Kurdistan. His comments are consistent with the Kurdish political participation in Iraq. As discussed in Chapter IV, the Iraqi Kurds are very active in high positions within the Iraqi government. Such participation demonstrates that the

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<sup>170</sup> Bakir interview.

Kurdish leadership is indeed intent on remaining part of a unified Iraq. His statement that the "current geopolitical circumstances are not conducive to independence" come to the same conclusion drawn in this thesis regarding the third level of analysis.<sup>171</sup>

Minister Bakir is also adamant that "the KRG is committed to the creation of a federal, democratic, pluralistic, and secular Iraq."<sup>172</sup> He was also clear that the KRG's "commitment to this experiment is not without condition."<sup>173</sup> There are still territorial issues within Iraq requiring resolution, which stem from the Arabization campaign. The KRG should be commended for wanting to see the issue rectified "in a legal and democratic manner."<sup>174</sup>

The next question focused on international obstacles, particularly Iran and Turkey. Minister Bakir's answer primarily centered upon Turkey. The PKK and Turkey's concern about its own Kurdish minority are of great concern to the KRG. Turkey has repeatedly crossed the border into Iraq to pursue PKK rebels, which infringes upon the sovereignty of Iraq and the authority of the KRG. Minister Bakir emphasizes that the KRG is working to assist Turkey with the PKK problem, but is hampered by the fact that "Ankara refuses to interact on an official level with the

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<sup>171</sup> Bakir interview.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

KRG."<sup>175</sup> Turkey may not be recognizing the KRG because in doing so it would have to recognize its own Kurdish minority.

Aside from the PKK issue, there is positive economic interaction between the Iraqi Kurds and Turkey. Even with the recent tensions (with the PKK), Turkey is still the Kurdish region's principle trading partner. It is the belief that "these commercial ties... will encourage future government to government interaction."<sup>176</sup>

The peace and relative stability enjoyed in the Kurdish region of Iraq is due to the unity and cooperation among the dominant Iraqi Kurdish political parties. It was not until the late 1990s and into the present decade that the PUK and KDP were able to reach a power sharing agreement. Minister Bakir assures that the "cooperation between PUK and KDP has become the standard, and will remain so" because "a unified front for the Kurds of Iraq is in the best interests of the people."<sup>177</sup>

The final question asked of Minister Bakir referred to a 2005 referendum in which 98.5% of the voters favored independence. He points out "there is a difference between desiring independence and the practicality of obtaining it."<sup>178</sup> To appease the desires of the people, the KRG has put an emphasis on "infrastructure development, healthcare, education, and economic reforms."<sup>179</sup> By doing so, "the

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<sup>175</sup> Bakir interview.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

KRG's pragmatic leadership has done a great deal to manage the expectations of its people."<sup>180</sup>

Minister Bakir presents an overall positive picture of unity among the political parties and greater prosperity throughout the Kurdish region of Iraq. Should there be a dramatic shift in circumstances in Iraq, the situation could change rapidly for the KRG. Spontaneous uprisings, not inspired by the Kurdish leadership, are not out of the question. As noted in Chapter V of this thesis, uprisings such as these have occurred in the past, the last one in 1991 at the end of the First Gulf War. This is important to note because the situation in all of Iraq could change drastically after the next U.S. presidential election. For this reason, it is important for the United States to have thoroughly considered the possible ramifications of a complete troop withdrawal and plan accordingly.

### **C. U.S. FOREIGN POLICY OBJECTIVES**

The U.S. has four policy objectives for the Middle East.<sup>181</sup> The following sections discuss each of these objectives as they relate possible U.S. reaction to a declaration of independence by the Kurds in Iraq.

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<sup>180</sup> Bakir interview.

<sup>181</sup> This list of policy objectives is a compilation of discussion points from NS3320 (U.S. Foreign Policy in the Middle East) during January and February 2008.

**1. U.S. Foreign Policy Objective One: The need to forestall foreign powers from exercising undue influence and control over the region.<sup>182</sup>**

During the Cold War, the United States and the USSR competed as super-powers to dominate the Middle East and the world. With the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the U.S. became the world's sole super-power. With no global challenger, countries have had to cooperate with the United States in order to keep their economy strong. Moreover, if a country outright opposes the United States and its policies, they risk being listed as a "rogue state."

Objective one has changed to reflect U.S. interests and preclude the overbearing influence of other states in the region, specifically those considered "rogue states." Countries such as Iran, listed by the United States as one of the "axis of evil" states, pose one of the biggest threats to security within the region.

Iran and Turkey also have great concern in the final outcome of Iraq, in particular, the final disposition of the Kurds, since they also have sizable Kurdish populations. As discussed in the previous chapters, what happens with Iraqi Kurdistan has direct relevance to the neighboring countries.

