
The Political Geography of Kurdistan

Carl Dahlman¹

Abstract: A U.S. geographer specializing in Kurdistan surveys that stateless region's complex historical, ethnographic, and cultural elements. Of particular interest is an analysis of the situation of the Kurds in each of the four major countries in which their homeland is found—Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria—and where they comprise roughly 8–20 percent of each country's total population. The study is based on recent field work, interviews with numerous Kurds in government and political organizations as well as Kurdish refugees, and a literature survey, including regional sources. The paper concludes by assessing the implications of the changed, post–September 11 political situation in the region for Kurdish political influence and territorial sovereignty. *Journal of Economic Literature*, Classification Numbers: H10, I00, I31. 2 maps, 2 tables, 66 references.

INTRODUCTION

At the edge of empires and the crossroads of civilizations lies the region of Kurdistan, “land of the Kurds,” a generally mountainous expanse of some 200,000 square miles straddling the present state boundaries of Turkey, Syria, Iraq, Iran, and the former Soviet republics of Armenia and Azerbaijan (Fig. 1). The environs of Kurdistan encompass the mountains and plateaus of southeast Anatolia, the eastern Taurus and northern Zagros mountains, along with their foothills, and extend out onto the upper reaches of the dissected Trans-tigridian plains of Mesopotamia and the Jazira region in northeastern Syria. Situated between plateaus in Turkey and Iran, the deserts of Syria and Iraq, and the Caucasus Mountains, Kurdistan has been an important historical contact zone in south Eurasia, isolated only by its mountainous terrain. Although the historical emergence of a relatively homogenous Kurdish population remains the subject of some debate, an identifiable cultural group was in place by the early 5th century BCE, marked by common social, religious, and linguistic form. Xenophon, Strabo, and Pliny each made reference to a group residing in this general area who appear to have possessed elements of early Kurdish culture, and whom these historians described using derivations of the modern identifier, Kurd (Jwaideh, 1960, pp. 22-27). Later travelers, including the 13th-century Venetian Marco Polo, described the Kurds on their journeys in the region. However, their cursory treatments left little useful historical record of the Kurds, except to characterize them as bandits. These misapprehensions, though not entirely without substance, still informed 20th century scholarship, even though most such accounts

¹Department of Geography, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC 29208. This paper is based, in part, on field work conducted from 1998–2002, including 55 interviews with individuals from the Kurdistan Regional Government, various Kurdish political parties, refugee communities in France, Britain, and the United States, and organizations related to the Kurdish issue. This research was funded, in part, by National Science Foundation Award No. 9906948. The author is grateful to Professor Richard Rowland, California State University, San Bernardino, for providing information on the number of Kurds residing in the former Soviet republics.

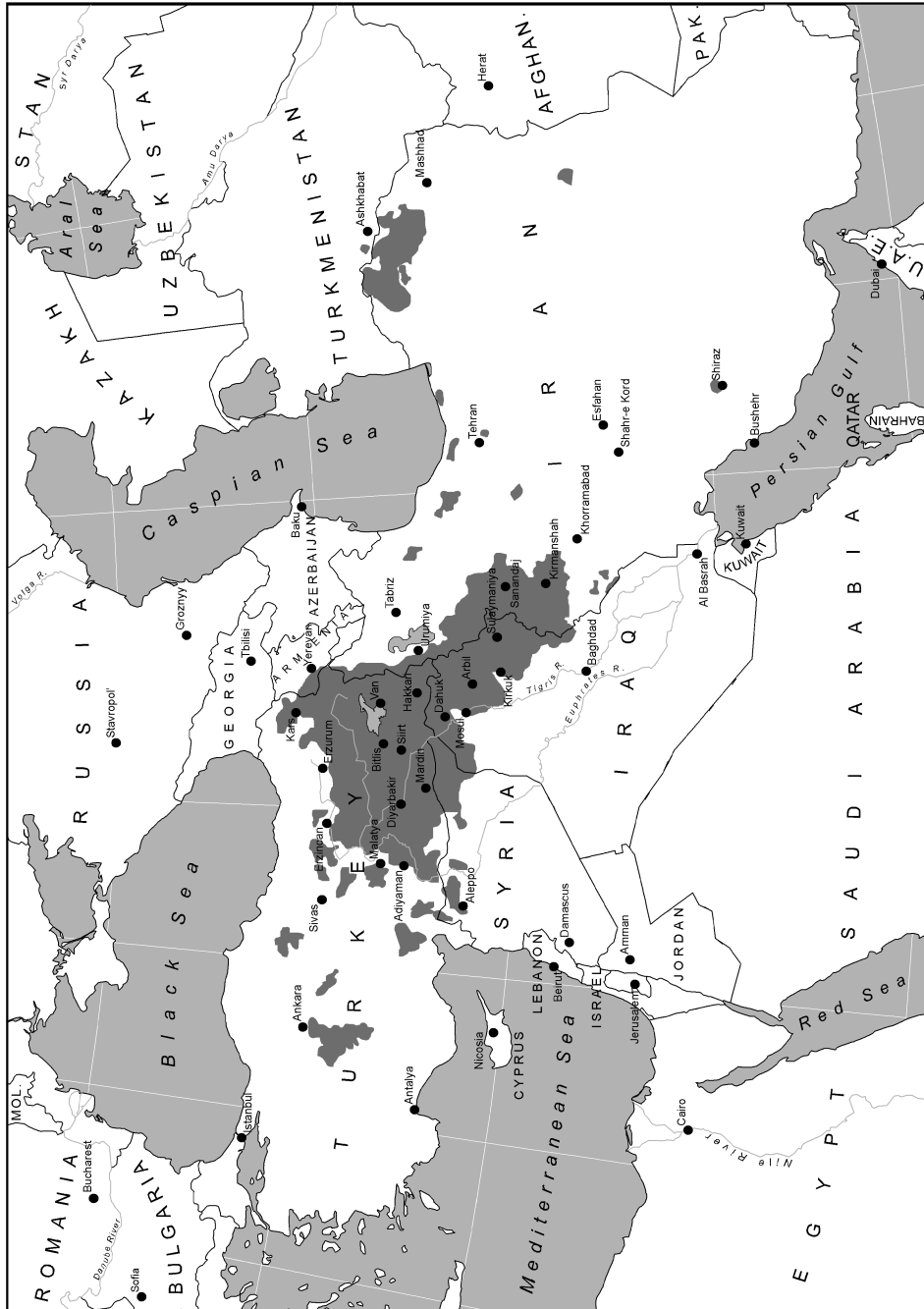


Fig. 1. Areas of significant Kurdish population (darkened pattern) in the Middle East and southwestern Asia.

were merely reflections of suspicions held by the Kurds' neighbors and enemies. As often as Kurdish tribal groups fought for regional empires, they rebelled against them.

The histories of the Sassanians, the Arab invasion and subsequent Islamization of the region, Umayyads, Abbasids, Seljuks, Byzantines, Crusaders, Turkomans, Mongols, Timur-lane, and many others are, in various and often complex ways, related to that of the Kurds. Modern Kurdish political history, however, began on August 23, 1514 at the Battle of Çaldıran in northern Kurdistan, where the competing Ottoman and Safavid empires found the limits of their reach and established the first significant division of Kurdistan. The boundary, formalized in 1639 in the Treaty of Zuhab, divided east from west along the Zagros Mountains and remained in place until 1914. The current boundary, delineated after World War I, is roughly collinear with the old and divides Iran from Turkey and Iraq (Edmonds, 1957).

Modern investigations of the Kurds were first conducted as a result of British imperial dominance in the region, from the late 19th century until the emergence of the Turkish and Arab national movements in the 1920s and 1930s. These contributions were authored by British officers, most commonly those assigned to the mandate of Mesopotamia, and by anthropologists, most notably C. J. Edmonds, Fredrik Barth, and Edmund Leach. Later studies by regional scholars emerged in the mid-20th century, especially Zaki (1939) and Jwaideh (1960). More recent significant contributions have been made by Martin Van Bruinessen, whose book *Agha, Shaikh and State: The Social and Political Structures of Kurdistan* (1992) is a standard reference for Kurdish studies. McDowall's recently updated *A Modern History of the Kurds* (1996) offers a comprehensive synopsis of the available research, scholarship, and journalism. The true significance of texts such as these, however, may later be recognized for their influence on Kurdish self-understanding. Indeed, the historian Robert Olson's works are frequently translated into one or more of the region's languages.

GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE KURDISH POPULATION

Though the well-known Kurdish sentiment that they have "no friends but the mountains" reveals the cultural and even political significance of the landscape, the reality of human settlement in Kurdistan belies this rather romantic vision. In fact, the largest urban Kurdish population is now in Istanbul, to which more than a million Kurds migrated in the last century, having left the relatively poor and increasingly unstable conditions of Turkey's southeast provinces. Likewise, differences between remote villages and large cities of northern Iraq are marked by contrasting patterns of rural and urban life, yet residents recognize a common Kurdish culture. And although Kurdish cultural forms, such as tribal lineage, remain components of Kurdish life, their varied experiences with modernization, as well as Arab, Persian, and Turkish nationalism, suggest the phrase "Kurdish society" more aptly describes the commonalities of the 20-some million Kurds living in the region while also acknowledging the differences among them.

Nevertheless, the ecological context of traditional Kurdish settlements is important for understanding the development of Kurdish society. Most of Kurdistan receives rainfall in sufficient quantities to support agriculture, in contrast to the arid alluvial plains to the south. Rain-fed streams rising in the heart of Kurdistan merge to form both the Euphrates and Tigris rivers, making possible the ancient and modern irrigated agriculture found on the arid plains of present-day Syria and Iraq. Human ecological transformation in these areas during the last century, especially increased deforestation and goat herding, has produced a severely denuded and increasingly eroded landscape (Mutlu, 1996a).

Table 1. Current Estimates of Kurdish Population^a

Country/region	Kurdish population, in millions	Percentage of the country's total population
Turkey	13.0	20
Iraq	4.2	19
Iran	5.7	9
Syria	1.1	8
Former USSR ^b	0.2	—
Diaspora	0.9	—
Total	25.1	—

^aEstimates of Kurdish population vary widely depending on the source and demographic technique employed (see Mutlu, 1996a).

^bRepublics of the Transcaucasus and Central Asia.

Sources: Compiled by the author from a variety of sources. See, especially, Izady, 1992, pp. 111-118; McDowall, 1996, pp. 3-5; Mutlu, 1996a; and Bozarslan, 1997, pp. 27-33. Information on Kurdish populations in the countries of the former USSR is available in Goskomstat SSSR, 1993, p. 12; ARKS, 2000, p. 1; and Natsional'nyy, 2000, p. 71.

The primary Kurdish population area is located in southeastern and eastern Anatolia, northern Iraq, and along both sides of the Iraqi-Iranian border (Fig. 1). Important areas of the Kurdish population also extend into northern Syria and the southern Caucasus, while pockets exist in central and western Anatolia, the south shores of the Caspian Sea, and in the Khorasan province in northeastern Iran near the border with Turkmenistan. No accurate population count exists for the Kurds; where actual census counts exist, their age or the political expediency of hiding the Kurdish population frustrate reliable estimation. Nevertheless, scholars have endeavored to estimate the Kurdish population and their research suggests that the Kurdish population numbers somewhere between 20 and 24 million (Table 1).² Events of the last one hundred years have further driven many Kurds both forcibly and voluntarily to seek safety or employment in the larger cities of the region—Istanbul, Kurds will say only half-jokingly, is the largest Kurdish city in the world. Exile and asylum in Russia, Central and Western Europe, and North America account for a growing community, perhaps over one million in Western Europe alone, with increasing influence in Kurdish political movements and in some Western governments.³ Although often overlooked, a considerable population of Kurdish Jews emigrated, at times forcibly, from Kurdistan, especially from Iraq between 1950–1951, leaving behind the *julikan*, or Jewish quarter, of Kurdish cities to resettle in the then–newly established Israel, where they are estimated to number over 100,000.

Although Sunni Islam is the predominant religion among Kurds, they by no means have an ethnic religion in the sense that significant segments of the Kurdish population practice quite divergent faiths. According to Izady (1992), about 60 percent of the Kurdish population

²The region also is inhabited by Armenian, Turkmen, Assyrian, Chaldean, and other minority communities as well as Arabs, Turks, and Persians. Historical claims to Kurdistan, including one made in 1945 to the UN conference in San Francisco, include those by the Lurs and other groups lying between the Kurds and the Persian Gulf (Fig. 2).

³Population estimates of Kurds in exile vary widely. The Institut Kurde de Paris (2002) suggests that as many as 850,000 Kurds live in Western Europe and another several hundred thousand have been identified throughout Central and South Asia. Estimates of the North American Kurdish population vary widely on either side of 50,000.

is Sunni and generally follow the Shaf'i school of legal thought.⁴ This places the preponderance of the Kurdish population in contrast with their neighbors, among whom Turks and many Arabs are Sunni of the Hanafi school, while many Persians practice Shi'i Islam. As much as 15 percent of the Kurdish population practices Ithna 'Ashari Shi'i, especially in southeastern Kurdistan where they share this religion with other Iranians. Other Kurds are "adherents of heterodox, syncretistic sects, in which traces of older Iranian and Semitic religions, extremist Shiism (*ghulat*) and heterodox Sufism" can be identified (Van Bruinessen, 1992, p. 23). Among these groups are the Alevi of northwestern Kurdistan and the Ahl-i Haqq of southern Kurdistan, who share "a veneration of the Imam Ali" and draw heavily from Zoroastrianism (McDowall, 1996, p. 10). Yezidi Kurds practice an orally transmitted and highly syncretic religion "linked to scripturalist religions such as Islam, Christianity, and Zoroastrianism" and several obscure sacred texts (Fuccaro, 1999, pp. 9-17). Finally, Judaism, as noted above, and Christianity are generally uncommon, but followers form significant portions of the population in some Kurdish cities. The doctrinal distinctions between different forms of Sunni, between Sunni and Shi'i, and again between mainstream Islam and regional syncretic or non-Islamic religions is perhaps not as telling as the degree to which both real and perceived religious differences have permitted political leaders to foment both division within and exclusion without Kurdistan. These potential leverage points are compounded further by internal and external linguistic differences.

The Kurdish language (Kurdish, or Kurmanji) is a West Iranian Indo-European language that is closely related to Persian and quite different from Turkish or Arabic, though all three have influenced it. Speakers of Kurmanji are divided into northern (Bahdinani) and southern (Sorani) groups, with the transition occurring roughly along a line from Mosul to the southern shore of Lake Urumiya. While linguists have debated the mutual comprehensibility of Bahdinani and Sorani, with the difference being likened to English and German or German and Dutch, there are greater differences between Kurmanji and the Pahlawani languages—Zaza (Dimili) of east-central Anatolia and Gurani of southern Kurdistan (see Kreyenbroek, 1992). Zaza and Gurani are languages that are spoken by the Alevi and Ahl-i Haqq groups, though neither exclusively nor comprehensively; this lends some support to notions that the two groups were once part of a larger population (Izady, 1992, pp. 173-174).

The uneven distribution of Kurdish and non-Kurdish settlements in parts of Kurdistan is rendered more complex still by varying religious and linguistic associations, some which have clearly produced a fair degree of intra- and inter-cultural syncretism and multilingualism. We are cautioned, therefore, to avoid simple associations between these elements.⁵ For example, some Zaza speakers identify as Kurds while others do not, and some Shi'ite Kurds in Iran spurn their Sunni neighbors. Likewise, some families known to be of Kurdish descent instead identify themselves as belonging to other culture groups altogether. Because of historical intermingling, mass migration, urbanization, and multi-ethnic coexistence, local conceptions of cultural identity in the region are less reliant on physical traits, and increasingly less reliant on lineage, than on more fragile markers such as language. There is, moreover, a desperate need for intensified social scientific and cultural study in the region, with most scholarship focusing on regional political events. This is all the more important as linguistic

⁴Of the four schools (or *madhhabs*) of Sunni jurisprudence, Shaf'i is considered to be the least restrictive, the others being Hanafi, Maliki, and Hanbali.

⁵For a similar cautionary note with respect to the peoples of Afghanistan, see Allan (2001, pp. 552-555)—*Ed., EGE*.

and cultural forms have been the target of regional governments' efforts to reduce potential Kurdish self-determination, as will be discussed below.

Kurdish society cannot be described under any singular construct, and important distinctions must be made between Kurdish groups in different parts of Kurdistan and again between "tribal" and "non-tribal" Kurds. The former may be generally described as a patrilineal, typically endogamous segmentary tribe, or *ashiret*. *Ashiret* may constitute either a tribe or a confederation of tribal groups, and may also comprise non-descent groups, clans, or descent lineages.⁶ The latter, non-tribal, Kurds historically comprised a peasant class of both Kurds and non-Kurdish sharecroppers, subject to tribal rule, though such distinctions are less visible today. Non-tribal Kurds must also be recognized to include those who are unaware, by chance or by choice, of their kinship—the term *ashiret* is used to describe a tribal structure but also the condition of being tribal. Kurdish local toponymy directly reflects the territorial division of land according to *ashiret*, and land rights generally follow descent or clan lines. Though private property is common today, collective property regimes associated with pasturage endure, largely through their administrative allocation to a village and the local sedentary clan. Van Bruinessen (1992, p. 53) has noted that "traditional tribal law, Islamic jurisprudence, Ottoman and Persian feudal practices," and the gradual introduction of private property serve to render useless any singular conclusion about local Kurdish territoriality. In some places, the introduction of private property has not displaced obligations for land transfers to remain within clan or tribe. During the 20th century transhumance has diminished both in numbers and in geographical scope, as the enforcement of borders and changing property relations made semi-nomadism unsustainable. More important, perhaps, is the rise of class-based distinctions brought about by modernization programs and urbanization in the 20th century.

Modernization and the rise of competing, national identities have altered Kurdish ethnic consciousness, making it, in some ways, as reliant on ideals of ethno-national markers—typically through language and religion—as on notions of descent and tribal affiliation (see Bozarslan, 1997, pp. 109-116). This is especially true of individuals who, for various reasons, do not identify with the Kurdish cause, as it has been locally defined, or who lack a sense of common historical experience with other Kurds. Accidental, forced, and voluntary dissolution of corporate ties with tribal or communal groups, especially through migration, serves to increase the disidentification with Kurdishness, especially in settings where individuals find it either expedient or necessary to deny any Kurdish affiliation. The gradual erosion of Kurdish identity is not simply that of modernization and urbanization theory, but is fostered by state officials for whom Kurdish identity is equated with political treason. Anti-Kurdish chauvinism has been the experience of Kurds under Kemalist Turkey, Ba'athist Syria and Iraq, and both the Shah's and Ayatollahs' Iran. Further still, ethnic Kurds are the target of popular social misconceptions and bias in the Turkish, Arab, and Persian nationalist projects around them. Recognizing the complexity of Kurdish identity and its official and informal marginalization, the population estimates appearing in Table 1 must be regarded with a great deal of skepticism, though some upper and lower limits may be ventured.

HISTORY AND POLITICAL ORGANIZATION OF MODERN KURDISTAN

With the incorporation of Kurdistan into the Ottoman empire following the battle of Chaldiran, the region was divided, according to Ottoman practice, into three *beglerbegilik* or

⁶Van Bruinessen's book (1992) on the social and political structures of Kurdistan remains the authoritative reference on these matters. The nuance and care he brings to describing Kurdish social forms can only here be generalized. See also Jwaideh (1960).

vilayets ruled by *beglerbegi* or *vali*: Diyarbakir (northern Kurdistan), Raqqa (western Kurdistan encompassing the present Turko-Syrian border), and Mosul (southern Kurdistan or northern Iraq).⁷ Within these *vilayets*, a number of remote chieftaincies were given almost total independence—without tax or military obligation—as *Kurd hükümeti*, or Kurdish governments, in exchange for their recognition of ultimate Ottoman sovereignty.⁸ In general, however, the Ottomans subdivided the three new *vilayets* into about 20 customary *sancaks* (districts; literally, banner), each under the rule of local *begs*, usually Kurdish chiefs. Like *sancaks* throughout the empire, *begs* were expected to pay a share of district revenues to the Sultan and to provide military assistance when called upon. This military assistance was organized as *sipahi*, or “feudal” cavalry, with ordinary *sipahi* receiving small landholdings within the *sancak* and higher-ranking *sipahi* receiving the yield of larger landholdings, or *zeamet*.⁹ On these fiefs, *sipahi* were entitled to collect revenue from the sedentary and toiling peasants, who, unlike peasants in Europe, had nearly exclusive hereditary right to cultivate the land though they did not own it.

The Ottoman feudal system was generally more centralized than its European counterparts, although tax and service obligations were more difficult to collect from Kurdish chiefs, especially at times of weakness in central administration. Because the *emirs* and *begs* of the region were drawn from the larger Kurdish families, the Ottoman system in Kurdistan tended to institutionalize Kurdish tribal authority rather than reduce it. Throughout the nineteenth century, local chiefs occasionally rebelled by refusing their obligations and at other times threatened the territorial integrity of the empire’s eastern frontier. Consumed with internal crises and external challenges elsewhere in the empire, the Sultan’s administration became increasingly concerned with the restlessness and mounting authority of the Kurdish *begs* beyond its immediate grasp (Jwaideh, 1960, p. 320; Van Bruinessen, 1992).