Should the Kurds of Iraq declare independence, it is certain that U.S. policy makers would have to take into consideration the impact of recognizing or not recognizing

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<sup>182</sup> This policy objective is a holdover from the Cold War era, yet still has some relevance as other powers from outside the region (e.g., China and Russia) continue to exert their influence in the Middle East.

the Kurdish state in terms of its long-time strategic ties with Turkey. By recognizing a Kurdish state, the U.S. risks alienating Turkey, potentially causing the Turkish-American alliance to collapse. The loss of this alliance would be devastating to U.S. foreign policy and strategic goals in both Europe and the Middle East.

Iran's response to Kurdish independence would also be of paramount importance to the United States. Relations between the U.S. and Iran are already strained. Adding another source of contention could lead both countries to an Iranian-American conflict.

**2. U.S. Foreign Policy Objective Two: To ensure the security of the state of Israel and encourage states in the region to reach a peaceful settlement of the Arab-Israeli dispute.**

The connection between an independent Kurdistan and the policy objective of supporting Israel is weak, but does exist. Iran, as with objective one, is the connecting factor. Israel and Iran have never fought a direct war. Iran's support for Hezbollah has sparked several cross-border incursions by Israel into southern Lebanon, the latest occurring in the summer of 2006. Angering Iran would potentially increase the support it gives to Hezbollah, causing security issues for Israel.

Similarly, the Arab states could also take offense to a Kurdish state in the region and thus bolster increased resistance to the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. This could be especially true with Syria, who has a sizable Kurdish population of its own. Any support of an

independent Kurdish state must take into consideration what effects this would have on the radical Islamist groups of the Middle East.

**3. U.S. Foreign Policy Objective Three: Ensure that the global economy has access to plentiful and reasonably priced oil.**

Oil is one of the foremost U.S. foreign policy objectives in the Middle East. Oil is the one natural resource that global economy relies upon and the Middle East has some of the largest reserves in the world.

If an independent Iraqi Kurdistan gained control of the oil fields in northern Iraq, it would become a major competitor in the world's oil market. Historically, the cities of Mosul, Kirkuk, and the oil-rich surrounding areas were predominantly Kurdish. Arabization, during the 1970s, took the majority standing away from the Kurds.<sup>183</sup> The Kurds wish to reestablish control over this area, creating a moderate point of contention between the Arabs and Kurds in Iraq today.

One factor that will need to be taken into account is the geography of Iraqi Kurdistan. It does not have an outlet to the sea and thus would require cooperation from neighboring states for distribution of its oil to the world market. It is likely that Iran would not cooperate. Turkey, on the other hand, could find great economic gain

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<sup>183</sup> Nader Entessar, *Kurdish Ethnonationalism*, Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1992, 74-75.

should they cooperate with the Kurds and provide an avenue for the oil to the European Union (EU).

This is not to say that Turkey would support an independent Kurdish state if it gained economically, but it would certainly help. One of the factors keeping Turkey out of the EU is the Kurdish issue in Turkey.<sup>184</sup> One of the conditions set by the EU is that Turkey must "grant its Kurdish ethnic population its cultural, educational, social and political rights."<sup>185</sup> The "lure of EU membership" is slowly changing the views in Ankara.<sup>186</sup> If cooperation with the Kurds from Iraq helps their own internal situation with indigenous Turkish Kurds, it is plausible that Ankara may find domestic support, especially if it helps Turkey gain EU membership.

**4. U.S. Foreign Policy Objective Four: Encourage the spread of democracy in a region that has little tradition or background in this form of government.**

Of all the U.S. foreign policy objectives for the Middle East, the declaration of independence by the Kurds of Iraq would be the objective that the United States would be the most hard-pressed not to support. The "Kurds are not alien to the democratic ideal," and it could be argued that the Kurds are the most developed democratic society in the Middle East.<sup>187</sup> Gareth Stansfield examines, in depth,

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<sup>184</sup> The issue centers on human rights and political equality for the Kurds within the state of Turkey.

<sup>185</sup> Michael M. Gunter, "The Kurds in Iraq," *Middle East Policy* 11.1 (Spring 2004), 108.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>187</sup> Stansfield, 185.

the origins and the development of the Kurdish political system.<sup>188</sup> While the system of governance in the KRG is not the picture of a perfect democracy, it is the most developed democratic system within the region.

One of the goals of the U.S. in post-Saddam Iraq is instituting democratic reforms. The model of the internal development of the Kurdish democratic system is one of the supporting factors that show democracy can work in Iraq. If democracy cannot take hold in the rest of Iraq, and the Kurds declare their independence, it would be hypocritical of the United States NOT to support the Kurds.

Even if the justification of supporting the Kurds lies solely in the promotion of democracy, many states in the region and throughout the world could see U.S. support of a single ethnic group as a blow to their own security. It is not implausible to assume that such support and recognition would fuel their own ethnic minorities to strive for greater autonomy or independence as well.