The Ottoman Sultan’s administration, known as the Sublime Porte, finally checked the independent-mindedness of some emirates in the 1830s during an episode involving American and English missionaries working among the Armenian and Nestorian Christian minorities of the region. Viewed by local leaders as a threat to their power, the missionary activity polarized existing rivalries between Kurdish chiefs and the Nestorian community, leading to widespread massacre of the latter by the former—subsequent objections by European governments further gave Istanbul justification it long desired to remove the emirates in Kurdistan. The longevity of the Ottoman-Kurdish emirates, however, was due to their mediating influence over the borderlands, far removed from Istanbul. Without the formal installation of tribal leadership, Ottoman Kurdistan became increasingly unruly during the 1840s (McDowall, 1996, pp. 42-44). In their place, *shaykhly* families rose in prominence, bringing some order to Ottoman Kurdistan, by extending their influence through *tariqas* or Sufi orders such as the Naqshbandiya, which combined Islamic interpretive authority with both mystical and temporal concerns.¹⁰ These *murids*, or networks of followers, spread rapidly throughout the region and gave rise to several important Kurdish leaders, most notably

⁷Governors, known as *beglerbegi* or *vali*, administered the Ottoman provinces, which were called *beglerbegilik*, later *vilayets*.

⁸These events are recorded in the *Sharafname*, a 16th-century chronicle written by Sharaf Khan Bidlisi detailing the political relations among the Kurdish emirate families and surrounding powers.

⁹The Ottoman organization of Kurdistan described in Van Bruinessen (1992, pp. 157-161) is comparable to such arrangements throughout the empire (see Faroqhi et al., 1994).

¹⁰Shaykhs are venerated holy men or religious instructors within the dervish or sufi religious orders, networks that connect followers throughout Kurdistan. The succession of shaykhly authority was frequently dynastic, creating politically important families.

Shaykh Ubaydallah, whose 1880 letter to a British Vice-Consul is regarded as the first expression of a modern Kurdish nationalism: “the Kurdish nation is a people apart . . . we want our affairs to be in our hands” (Olson, 1989, p. 2). A revolt started by the Shaykh’s family later that same year was to energize the whole Kurdish region between Lakes Urumiya and Van, including in Qajar (Persian) territory, where the last of several Kurdish emirates was destroyed by the mid-19th century. The subsequent defeat of Kurdish tribes by the Ottoman and Qajar forces marked the last significant political change in Kurdistan until the first World War.

During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Kurdistan was increasingly entangled in British and Russian imperial rivalries, with the Ottomans maintaining a weak presence in the region. The Young Turks entrance into World War I on the side of the Central Powers was the beginning of the end of the Sultanate and the empire, but not without a great deal of blood-letting. During this period of emerging Kurdish and Armenian national consciousness, the political organization of these populations was fueled by increased imperial depredations within Kurdistan and as well the writings of intellectuals in exile or elsewhere in the empire. The threat of Russian dominance south of the Caucasus and Moscow’s potential alliance with either Armenian or Kurdish nationalists were among the issues that gave the Young Turk revolution such an ultra-nationalist tenor. In reality, Russia had little interest in establishing independent Armenian or Kurdish homelands over which it hoped to gain direct control. Regardless, with Moscow’s apparent bid for Armenian loyalty and its deadly advances into eastern Turkey, segments of the Kurdish population allied with the Turks to fight what they viewed as a common Russo-Armenian enemy. Organized by Istanbul into the Hamidiye light cavalry, some Kurdish horsemen participated in the Armenian massacres from the 1890s until 1923 (White, 2000, pp. 60-61).

The end of World War I would have meant the division of the Ottoman empire among the Allied victors according to the 1916 Sykes-Picot Agreement but for the refusal by Russia’s recently ensconced Bolsheviks and the entrance of the United States in treaty negotiations. Sykes-Picot called for the division of Kurdistan into Russian, French, and British spheres of influence. The subsequent renegotiation of the terms of peace, particularly Wilson’s insistence for increased autonomy of Kurdish and Armenian minorities, led to certain statehood for Kurds and Armenians living in part of the former Ottoman territories as established in the 1920 Treaty of Sèvres.¹¹ This brief period of statehood for Kurd and Armenian minorities was less a triumph for the nascent League of Nations and Wilson’s principles than it was a practical arrangement among the Allies to parlay their imperial ambitions into an agreeable framework. In particular, the division of the Kurdish-populated area largely served the interests of Britain, which sought to reduce Turkish and Bolshevik influence in Mesopotamia where it could ill afford sufficient troops to protect its economic interests, including new-found oilfields near Kirkuk. As such, Sèvres mostly served to create buffer states among rivals rather than acknowledge any expression of Kurdish nationalism or minority self-determination, although the treaty has remained a significant touchstone for Kurdish political movements ever since.

The impending loss of eastern Turkey as specified in the Treaty of Sèvres, however, proved anathema to Turkish officers led by Mustafa Kemal, who dismantled the changes wrought by the Young Turks, fully extirpated the Sultanate, and established a secular republic patterned after European models. Kemal, later known as Atatürk, father of the Turks,

¹¹Treaty of Peace between the Allied and Associated Powers and Turkey Signed at Sèvres August 10, 1920. Articles 62 and 64 address Kurdistan, while 88 through 93 provide for an Armenian state under Russian protection.

established formidable regional power and immediately sought redress of the terms of Sèvres, which were abrogated by the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923 (Ahmad, 1993).¹² Kemal's talk of a secular state lessened European and American concern over the fate of the Christian Armenian community, while the promise of a civic nationalism, one that would promise rights for all of Turkey's many non-Turkish minorities, slackened international concern for Kurdish self-determination. The terms of the Treaty of Lausanne, therefore, made no provision for a Kurdish or Armenian state, but instead certified the return of eastern Anatolia with borders that remain today. The subsequent installation of King Faysal in Iraq and the creation of Syria as the French mandate thus set the boundaries of what is known as the "rule of four" divisor states over Kurdistan, although a fifth and much smaller area of the Kurdish population in the southern Caucasus found itself under Soviet rule. For all intents and purposes, the history of Kurdistan becomes quadripartite with the advent of the state projects of Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria.

KURDISTAN IN TURKEY

Shortly after the rise of Mustafa Kemal and the establishment of a new government in Ankara, the Treaty of Lausanne (1923) gave international recognition to the territory that now constitutes Turkey. Though Kemalists had promised the Kurds a better deal in a post-Sultan era, Kurdish distrust of secularist military officers only intensified existing sentiments among Kurdish nationalists. Van Bruinessen (1992, pp. 265-267) makes the argument that unlike the Shaykh Ubaydullah rebellion in the 1880s and subsequent uprisings, a large 1925 revolt led by Shaykh Saïd was original in its political mobilization of previously unaffiliated Kurds. As a charismatic figure in the Naqshibandi order, Shaykh Saïd parlayed local distrust of the Turkish nationalists into a mass uprising, which he further commanded with a fair degree of military organization. The revolt spread rapidly from the area north of Diyarbakir to other towns and cities in the southeast, centered along the Murad River between the Euphrates River and Lake Van. After several months of fighting, the Turkish army and its small air force finally quashed the revolt, although significant subsequent chapters unfolded in 1930 with the Ararat Revolt, which smoldered until the 1938 repression of that year's revolt in Dersim. Estimates of troop strength suggest that of the roughly 25,000 Turks fielded and the 15,000 in rebellion, each side lost about 5,000, while the devastation of civilian villages is inestimable (Olson, 1989, p. 126).

Atatürk placed the southeast under martial law and military occupation, which was not to be the last time this tactic was used against Kurdish rebels. The lasting effect of this period was the continued destruction of villages, massive displacement, and long-lasting mutual mistrust between the government in Ankara and Turkey's sizeable Kurdish population. As an example of the extreme measures taken to yoke Turkish Kurdistan, Ankara encouraged resettlement by Kosovar Albanians and Assyrians in the southeast to change the composition of the region. Following the immediate pacification of Kurdistan after years of internal war, the incorporation of Turkish Kurdistan was to continue according to Kemalism's general program of modernization and economic development—in exchange for adopting a civic Turkish, and pointedly non-Kurdish, national identity—however chauvinistic and incomplete such attempts were. Geopolitically, the outcome of the Shaykh Saïd rebellion established the new tenor in the region, most importantly: Britain was able to consolidate its imperial position in Mesopotamia; Turkey assumed a non-interventionist foreign policy; and Moscow had

¹²Treaty of Peace with Turkey Signed at Lausanne July 24, 1923.

clearly removed itself from manipulating Kurdish affairs among its southern rivals. Since 1925, as Olson (1989) has noted, the Turkish Armed Forces have conducted nearly all of their campaigns against the Kurds, the few notable exceptions being Korea and Cyprus. This is especially significant considering the expansion of Turkey's military resources accompanying NATO membership and the likely predilections of Turkey's political interventionist generals in dealing with the Kurds. Turkish Kurdistan has remained something of an internal colony for the last 75 years.

An outbreak of guerilla war initiated by the *Partiya Karkeren Kurdistan* (the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK) in southeastern Turkey in 1984, although unexpected by many, was not without precedent. Not only had the PKK displayed a propensity for radical, sometimes violent, protest in previous years, but this occasion was preceded by almost 20 years of leftist political campaigning, beginning in 1961 under a new Turkish constitution that granted greater freedom of political expression. As early as the late 1950s, an "Eastism" movement in Turkish politics emerged, which sought to improve startling levels of underdevelopment in parts of Turkey, especially in the Kurdish southeast. Inasmuch as the use of the Kurdish language and any reference to the Kurdish population had long been banned in Turkey, it was a sign of relative freedom that early Eastist journals were able to publicly write about Kurdish culture, even as subsequent Kurdish press ventures were closed as "a threat to national unity."¹³ While Kurdish cultural awareness was rising in town and village during the 1960s, Ankara became increasingly concerned about the Kurdish countryside, eager to forestall any emulation of the ongoing Iraqi Kurdish separatism to the south (Kendal, 1993). The 1971 military coup in Turkey brought with it the repression of Kurdish political activity, which rapidly returned following the reinstatement of parliamentary rule in 1973. The Kurdish organizations had, by now, become increasingly radicalized; Marxist organizations sought not only the development of Kurdistan, but greater autonomy, as well. Polarized by the 1975–1976 Kurdish rebellion in northern Iraq and its betrayal by the U.S.-backed Shah of Iran, the PKK emerged as an anti-colonial movement that targeted both Kurdish "traitors" (absentee feudal landlords) and Turkish "colonizers" (government officers and agents). In 1978, Turkey again declared martial law over the southeast and in 1980 the Turkish Armed Forces arrested anyone suspected of pro-Kurdish political activities. Unfortunately, the Turkish method of incorporating the southeast involved still greater cultural and political repression, forced displacement, and failed economic development. The violent eruption of PKK activity in 1984 was, to say the least, a long time in the making.

Attacks by the PKK on local Kurds provided Ankara an opening by which to divide the Kurdish population against itself. In 1985, a new law establishing the village guard system supplied Kurdish locals with arms to defend their villages from PKK depredations. In addition to being supplied with arms, village guards were also paid, often through tribal chiefs who dispensed the cash and provided the guard with in-kind aid, thereby increasing the dependency of the often poor Kurds on their quasi-feudal and tribal masters. The first guard units were chosen from among the PKK's rival tribes or clans, who sometimes used the guard to settle conflicts with non-Kurdish or non-Sunni groups. The strengthening of tribal patronage, moreover, improved relations between the government and the recipient chiefs, already pleased with an opportunity to assist in the elimination of the PKK. Right-wing and Islamist organizations, including the particularly violent Turkish Hizbullah, have been linked

¹³The Kurdish language was banned with the establishment of the Republic in 1923, reinforced over the years by various measures against Kurdish-language education, public speech, or broadcasting in Kurdish, or through anti-terrorism laws equating Kurdish and references to the Kurds as acts of separatism.

to the village guard system, although this officially has been denied by the government. McDowall (1996, p. 422) estimated that by 1990 there were 20,000 village guards and within three years, recruitment had raised that number to 35,000.

Most Kurds, however, were trapped between the often violent orthodoxy of the PKK and the combined brutality of the Turkish armed forces, village guards, and paramilitary groups. The victims in this conflict were the villagers themselves, forced to choose sides while knowing that any suspicion of succor to either enemy would mean certain imprisonment or death. For many Kurds, however, the balance of government-backed terror on top of years of cultural, political, and economic repression gave the PKK greater popular support. Since 1984, nearly 3,000 Kurdish villages have been destroyed and over 300,000 persons have been forcibly displaced by the government's anti-PKK campaigns. Government programs to resettle the homeless have failed to provide durable solutions for the displaced, and between 1980 and 1999, over 500,000 persons have fled the country altogether to seek asylum in European countries (UNHCR, 1999).¹⁴

Ironically, it is Kemalism's westward orientation that has offered the greatest political leverage for the Kurds of Turkey. Although the PKK has long been branded a terrorist organization by Western governments, the Kurdish struggle for human rights has among its greatest champions activists, journalists, and politicians in those same Western countries. European popular opinion has been predominantly pro-Kurdish with much less support for the PKK and open criticism of Turkey itself. These issues emerge most distinctly in the diplomatic negotiations surrounding Turkey's bid to enter the European Union (see Robins, 1996; Kuniholm, 2001). Turkey made application in 1959, and received in 1963, associate membership status in the European Economic Community. In 1987, President Özal submitted his country's application for membership in the European Community, now European Union. Although party to a customs union beginning in 1995, application for full membership was sidelined throughout the 1990s for reasons relating to Turkey's unstable economic situation, the rise of Islamist parties and their undemocratic disposal by the military, the ongoing question of Cyprus and strained relations with Greece, and Turkey's poor record on human rights in many areas, but especially relating to legal and cultural rights. Although Turkey was removed from the membership process in 1997 for failing to show progress in meeting admittedly vague criteria, Ankara's brief attempt at forming a sphere of influence in Cyprus, Central Asia, the Caucasus, and northern Iraq provided limited returns and reinforced its need for closer ties with Europe. Turkey's return to EU negotiations was further assisted by the United States in coordinating the 1999 capture of Abdullah Öcalan, the PKK leader, thereby providing the pro-EU elements in Turkey the diplomatic and domestic leverage necessary to begin scaling back the military oppression/occupation of the southeast and the unpalatable excesses it entailed. The result has meant continuous EU pressure on Ankara to reform its public institutions but especially that Kurds be granted greater cultural autonomy and political participation. In a country that has viewed Kurdish speech as seditious and denied that as much as one-fifth of its population were anything but "mountain Turks," it is perhaps telling that the current debate in Turkey concerns Kurdish-language education. Though constitutional, legal, and institutional reform has begun on paper, the improvement of conditions for Kurds in Turkey is relatively minor and potentially ephemeral should Europe again reject Turkey.

¹⁴Turkey's human rights situation is discussed in the annual U.S. State Department country reports available at <http://www.state.gov.drl/hr/c1470.htm>

A new challenge facing the Kurdish southeast actually began decades ago with plans to build 22 dams and extensive irrigation networks on the headwaters of the Euphrates and Tigris rivers, which rise in Turkish Kurdistan. The GAP (Güney Dogu Projesi), or Southeast Anatolia Project, is a massive development project in eight provinces of Turkey, centered on several enormous hydroelectric dams connected to a series of massive irrigation corridors. The intent of the project is to provide inexpensive power and socio-economic development to Turkey's most neglected and poorest region. Turkey's public rhetoric presents the project as a means of addressing "root causes" for the persistent problems in the southeast (Tomanbay, 1993). Mutlu (1996b) has suggested that the financial assumptions built into projections of GAP's success are problematic, and may easily throw Turkey's already unstable economy into a tailspin. He and McDowall (1996, pp. 434-435) also have argued that the capital-intensive and industrially oriented development scenario will not assist the generally poor and semi-literate population of Turkey's Kurdistan, but rather will intensify the bimodal income distribution and further exacerbate social tensions that the project was intended to ameliorate. More skilled workers from western Turkey likely will fill any expansion of industrial labor demand in the region. Furthermore, the project has become the target of very active and highly mobilized groups of environmental activists in Europe who thus far have effectively delayed construction on the Ilisu dam by blocking export credits backed by European governments. Environmentally, the dams will severely limit downstream alluvial deposition, necessary for downstream soil quality, and will reduce water quality as a result of increased agricultural pollution upstream (cf. Beaumont, 1996). As well, the expansion of irrigation agriculture in Turkey will likely hasten already rapid erosion of intended cropland and contribute to already rising water tables and their salinization (Mutlu, 1996b).

These points are, perhaps, relatively minor in comparison with the geopolitical advantages to be gained by Ankara. First, although Turkey has promised never to use the dams as a weapon, the dams will effectively control the water supply to important downstream agricultural areas in Syria and Iraq (Hardan, 1993; Tomanbay, 1993; Wakil, 1993). Turkey argues that shutting the valve would flood Turkish agricultural areas, but facing the option of war most suspect that water may indeed become one, though perhaps not the only, weapon. Despite the recent UN Convention on the Law of Non-Navigational Watercourses (May 21, 1997), Turkey remains a reluctant participant in dialogues with Iraq and Syria (Gresh, 1998). Turkey has already used the water issue in its war with the PKK when it threatened to end the dialogue with Syria over water sharing unless Damascus ended aid to PKK cells operating from Syrian territory.

Second, the GAP dams would create enormous reservoirs in the valley systems of the southeast, flooding thousands of Kurdish villages. McDowall (2001) estimated that the proposed Ilisu dam would alone displace 25,000 persons. A region that has never experienced land reform, the region's troubles are directly related to the feudal and semi-feudal poverty of Kurds. The dislocation caused by intentional flooding is compounding the forced relocation caused by the government's destruction of villages during the 1980s and 1990s. The ultimate effect of this process is the further dismantling of Kurdish land tenure and tribal systems, which have long been viewed as the source of the Kurd's extra-governmental loyalties.

Separately, Ankara's stance against Islamism, its alliance with the United States, and its general suspicion of Arab states in the region has brought it into a closer relationship with Israel. A military alliance that began in 1994 between Turkey and Israel is developing into a much wider entente, with both countries aligning themselves against Islamist extremism while providing each other with immediate military support against their present enemies, Kurds and Palestinians.

Although Turkey is heavily dependent on imported oil and natural gas, it is arguably energy secure. Because of its geographic location, a land bridge between Eastern energy sources and Western markets, Turkey forms an important energy corridor. United States diplomacy has played an important role in promoting construction of a pipeline corridor from Baku to Ceyhan on Turkey's southern coast (Burke, 2000). Domestically, the Turkish State Petroleum Company (TPAO), Royal Dutch-Shell, and Exxon Mobil operate the country's small production sites around Hakkari in the southeast, which together yield about 60,000 barrels per day (DOE, 1999).¹⁵ Joint ventures with other producers and states has placed Turkey, via TPAO, in the midst of Central Asian petro-politics while Iraqi oil first flows north to Turkey, then west, in the Kirkuk-Yumurtalik pipeline built in 1986.¹⁶ Small amounts of oil have been exported out of northern Iraq to Turkey via truck since the 1991 Gulf War, yielding a significant income for Iraq's Kurdistan Regional Government in Arbil (see below), which oversees the trade at the Habur border crossing. Maintenance of a secure energy corridor will be crucial for Turkey to maintain its geostrategic advantage in these arrangements, ensuring Ankara's suspicion of Kurdish autonomy anywhere in the region.

KURDISTAN IN IRAN

On the eve of the First World War, Iran was effectively split between Russian occupation in the north and British control in the south. With the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, the Qajar ruler, Ahmad Shah, was left to the exactions of British imperial interests. The post-war Iranian government was weakened by mounting popular protest against its pro-British leanings and was unable to establish control over its territories, including Iranian Kurdistan west of Lake Urumiya, which by 1920 was under Ismail Agha, or Simko, a local Kurdish chief and nationalist. Ahmad Shah was dethroned in 1921 by the nationalistic and patriotic colonel Reza Khan, who moved to diminish the British presence, strengthen the army, and quell popular unrest, especially among the non-Persian communities. Successful in restoring relative law and order, Reza Khan convinced the Majlis to dissolve the Qajar dynasty and install him as the "king of kings": in 1926 he became Reza Shah of the Pahlavi dynasty, which endured until 1979. Much like Kemalist Turkey, the Shah's Iran strove for a secular, Westernized society, promoting industrialization and economic self-assurance (Cleveland, 1994, p. 174). Increased militarization of the Iranian border, the disarming of rebellious tribes, and the settling of nomads were part and parcel of the new Shah's oppression of the Kurds, culminating in the government's assassination of Simko in 1930.

Growing domestic unease with Britain's power in Iran, centered as it was on the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, prompted the Shah's flirtations with Germany prior to World War II as a means of countering British influence. This uncertain loyalty, however, precipitated his removal by the Allies, once again dividing Iran north and south, now with Soviet troops and their British counterparts. While the Shah's son was installed as head of a weak government in Tehran, the area around Mahabad was left unoccupied and provided Simko's successors a unique opportunity to replicate the independence won by neighboring Azeris. The rapid mobilization of Kurdish politics in the Mahabad region, beginning in 1942 with the formation of the Komala (Revolutionary Organization of Kurdish Toilers) and their program of *Jiani Kurdistan* (rebirth of Kurdistan), briefly consolidated several regional Kurdish

¹⁵Turkey's proven oil reserves are 296 million barrels, as compared with Iraq's proven oil reserves of 12.5 billion barrels (DOE, 1999, 2001).

¹⁶The Kirkuk-Yumurtalik pipeline can carry 900,000 barrels per day (DOE, 2001).