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<sup>188</sup> Stansfield, 185.

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## VI. CONCLUSION

This purpose of this thesis was to address four questions. The first question was, "*Have the Kurds gained enough political maturity to declare independence?*" Analyzing the development of the KRG and the willingness for the major political parties to set aside their differences and work together clearly demonstrates that the Iraqi Kurds have politically matured to the point where they could operate as an independent state.

The answer to the second question, "*What level of permissiveness for an independent Kurdistan exists among the regional powers?*" is also clear. The most important regional actors, especially Turkey, will not allow or recognize an independent Iraqi Kurdistan as it would threaten their national security.

The consensus among scholars and the Kurdish leadership concur with the answer to the third question, "*What is the possibility that the Iraqi Kurds will declare independence from Iraq?*" A declaration of independence by the Iraqi Kurds in the foreseeable future is highly unlikely. Although, with such an overwhelming percentage of the Kurdish population desiring statehood, it is not beyond the realm of possibility for an internal uprising to alter the policy of the KRG.

The United States should consider such a scenario possible. The answer the fourth question, "*How should the United States shape its foreign policy in the event of such a declaration?*" is probably the most contentious. There

are valid reasons to support both a decision to recognize and not to recognize an independent Kurdistan.

In the event that circumstances change and the Iraqi Kurds decide that independence is in their best interest, the United States should support and recognize them. Within the context of the U.S. foreign policy objectives for the Middle East, stability of the oil and energy markets and the promotion of democracy are arguably the most important objectives.

This recognition may not be immediately popular, particularly with Turkey. Their fears of their own indigenous Kurds desiring their own autonomy or state is not unfounded. However, that is an internal issue of which the Iraqi Kurds have little direct influence. Intervention in Iraqi Kurdistan on Turkey's part could further stall their entrance in the EU, as well as damage its strategic alliance with the United States.

The future of a federalized Iraq is uncertain; therefore, multiple options deserve consideration. The model of compromise and cooperation exhibited by the Kurds and the KRG will, with any luck, be contagious and spread throughout the remainder of Iraq and to other parts of the Middle East.

The application of the three levels of analysis to the people and events of the Iraqi Kurdish history provide indications that the prospect for a future Kurdish state is viable. Even though the potential exists, a declaration of Kurdish independence is still improbable. Extensive changes to the international system are necessary for the realization of an independent Iraqi-Kurdistan.

**APPENDIX: FULL INTERVIEW WITH FALAH MUSTAFA  
BAKIR, MINISTER OF FOREIGN RELATIONS FOR THE  
KURDISTAN REGIONAL GOVERNMENT<sup>189</sup>**

*Question 1: What are the main obstacles to  
independence for Iraqi Kurdistan?*

Independence in order to create a sovereign state for the Kurds of Iraq or the Kurds of Turkey, Iran and Syria, is not a policy of the Kurdistan Regional Government of Iraq.

The Kurds are the world's largest nation without a homeland, we have sought and been promise sovereignty in the past, most notably after World War I, and in his heart of heart every Kurd would like to see an independent Kurdistan.

But it is also true that the current geo-political circumstances are not conducive to independence, and that we have publicly and often stated that we are not seeking independence. We stand by our pronouncements and assurances. We believe that the best thing for the people of the Kurdistan Region is to be a strong region in a federal Iraq.

Our main priority is to recover from decades of persecution and neglect under the former regime of Saddam Hussein. We seek this economic, cultural and political development not in the name in independence, but in order to provide the citizens of the Kurdistan Region the chance of a better life.

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<sup>189</sup> Falah Mustafa Bakir, Minister, Head of the Department of Foreign Relations, Kurdistan Regional Government, interviewed by Robert Lewis, February 29, 2008, via email. The responses from Minister Bakir are unedited.

***Question 2: The main obstacle to an independent Kurdistan appears to be international influences, especially with regards to Turkey and Iran. What can, or is, the KRG doing to better its relations with Turkey and Iran?***

The KRG desires to have good relations across the board - governmental, political, commercial, and cultural - with all our neighbors.

The Kurds of Iraq have had longstanding and fruitful ties with both Turkey and Iran.

On a governmental level the KRG enjoys normal relations with Iran. The Iranian consulate is one of twelve foreign representation offices (the others being Austria, the Czech Republic, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, the Republic of Korea, Spain, the Russian Federation, the UK, and the US) present in Erbil. Iran is also a trading partner.

Our relations with Turkey are more complicated. There are two main reasons for this: a) the issue of the PKK and b) the Kurds inside Turkey who some in Ankara believe are inspired by the emergence of a semi-autonomous Kurdish across their border, inside Iraq.