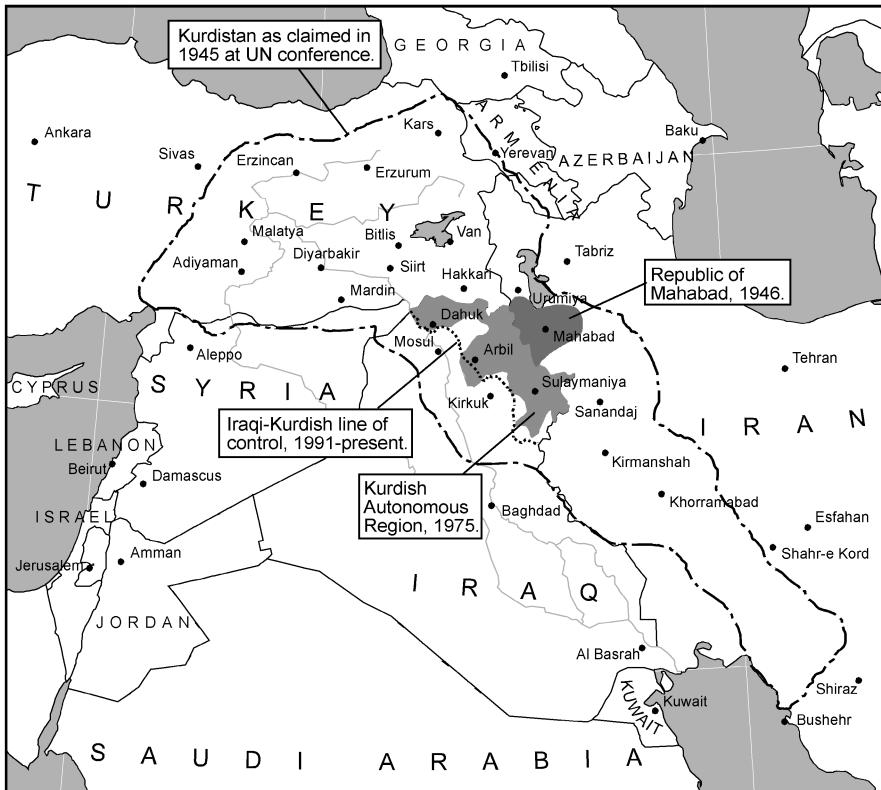


Fig. 2. Map depicting various territorial claims of Kurdistan.

nationalist movements. Komala members from Iran and some Iraqi Kurds, including the Barzanis, in 1945 formed the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) with Qazi Mohammed among its leaders. Moving forward on a party program seeking greater Kurdish cultural, economic, and political progress, Qazi Mohammed proclaimed the first Kurdish Republic (of Mahabad) on January 24, 1946 (Roosevelt, 1993) (Fig. 2). The Azerbaijan Republic established to the north of Mahabad inspired the Kurds, whose experiment lasted almost a year with the support of the Soviets. With the withdrawal of Soviet troops in mid-1946, Tehran prepared to reestablish authority over the young republics, concluding with the arrest and execution of Qazi Mohammed and other officers of the Kurdish republic (cf. Ghassemlou, 1993). With the collapse of the republic, Mulla Mustafa Barzani and other Iraqi Kurds fled to Iraq, having already established there a parallel “branch” of the Kurdistan Democratic Party, to which we return below (McDowall, 1996; Van Bruinessen, 1996).

Since the Mahabad republic, mobilized Iranian Kurds have remained active as a politico-military organization, in the Kurdistan Democratic Party–Iran (KDP-I) and Komala, participating at times in regional conflicts although usually engaged in localized, low-intensity conflict with the Iranian government. Under both the Shah of Iran and the Islamic Republic, the Kurds, like other non-Persian minorities, have suffered the general deprivation of cultural rights, economic development, and political enfranchisement. After an initial surge of popular support for the removal of the Shah, the Iranian Kurdish nationalists and

some left-wing opposition organizations immediately moved against the Islamist government from bases in Iranian Kurdistan. Teheran countered with bloody repressions and summary executions of suspected opponents to the new regime, including KDP-I and the Mujahedin-i Khalq, a leftist organization that carried out executions of religious and political figures in the Teheran regime. Soon thereafter, the cornered KDP-I established tenuous relations with Teheran, although they were still suspected by their Iraqi Kurdish counterparts of collusion with Baghdad. With the outbreak of war between Iraq and Iran in 1980, both countries sought to use the other's Kurds against their common enemy in exchange for assistance in establishing local party dominance. Thus did the Iraqi KDP assist Teheran in reducing the KDP-I presence in western Iran, from which the Iranian Kurds have yet to fully recover.¹⁷ Severely weakened, the KDP-I banded briefly with the Mujahedin-i Khalq before taking assistance from Syria's Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK; see below) to seek a settlement with Teheran. At a negotiation organized by the PUK leadership in Vienna between Teheran and the KDP-I, Iranian agents assassinated several of the Kurdish leaders, including its leader, Abdul Rahman Ghassemlou. Meanwhile, Komala united with other opposition groups to form the Communist Party of Iran, adopting a non-conciliatory stance toward the Islamic regime but unable to form any meaningful opposition to Teheran.

Reports on Iranian Kurdistan after the Iran-Iraq war are limited, as the government reestablished almost total control over Iranian Kurdistan. The predominantly Sunni Kurds of Iran—comprising part of the 20 percent of Iran that is Sunni—are regular targets of discrimination and subject to Teheran's interpretation of Shi'ite stricture. Kurdish identity, along with other non-Persian groups, has been suppressed, in part, by the Islamist universalist discourse of the Ayatollahs. The available data on current repression of Iranian Kurds is summarized by the U.S. Department of State:

The Kurds seek greater autonomy from the central Government and continue to suffer from government discrimination. The Kurds' status as Sunni Muslims is an aggravating factor in their relations with the Shi'a-dominated government. Such tensions predate the revolution. Kurds often are suspected by government authorities of harboring separatist or foreign sympathies. These suspicions have led to sporadic outbreaks of fighting between government forces and Kurdish groups.¹⁸

KURDISTAN IN IRAQ

By the end of World War I, the British army occupied the former Ottoman provinces of Baghdad and Basra, currently the central and southern area of Iraq. With the truce between the Allies and the Sultan, Britain also took up occupation of the Mosul region in what is now northern Iraq. In 1919, having installed as governor of Sulaymaniya an influential Kurdish religious figure, Shaykh Mahmud, Britain found it difficult to consolidate centralized power. According to the 1920 Treaty of Sèvres, these areas became the British mandate of Mesopotamia, later to become the state of Iraq, in which London enthroned an Arab king, Faysal. The local chiefs of the late Ottoman period had relatively autonomous powers and the Kurdish population of southern Kurdistan had no interest in exchanging Turkish masters for Arab

¹⁷The two parties' animosity toward one another stemmed from the KDP leadership's opposition to the establishment of a separate KDP-I in Iran.

¹⁸The entire U.S. Department of State human rights report on Iran is available at <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2001/nea/8251.htm>

or British ones. As soon as he was installed in 1919, Shaykh Mahmud used his office to consolidate a nationalist movement that would gain independence from British occupation, though it would not displace his shaykhly authority and traditional tribal structures for state institutions (McDowall, 1996, p. 158). After a brief, and popular, campaign against a British garrison, the Shaykh was captured and exiled. Within three years, Britain had restored Shaykh Mahmud in hopes that he would organize the Kurds and provide a mobilized Kurdish buffer against the Turks, who were seeking to regain the region around Mosul. The shaykh declared a Kurdish state with himself as king, although soon conciliated to an arrangement with Iraq under which the Kurds would maintain a limited autonomy within that state. The promises for Kurdish self-determination and autonomy made at Sèvres, however, were abrogated in the renegotiated treaty with Mustafa Kemal the following year (1921).

The announcement in 1930 that Iraq would be admitted to the League of Nations despite the lack of progress for Kurdish self-determination and cultural rights caused a third uprising under Shaykh Mahmud, which was suppressed with British air and ground troops even though London resented Baghdad's failure to implement the promises made to the Kurds. During the 1930s, Shaykh Ahmad Barzani, whose brother was central in the post-war Kurdish movement, threatened Baghdad's authority in the Barzan district near the border with Turkey. Iraqi ground and British air forces moved against Barzani, wreaking destruction on remote Kurdish villages and towns and inflicting civilian casualties (McDowall, 1996, pp. 179-180).

In 1943, Shaykh Mahmud's brother, Mulla Mustafa Barzani, increased demands that Baghdad implement the promises it never fulfilled to the Kurds according to the League of Nations agreement. Drawing strength from continued Arab neglect, Mulla Mustafa led an uprising that began in 1943 and sought to reconsolidate a Kurdish independence movement, partially in consultation with the Soviets and the Iranian Kurds in Mahabad. The British Royal Air Force defeated the uprising in 1945 and Barzani withdrew to Mahabad and was on hand at the founding of the Iraqi Republic there.

In 1946, the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iraq was established, with Mulla Mustafa as its president in exile. The establishment of a separate party from the KDP in Iran would, in time, create a long-lasting animosity between the two communities (see above). With the collapse of the Mahabad Republic, Barzani and many of his troops made a long march into the Soviet Union where they remained in exile for 11 years. With the overthrow of the Iraqi monarchy by Qasim and other free Iraqi officers, Barzani was invited back to Iraq. Ultimately, the conflict between Qasim's Arab-nationalist base of support and the Kurdish leader's growing power in Iraqi Kurdistan dissolved any hope for improved Arab-Kurd relations. Qasim began to move against Barzani and the Kurds, threatening to arm Barzani's old rivals. The Kurdish revolt against Qasim lasted from 1961 to 1963, slowly picking up momentum and strength while Qasim became increasingly unpopular in Baghdad. Barzani believed the Kurds could receive their desired autonomy in exchange for Kurdish support of a Ba'athist overthrow of Qasim. However, the Ba'athists proved to be suspicious of Kurdish loyalties and Communist Party members, moving quickly against both in a bloody round of executions and military campaigns throughout 1963 (Vanly, 1993). It was during this period that Kurds in the oil-rich area of Kirkuk were forcibly removed in an attempt to Arabize the town and to control its resources—a process that continues today under the Ba'athist regime of Saddam Hussein (Zanger, 2002). Before the end of 1963, Abd al Salam Arif, who sought to end the costly and unpopular war with the Kurds, ousted the Ba'athists. In 1965, however, fighting resumed for another year until a ceasefire was arranged with Arif's successor, whose reign ended when

the Ba'ath Party returned to power in a 1968 "revolution" before launching yet another war against the Kurds in 1969.

Unable to make meaningful gains against the entrenched rebels, Baghdad offered near total Kurdish autonomy under an accord signed by both sides on March 11, 1970. However, both sides failed to fulfill their obligations under the treaty, and tensions over the demographic shifts in Kirkuk, among other things, drove the parties further apart. Iraq's friendship pact with Moscow in 1972 brought the attention of the United States and its allies, Israel and Iran, to Barzani's request for outside assistance. Assassination attempts on Barzani and Kurdish intrigues with Iraq's enemies strained the relationship. Unable to reach an agreement with the Kurds, the Ba'ath Party unilaterally declared the Autonomy Law of 1974, delineating the boundaries of the Kurdish Autonomous Region (Fig. 2). Although Barzani rejected the move as falling short of Kurdish territorial demands, many Kurds thought the offer worth taking.

The subsequent 1974–1975 war established regional tensions that persisted for the next two decades. The United States and Iran provided some support to the KDP during the conflict that afforded Barzani temporary gains, and ultimately the cost of the war drove Baghdad to accept an arrangement with Teheran. The Algiers Accord of 1975 exchanged Iraq's control over the Shatt al-Arab thalweg for Iran's suspension of material support for the KDP. Barzani was defeated and later died in exile. Iraq consolidated its control over Kurdistan and more than 200,000 refugees from Iraqi Kurdistan sought safety in Iran. Iraq subsequently moved to eliminate what it perceived as the Kurdish security threat by destroying Kurdish villages and forcing Kurds into government camps or larger towns and cities under government control: the result was a depopulated security zone along the borders with Iran and Turkey. Some Kurds were deported to the south and Kirkuk was further Arabized (McDowall, 1996, pp. 339-340; Zanger, 2002). Soon after the cease-fire, elements of the KDP began to reorganize and a new political party, the socialist Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) was formed in Damascus.

As the longest-running conventional war in the 20th century, the First Gulf War between Iran and Iraq began in 1980 and lasted until 1988. Although the region had been divided between Soviet and U.S. spheres of influence, Iraq and the Shah's Iran, respectively, the U.S. hostility toward the new regime in Teheran appeared to Baghdad as a strategic opening. Saddam Hussein believed that a quick strike on Iran would cripple the supposedly disorganized Shi'a regime in Iran and end Teheran's tacit support of Kurdish rebels in northern Iraq and Iraqi Shi'ites in the south. Saddam hoped to regain the Shatt al-Arab waterway, lost to Iran in the Algiers Accord of 1975, and sought to acquire the substantial oil fields in Khuzistan, southwestern Iran, which would alter the regional balance of power in his favor. The potential for either side to gain considerable strategic advantage from small territorial gains proved a dilemma for Washington, which had opposed Teheran since the fall of the Shah and, previously, the Soviet-leaning Baghdad. Although the dual containment of Iraq and Iran is most closely associated with the Clinton administration, the policy's *raison d'être* must be recognized in the lack of a desirable partner as first presented in the Iran-Iraq war. With the declining influence of Moscow in the region during the late 1980s, Washington and Western governments stepped in to assist Iraq and, it must be noted, Kuwait against Iranian predations in an effort to neutralize any gains by Teheran. As a result, the United States provided Saddam Hussein with sufficient leeway and resources to keep Iran at bay. Saddam's actions against the Kurds at the end of the war and his invasion of Kuwait two years later proved his liability as a regional ally to the United States. Ever since, Washington has

diplomatically and militarily kept both actors boxed in under sanctions and through countervailing regional alliances.

For their part, the Iraqi KDP and PUK remained somewhat marginal to the conflict until late in the war. Baghdad's preoccupation with operations in the south permitted the return of refugees and exiles from the 1975 rebellion, the reconstitution of Kurdish villages and towns, and the restoration of the KDP. Both the KDP and the PUK expanded their *peshmerga* units and further divided territorial control in Iraqi Kurdistan between the KDP in the northwest (Bahdinan region) and the PUK in the southeast (Sorani region).¹⁹ Although maintaining separate *peshmerga* armies, the parties agreed in 1982 to an undivided Kurdistan for the purpose of fighting Baghdad and the free movement of all Kurdish parties, including the smaller Kurdish and non-Kurdish opposition groups. The Kurds were further assisted by the Syrian Ba'ath Party, which was allied with Teheran to destroy Damascus's rival, Saddam's Iraqi Ba'ath party. The effort by Baghdad's rivals to ally Iraq's Shi'a Arabs, Arab nationalists, and Kurdish and communist parties failed to hold, however, with only the last two recognizing Kurdistan's autonomy. The National Democratic Front, consisting of the KDP and three Kurdish and non-Kurdish socialist and communist parties, represented the Kurdish-leftist alliance. Fighting between the KDP's alliance and the PUK was short-lived, and by 1983 a truce generally held among the Kurds who, together, made subsequent progress against Iraqi troops. After a failed attempt at negotiations between the PUK and Baghdad in 1984, slow rapprochement between the Kurdish parties led to the formation in 1987 of the Kurdistan Front, a collection of Kurdish and non-Kurdish Iraqi parties unified against Baghdad. Facing increased threats, Iraq was using chemical weapons by 1989 against Iranian troops and Kurds, a foreshadowing of the coming *Anfal* campaign, which resulted in the defeat of the Kurdistan Front and, more tragically, a campaign of genocide against the Kurds themselves.

The full scope of Iraq's 1988 *Anfal* campaign against the Kurds was not fully appreciated at the time, despite reports coming out of Iraq that chemical weapons had been used and large numbers of civilians were killed.²⁰ Iraq launched the first of eight *Anfal* campaigns on February 23, 1988 against towns in a PUK stronghold east of Lake Dukan, near the Iranian border north of Sulaymaniya.²¹ About a month later, on March 16, the nearby town of Halabja was to witness the full extent of Iraq's new weapons. Like many of the larger towns in Iraqi Kurdistan, Halabja's population had grown with refugees from the depopulation of smaller Kurdish villages in the late 1970s and 1980s. Beginning with highly destructive incendiary weapons, the Iraqi troops launched chemical attacks against the 60,000 to 80,000 residents of Halabja. Estimates of the number of fatalities range from 4,000 to 7,000 (HRW, 1995, p. 72).

¹⁹The *peshmerga* are Kurdish paramilitary units, whose name means "those who face death."

²⁰The Arabic word "al-anfal" means "the spoils" of war, constituting a reference to the Qur'an (Koran), eighth sura, which imputes the basis for a just and holy war. Its use by Baghdad's secularist and putatively socialist regime is generally regarded as a gross irony, although Makiya (1993) argued that the Ba'athists apply the concept as a Qur'anic justification to take possession of all within Iraqi territory by any means. The objective of the *Anfal* campaigns as a military operation against Iraqi Kurds was to depopulate the area along the Iranian border and to reestablish Baghdad's control over the mountain frontier with Iran.

²¹There is evidence to suggest that Iraq used chemical weapons against these towns a year earlier, before the *Anfal* operations proper. Information about the *Anfal* campaigns was not generally confirmed until the seizure of government documents and audio tapes following the Gulf War in 1991. Additional information may provide further clarity to the events. The account provided here closely follows the standard and most comprehensive summary of the *Anfal* campaigns (HRW, 1995) and more recent reports. Significant additional sources are United States Senate (1991) and Goldberg (2002). See also McDowall (1996) for a comprehensive and updated synopsis of events.

Human Rights Watch (HRW, 1995, p. xvii) has estimated that in total, the campaigns killed 50,000 to 100,000, with many more still missing, whereas McDowall (1996, pp. 357-360) estimated that between 150,000 and 200,000 died in the campaigns altogether. The subsequent flight of 1.5 million Kurds created a humanitarian crisis in Iraq, Iran, and Turkey, the latter country officially opening its borders for the first time to accept about 60,000 fleeing Iraqi Kurds (McDowall, 1996, p. 360). Iran's population of 50,000 Kurdish refugees from the 1975 war rose to well over 200,000 by the end of 1988 (McDowall, 1996, p. 361). Many of the Kurdish refugees from *Anfal* did not return to northern Iraq until after the second Gulf War in 1991, many having lived in isolated and substandard refugee camps in southeastern Turkey and western Iran (see Cigerli, 1998). Some of the refugees seeking asylum in Turkey refused to return and were accepted as refugees by Western governments, including Britain and the United States, in order to placate Turkish fears that the refugees would fuel Kurdish nationalism in southeast Anatolia.

With Iraqi Kurdistan under occupation and the political parties in disarray, the Iraqi opposition (including Kurdish, Arab, communist, and Islamist elements) was hosted by Syria and, to a lesser degree, Iran. During 1988 and 1989, Syria actively advocated the formation of an alliance among the opposition parties to defeat the Ba'athist regime in Baghdad, but they were unable to reach an agreement. The Iraqi opposition remained in Syrian exile, as some leaders opened negotiations with Baghdad for a general amnesty and return, although Saddam was unwilling to provide any concessions to the exiled parties nor any guarantees for their survival. The stalemate ended with Saddam's invasion of Kuwait in 1990, when U.S.-backed regional alliances pushed to reenergize the opposition parties (Karadaghi, 1993). Turkey's role in the U.S.-led coalition against Iraq provided President Özal an opportunity to establish relations with the Iraqi Kurds and to open a dialogue within Turkey about their own Kurdish population. Turkey's moves, along with an agreement with Iran and Syria that Iraq's collapse must not give rise to an independent Kurdish state, were designed to permit Turkey several options for dealing with the uncertainty of the war on Iraq (McDowall, 1996, p. 371).

With Iraq defeated by February 28, 1991, and fueled by large numbers of army deserters, the southern Arab *intifada*, or uprising among both Shi'ite and Sunni, was soon paralleled by the northern Kurdish *rafareen* on March 4. Within several weeks, Kurdish and Arab groups that had collaborated with the government abandoned Baghdad, swelling the ranks of the uprising to over 100,000 in northern Iraq alone. The uprisings in the north and south, which had been encouraged by broadcasts of President George Bush over Voice of America radio telling the opposition "to take matters into their own hands," were stopped by the Iraqi Republican Guard, which had survived the Coalition's attacks. It is clear from the turn of events that the Coalition did not want the uprising to reach Baghdad, which threatened the stability of a territorially intact Iraq. Furthermore, the United States had promised Turkey and Saudi Arabia that the military campaign would not give political advantage to Kurds and Shi'ites (McDowall, 1996, p. 372). By May, 1.5 million refugees from Iraq were inside Iran and nearly 500,000 refugees were on the frontier with Turkey, which refused their entry. Fearful of a destabilization of the security zone in the southeast, Ankara kept the border closed to Kurdish refugees whose highly publicized suffering—500 to 1,000 deaths per day—forced the Coalition to seek alternatives to end the humanitarian crisis on the border. Despite concerns that creating an internationally administered territory inside Iraq violated norms of state sovereignty, the United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 688, providing for a safe haven around Dahuk in northern Iraq (see Graham-Brown, 1999, p. 25-26). Ultimately, the creation of the safe haven in northern Iraq and the subsequent no-fly

zones committed the United States and Britain to over a decade of military operations in support of Kurdish operations on the ground (Fig. 2).