The PKK is a serious problem and the KRG is dedicated to being an important part of the solution. We have officially condemned the violence of the PKK within Turkey and commiserated with the families of those affected by their actions. And we are determined that territory inside Iraq should not be used to launch attacks inside Turkey. To ensure this does not happen we are closely monitoring our region's airports to prevent known PKK members entering or leaving. We have created a cordon around areas the remote border areas we suspect may contain PKK to prevent the supply of food or weapons to the fighters. We have also closed PKK "front" offices operating inside the region. The

KRG also played a key role in securing the safe release of the eight Turkish soldiers captured by the PKK at the end of last year.

And we want to do more. We believe that the solution to this problem lies not in military action but in diplomatic dialogue and compromise. We further believe that the KRG should be included in US, Iraqi and Turkish talks on the subject. The KRG is uniquely placed to help produce change in the situation.

However, Ankara refuses to interact on an official level with the KRG. We believe this attitude is shortsighted. The KRG is a de-jure part of Iraq - a constitutionally mandated regional government, and furthermore we govern territory immediately next to Turkey.

Some in the Turkish military, bureaucracy and political establishments view with distaste the progress made by the KRG. However, the new gains made recently by the AK Party, a party that the record shows is supported by the majority of Turkish Kurds, are cause for hope. The AK Party has already made concessions towards the Kurdish population in Turkey by removing some of the stringent constraints placed on them in the past.

Social and political measures such as these are the real key to neutralizing the militant wing of the PKK. By embracing their Kurdish population, and encouraging them to celebrate their culture and language, and ensuring economic development, the Turkish state can better sustain its unity.

On a private sector commercial level relations between the people of the Kurdistan Region and Turkey are robust. Turkey is our principal trading partner and the construction boom taking place in the Kurdistan Region is being conducted for the most part in cooperation with Turkish companies. This trade is mutually beneficial, as illustrated by the fact that even at the height of the recent tensions Turkey did not close the Harbor border crossing.

The KRG is heartened by these commercial ties. We believe they will encourage future government to government interaction.

***Question 3: Is the KRG absolutely committed to working within a federalized Iraq? Or is the KRG conducting its policies to increase its autonomy / chance for statehood?***

The KRG is committed to the creation of a federal, democratic, pluralistic and secular Iraq. Our commitment to this new state is born of a belief that after decades of persecution the people of this country deserve a better future and the tenets mentioned above are the best way to secure that future.

Our commitment to this experiment is not without condition. We have, since the liberation of 2003, emphasized the importance of resolving the situation of the disputed territories inside Iraq. Our demands were recognized by Article 140 of the Iraq constitution, a constitution voted for by the vast majority of Iraqis. The issue of the disputed territories is important because in a democracy the people must be given the right to chose for themselves who will govern on their behalf. Saddam carried out a campaign of Arabization, violently forcing people out of the areas, confiscating their lands and houses. This injustice must be rectified. Rather than resort to violence though, we want to return these rights in a legal and democratic manner.

The KRG, its political parties, and its leadership work hard to create progress in the federal government in Baghdad. We believe that it is time for Iraqis to create change; we can no longer rely solely on the international community.

***Question 4: Has there been any communication between the KRG and the US regarding the possibility of a declaration of independence.***

The pursuit of independence is not a KRG policy. We are working to create a federal, democratic country with a federal system as outlined in the preamble of the Iraqi constitution with correct power and wealth sharing.

We welcome talks with the US to discuss the role of the Kurds in their wider Middle East policy. We are the US' best friends in the region, we are grateful for the liberation and we want to develop a long term strategic partnership with the US.

***Question 5: During the 1990s, the KDP and PUK fought what could be considered a civil war. By the late 1990s, the two parties reached an agreement and appear to be working together for the interests of Kurdistan. Is the cooperation between the two dominant parties of the KRG likely to continue?***

The KRG is a government of unity. The two largest parties, the PUK and the KDP, reached a power sharing agreement two years ago and this agreement still stands today. Included in this agreement are the smaller parties of the region.

A unified front for the Kurds of Iraq is in the best interests of the people of the Kurdistan Region and therefore cooperation between the PUK and KDP and other parties has become standard, and will remain so.

*Question 6: What percentage of the population within the three Kurdish provinces favor independence? According to the January 2005 referendum, 98.5% of the voters were in favor of independence. How is the KRG convincing the public that independence is still a remote possibility, but not in the near future due to outside influences?*

The referendum showed that a large proportion of people in the Kurdistan Region were pro independence. However, there is a difference between desiring independence and the practicality of obtaining it. The KRG understands this, and so do the people of the region. The KRG's pragmatic leadership has done a great deal to manage the expectations of its people in this regard.

The Kurdistan Region is experiencing the greatest period of prosperity in its long history. There is much work still to be done, and by no means has the KRG created a situation without problems. But we are working in partnership with our people and our friends in the international community to create a better life. Our highest priority is to concentrate on infrastructure development, healthcare, education and economic reforms.

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