Following the Gulf War, northern Iraq was under a double sanction, suffering first from the sanctions against Iraq by the international community and again by Baghdad's sanctions against the north. Sanctions established in 1990 by the United Nations against Iraq provided for the limited sale of Iraqi oil to fund a humanitarian aid program for the Iraqi people. Iraq refused to participate in the program, requiring U.N. and international aid commitments to provide for northern Iraq. The oil-for-food program was not put into place until 1995 under U.N. Security Council Resolution 986, which began delivering aid in December 1996. By April 2002, the 11 phases of the oil-for-food program had raised \$53.5 billion, spent primarily on food, food distribution, health and medicine, electricity, agricultural renovations, water and sanitation, education, and housing. The U.N. also spends a large portion of the funds on spare parts used in oil production. While aid distribution in the central and southern governorates is handled by Baghdad, the United Nations works with the northern governorates directly (UNOIP, 2002).

The three northern governorates of Dahuk, Arbil, and Sulaymaniya are also those under the control of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), which was established by popular elections in 1992 (Table 2). The results of these elections showed an even split between the KDP and PUK, with token support for minor ethnic and Islamic parties. In practice, there are two parallel KRG structures, each dominated by one of the two main parties: one is in Arbil (KDP) and one in Sulaymaniya (PUK). Thus, northern Iraq is divided between a northwestern KDP area and the southeastern PUK area, much as it was during the early part of the Iran-Iraq War. The KDP also controls the strategic crossing points with Iran and with Turkey. Though small in comparison to the various oil smuggling schemes by Baghdad, the oil entering Turkey by truck at the Habur border crossing contributes greatly to the KDP coffers, much to the dismay of the PUK.

In 1994, fighting broke out between the parties over a land dispute near the line of control between the parties' territories.²² The fighting continued for four years, except during a few short respites for peace negotiations mediated by the French and Turkish governments and encouraged by the U.S., Iran, and even Iraq (Gunter, 1999, pp. 67-109). Turkey, in particular, was concerned that the conflict would create greater opportunities for the PKK to organize within northern Iraq, a contingency Ankara had been working to avoid. Meanwhile, Kurdish Islamists, who had made an appreciable showing in the 1992 elections, were, by 1994, organized into the Islamic Movement of Kurdistan (IMK). The IMK had its base among the urban populations in Sorani Kurdistan, under PUK rule, as the Islamists provided a conservative alternative to the PUK that elsewhere would have been satisfied by the KDP. Receiving, at first, some cooperation from the KDP, the IMK used the internecine fighting to advance its hold over Halabja and nearby towns near the Iranian border, across which they received aid from Teheran. As fighting continued into 1995, the Clinton administration and U.S.-based exile Iraqi Kurdish groups attempted to broker a settlement among the parties, including the IMK, but which was unable to satisfy PUK claims on the receipts collected by the KDP at border crossings. With PUK officials in the KDP capital of Arbil, and possible peace settlements on the table, the KDP was attacked by PKK troops who regularly operated out of the mountainous area south of the border with Turkey. The PKK attacked the KDP on

²²While the KDP and PUK maintained a line of control against government troops to the south (Fig. 2), the two parties also maintained a territorial division of northern Iraq between them, with KDP control over the northwest and PUK control over the southeast.

Table 2. Election Returns for Iraqi Kurdistan National Assembly and for the Leader of the Kurdistan Liberation Movement, May, 19, 1992

Party/candidate	Votes	Share of total, pct. ^b
Assembly election		
Kurdistan Democratic Party	437,879	45.3
Patriotic Union of Kurdistan	423,833	43.8
Islamic Movement of Kurdistan	49,108	5.1
Kurdistan Socialist Party	24,882	2.6
Iraqi Communist Party	21,123	2.2
Kurdistan Popular Democratic Party	9,903	1.0
Independent Democrats	501	0.1
Total ballots ^a	967,229	—
Leadership election ^c		
Massoud Barzani (KDP)	466,879	47.5
Jalal Talabani (PUK)	441,057	44.9
Others (IMK, KSP)	74,713	7.6
Total ballots ^a	982,649	—

^aThese totals do not include spoiled ballots, which accounted for 0.19% of total assembly ballots and 1.3% of total leadership ballots cast.

^bSeven percent is required to receive assembly seat. KDP won 51 assembly seats and PUK won 49. KDP gave one assembly seat to PUK, balancing party allotments, 50-50. Five additional seats were provided for Assyrian parties.

^cBarzani and Talabani set aside results prior to runoff election, deciding to lead liberation movement jointly.

Source: Compiled by the author from Habeeb, 2000 and McDowall, 1996.

the pretense of the KDP's collaboration with Ankara, but more strategically to unsettle the peace negotiations and restore the local instability in which it thrived (Gunter, 1999, p. 83). Pressures were building against the KDP, namely changes in the Turkish government, Iranian assistance to the PUK, and the election-year disinterest of the Clinton Administration (Randal, 1997, pp. 302-305). In response, the KDP invited Baghdad to help take Arbil from the PUK, which they did in August 1996. While the government troops were driven out of Iraqi Kurdistan by U.S. air strikes, the KDP continued their offensive and captured Sulaymaniya, the PUK capital.

The instability caused by the Iraqi invasion and the KDP's offensive caused the collapse of the safe haven, ending Operation Provide Comfort. In response, the United States insisted on the evacuation of its personnel and those of U.S.-based relief organizations. This evacuation included 6,000 local Kurdish workers who had assisted the relief operations and their families, and 600 opposition Arabs with connections to the CIA (Graham-Brown, 1999, pp. 312-313). A PUK counterattack in late 1996 ultimately restored the inter-party line of control and was followed in 1997 by a major PUK campaign against its Kurdish rival, in which Turkey intervened on behalf of the KDP and the PKK appeared to assist the PUK (Gunter, 1999, p. 89). By the beginning of 1998, the two sides were working on a full settlement, which was supported publicly by the Clinton administration and resulted in the Washington Accord between the parties in September 1998.²³ The 1999 capture of Abdullah Öcalan removed much of the PKK threat against the parties in northern Iraq and served to lessen Turkish apprehensions over a federalist solution for Iraq's Kurds (Olson, 2001).

Likewise, by 1998 the northern governorates were beginning to enjoy the economic and humanitarian relief of the oil-for-food program. Since 1998, northern Iraq has predominantly focused on reconstruction and the maintenance of the status quo, a delicate condition that may yet be unbalanced by the events of September 11.

KURDISTAN IN SYRIA

The Kurds of Syria are predominant along the border with Turkey (Fig. 1), especially in the regions of Kurd-Dagh and Jazira, as well as pockets in major cities, especially Aleppo and Damascus. Most estimates number the Syrian Kurdish population at well over one million, while Kurdish parties cite estimates as high as three million. Because of the government's anti-Kurdish policies and intentional census manipulation, the true figure is distorted by a number of factors discussed below. Official repression of linguistic and civil rights for the Kurds in Syria began under the French mandate (1920–1946). Wary of unbalancing either the mandate system or Turkey's young government in light of the 1920s uprisings, the French officially banned Kurdish language and education. Kurdish demands for greater self-rule and cultural rights emerged as early as 1928, although it was not until World War II, when Syria came under British control, that Kurdish cultural expression was officially tolerated. This brief period of relative freedom ended with Syria's increasing pan-Arab nationalism, culminating in the short-lived United Arab Republic with Egypt and prompting the 1957 formation of a Syrian branch of the Kurdistan Democratic Party. The KDP-S was banned shortly thereafter, with repression only increasing after the collapse of the United Arab Republic in 1961 (Hasanpour, 1991).

The 1961 Kurdish uprising in Iraq had implications for the Kurds living in Syria, whom the government suspected of harboring similar independent orientations. In 1962, the Syrian government conducted an extraordinary census in the Kurdish areas of the northeast, by which an estimated 120,000 Kurds were classified as *ajanib*, or foreigners. Putatively targeted at "alien infiltrators" from Turkey, the policy of identifying "foreigners" clearly was intended to Arabize northeastern Syria. Although officially the classification was to target those whose residence in Syria began after 1945, the policy of exclusion attending that classification was often applied to Kurds regardless of the tenure of their residency. Through the use of identity cards, the newly "foreign" Kurds are unable to vote, own property or businesses, hold licensed professional employment, or marry Syrian citizens. These stateless Kurds remain today without rights and, owing to their lack of documentation, cannot safely leave Syria, much less return. Furthermore, the 75,000 or more children of stateless Kurds are simply *maktoumeen*, or unregistered, having neither identity cards nor documented nationality, further denying them access to education and other child services.²⁴ Syrian Government sources estimate the total number of stateless persons at around 150,000, although others claim 200,000 (Hasanpour, 1991). There is no estimate of how many Kurds, recognizing the intention of the policy, have registered themselves as Arabs.

The loss of citizenship for many of Syria's Kurds and the government's increased persecution of Kurdish cultural and political activities was the first step in a larger program to Arabize the well-resourced northeast (Vanly, 1992). Beginning in 1962, the government began removing Kurds from the *Hizam 'arabi*, or Arab belt, a 10–15 km wide zone running

²³For the full text of the Washington agreement, see Gunter (1999, pp. 101-108).

²⁴See the U.S. Department of State's report on human rights violations in Syria [<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2001/nea/8298.htm>].

300 kilometers along the borders with Iraq and Turkey, as far west as Ra's al-'Ayn. Although the region has long been settled by Kurds, the government misrepresented the region as an Arab land under threat by the Kurds. The removal of an estimated 60,000-120,000 Kurds, some already dispossessed of their land under the 1961 census, was part of a larger campaign to remove the Kurdish presence entirely, including Kurdish toponymy (Hasanpour, 1991). In their place, the government began resettling Arabs in model villages and farms throughout the Arab belt, significantly altering the ethnic composition of the borderlands (Nazdar, 1993). The nationalization of property and its conversion to Arab control was planned to continue along the Kurdish borderlands in the Jazira region, but the war with Israel in 1967 refocused Damascus's attention (Hassanpour, 1991; Nazdar, 1993). It was not until 1976 that Hafiz al-Asad formally ended the program, although no Ba'athist land redistribution was implemented that would benefit the Kurds (Hassanpour, 1991; Cleveland, 1994, pp. 357-359). In August 2001, dialogue opened between the Syrian Ba'ath party and an alliance of Syrian Kurdish political organizations, the outcome of which was reported to include a mutually recognized memorandum outlining Kurdish complaints and expectations (Deutsche Presse-Agentur, August 22, 2001). Despite the promise of redressing decades of statelessness, cultural oppression, and political disenfranchisement, Syrian Kurds continue to leave the country, seeking refuge in Europe. Indeed, many of the 900 "Riviera Kurds," whom smugglers notoriously beached on the southern French coast in February 2001, were from Syria and seeking asylum in the European Union (Agence France Presse, 2001).

DEPOPULATION, DETERRITORIALIZATION, AND DIASPORA

The unique historical and geopolitical events of the separate states that comprise the "rule of four" over the Kurds nevertheless demonstrate recurrent and parallel themes. Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria have each tried to depopulate Kurdistan, whether to disrupt the feudal and tribal structures that sustain traditional Kurdish society or to commit genocide against a population for whom the ruling authority wishes to make no provision. Kurdistan's demographic structure has been repeatedly altered by both regional and internecine conflict, forced migration, and oppressive economic and social underdevelopment. Some regimes have sought to break up Kurdistan by forcibly removing villagers to towns outside Kurdistan, whereas some Kurds have willingly sought improved opportunities outside Kurdistan and, indeed, outside the region. The decision by the Allies after World War I to draw the boundaries through Kurdistan rather than to create a separate buffer state has meant that what was recognized as a population worthy of a separate territory was damned to become a minority in four countries. As states define their security in terms of borders, the presence of a transboundary people like the Kurds has meant their geopolitical status is defined in terms of state security.

The cumulative effect of depopulation on Kurdish social structures, political identities, and cultural survival is only now coming into focus. The deterritorialization of a population, i.e., losing its sense of place, must be recognized for its culture-altering effects. Whether forcibly displaced and seeking asylum in exile or voluntarily migrating to urban centers for better economic opportunities, Kurds have, for some time, been living much differently from the romanticized descriptions written by early European travelers and, indeed, by the visions of Kurdish nationalists. Removed from a strongly identified homeland, and increasingly alienated from traditional kinship structures and cultural ecological practices, Kurdish society will undoubtedly change. It has, in fact, already splintered along the superimposed lines of Kurdistan's occupying states, permitting intra-cultural differences to be exploited for

extra-nationalist purposes. The alteration of already diverse Kurdish linguistic patterns facing Turkish, Arab, and Farsi encroachment is further compounded by the new host languages for second-generation exiles.

Deterritorialization also implies reterritorialization, which, for the Kurds, has often meant asylum outside Kurdistan. Perhaps as much as one-fourth of the Kurdish population lives outside the historical Kurdish homeland. As second and third generations are raised in societies much different than their grandparents', the sense of *Kurdaiety*, or Kurdishness, undoubtedly changes. Moreover, the diffusion of Kurds among so many resettlement locations, including Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Russia, Israel, France, and the United States, suggests something of Kurdistan's fragmentation. Still, the emergence of regularized migration paths, especially to Western European cities, has reterritorialized Kurdish communities. Kurdish community centers, political party offices, and teahouses are as common in some sections of London and Berlin as in the cities of northern Iraq or southeast Turkey. Comprising refugees, undocumented laborers, and political exiles, the Kurdish diaspora brings with it what the imperial powers once dubbed the "Kurdish Question," placing it at the center of European public debate and pointing up the divisions within the Kurdish community itself. It is not unusual for a government to host Iraqi Kurdish delegates while police units close down PKK "terrorist" offices in the same city, or for Iraqi Kurdish refugees to more easily attain asylum than Turkish Kurds. Moreover, the Kurdish political parties have restructured their organizations to include members living in Europe and North America. Currently, many Kurds in the diaspora express a desire to return to a "free and independent Kurdistan," but often condition their return on the establishment of democratic institutions as they have experienced in resettlement. If the Kurds are to achieve some degree of collective security and autonomy within Kurdistan, they will increasingly rely on ethnic lobbies and financial support established in the exile communities with links to geopolitical centers like Washington and London. Less certain is the effect that diasporic life will have on Kurdish identity and the priorities of political movements for a future Kurdistan.

CONCLUDING NOTE

The war on terrorism that followed September 11, 2001 prompted speculation about whether shifting alliances and deepening U.S. involvement in the region might contain promise for the Kurds (see Pope, 1992; Iraq, 2002). The post-Gulf War decade of political stalemate and attrition would seem to portend an opportunity for Kurdish interests to realign their status within the changing relations between the United States and states of the Middle East-Southwest Asian region. This is thought to be especially true for the Kurds of northern Iraq—the KDP and PUK—who, along with the predominantly Arab Iraqi National Congress (INC), have been groomed by the United States as a future opposition force in toppling Saddam Hussein (Shanker and Sanger, 2002; Sipress, 2002). Even before September 11, the regime of Saddam Hussein was considered *unfinished business* by the current American Administration, which clearly intended to precipitate a regime change one way or another, with the Kurdish parties and the INC as part of a post-Ba'athist government. As a KDP officer stated confidentially to this author before September 11, "the future of Kurdistan is in Washington."

The effect of the U.S. war on terrorism, however, extends far beyond America's immediate plans and indicates that, for the Kurds, any political gains they might receive from a regime change in Baghdad must be weighed against the limitations set by the United States and regional states. Specifically, the United States' preparation of an Iraqi opposition has had

as a prerequisite the maintenance of Iraq's territorial and sovereign integrity. There are two reasons for this, the first being that Washington has had to balance its desire to depose Saddam Hussein with the interests of its key ally, Turkey, which fears that an independent Iraqi Kurdistan and a weakened Baghdad will provide greater opportunity for Kurdish separatists in Turkey. This has been characteristic of Turko-American relations: for example, it was Ankara's fear of intra-Kurdish reconciliation that caused the Coalition's *volte face* on the Kurdish refugee crisis in 1991 and led to the establishment of the safe haven inside northern Iraq. Likewise, Turkey has maintained a diplomatic consensus with Syria and Iran that an independent or even quasi-independent Kurdish territory is contrary to their collective interests.²⁵

The second reason for insisting on an integrated post-Saddam Iraq relates to the delicate balance of power between Iraq and Iran as large oil producers with past interests in gaining control over each other's southern oil and gas fields, shipping facilities, and port access. Given the relatively small territory at the mouth of the Shatt al-Arab waterway and Iraq's short water frontage on the Gulf, any territorial gain by Iran might serve to create a land-locked Iraq, thus altering the geostrategic balance preferred by the governments of Western petroleum-dependent states. Moreover, in the same way that the north of Iraq is Kurdish, the south is predominantly populated by Shi'ite Arabs, whose loyalty to Teheran is thought to outweigh any trust of the Sunni Arab regime in Baghdad. Indeed, a popular suspicion among many Iraqi Kurds is that the withdrawal of American support for their 1991 uprising was predicated, in part, on the State Department's belief that the group was largely Shi'ite and would install a puppet government loyal to Teheran.

Thus, while northern Iraq under the Kurdistan Regional Government would appear to be a pseudo-state, in that it has all the trappings of a sovereign territorial government except international recognition, its political leadership, the KDP and PUK, appears to give no indication that it will emerge as a separate state.²⁶ It is not unreasonable to suggest that Iraqi Kurdish involvement in a regime change will come at the expense of Kurdish movements in other countries, who will likely face increased scrutiny and repression during the conflict. The current KDP and PUK leaders, Nechirvan Barzani and Jalal Talabani, have met with the governments in Ankara, Damascus, and Teheran to quell regional apprehensions of an incipient Kurdish state resulting from a U.S. attack on Iraq, calling instead for "a federal resolution within a united and democratic Iraq" (Iran, 2002; Ulman, 2002). Among the assurances made to the neighboring capitals, the Iraqi Kurds foreswear expanding any solution in Iraq to adjacent Kurdish areas. KRG Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani recently was quoted as stating:

The population of each section of Kurdistan has a special political, economic, and social situation. Local problems must be resolved within the framework of the respective states. Therefore we are not insisting on our scenario for the solution of the Kurdish problem as a mandatory example for everyone. (Iraqi, 2002)

While Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria are apprehensive of a pan-Kurdish uprising, one in which Kurds from all four countries would collaborate on a larger territorial project, these

²⁵The diplomatic relations between Turkey and other regional states is thoroughly treated by Olson (2001).

²⁶While Kolossov and O'Loughlin (1999) identified Kurdistan as a quasi-state—a chaotic and ephemeral space, often involved in illicit flows and "half-institutionalized" control—this is only true to some extent in Turkish Kurdistan. Such spaces as Iraqi Kurdistan are better described under the pseudo-state concept as "hav[ing] achieved varying but low levels of recognition by the international community, [and] are highly involved in local wars whilst their unsettled political status makes further conflict possible" (ibid., p. 152).

governments are more immediately concerned with the effect that an independent Kurdish territory would have in mobilizing, sheltering, or supplying Kurdish opposition movements within their own territories. The geopolitical history of the Kurds since the short-lived Mahabad Republic is an unfortunate testament that the Kurdish political movements are, themselves, equally preoccupied with short-term gains. Each of the four governments successfully limited the Kurdish challenge to their regimes by using regional Kurdish disunity to mobilize Kurds against each other and against competitor states. As a result of this treacherous history, the Kurdish parties deeply distrust one another and those outside Iraq are unlikely to participate in any action that would put them in further jeopardy.

This condition is compounded by the changed political climate set by the U.S. war on terrorism, which has altered at least the tenor, if not the substance, of regional relations. For example, Turkey and Iran agreed in April 2002 to recognize each other's main opposition groups, the PKK and the Mujahedin-e Khalq, as "terrorists," thereby contributing to the "development of relations of trust" between the two governments (Agence France Presse, 2002). Likewise, the PKK, weakened after the arrest of and partial conciliation by Öcalan, recently changed its name to the Kurdistan Freedom and Democracy Congress (KADEK), claiming that it would end terrorist tactics and campaign peacefully for Kurdish rights. In May 2002, the Council of the European Union added the PKK, but not KADEK, to its list of terrorist organizations (Ames, 2002; Council of the European Union, 2002).

While Turkey and Iran have utilized the new doctrine on terrorism to pin down their opposition, America's war on terrorism would seem to bolster the position of the Iraqi Kurds as an indigenous force analogous to the Northern Alliance that fought the Taliban in Afghanistan. The situation in northern Iraq, however, is more complex than such a comparison may suggest, because the Kurds must contend not only with Saddam Hussein's army but also with Islamists within Kurdistan. Indeed, following the attacks of September 11, 2001, reports emerged from northern Iraq that splinter factions from the Islamic Movement of Kurdistan had been formed into the *jund al-islam*, or soldiers of Islam, by Osama Bin Laden's Al Qaeda organization (BBC, 2001). According to reports from regional and international journalists, the *jund al-islam* took several villages near the Iranian border and was receiving assistance from Iran. Still other reports have linked Al Qaeda to Saddam Hussein and Iraqi-based training camps or Iraqi-supported Islamist insurgents (e.g., Goldberg, 2002).

The reputed Al Qaeda links to Kurdistan may give the American Administration another card to play in its effort to remove Saddam Hussein. However, the current U.S. Administration has not found the Kurds to be as willing to rise up as they were in 1991, after the desperate years following the *Anfal* campaign. While far from stable, northern Iraq under the oil-for-food program has benefited to a degree from expanded commercial trade, housing rehabilitation, and the improvement of electrical, telephone, and sewage services. Furthermore, the Internet and local television broadcasts increasingly connect northern Iraq with the rest of the world, marking a degree of openness atypical in the region's history (Pope, 2002). Finally, the reported unpredictability of other, non-Kurdish Iraqi opposition groups tends to reinforce the reluctance of Kurds to play the role of America's local allies in a campaign to eliminate the current Iraqi regime (see Sipress, 2002).

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