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# **NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL**

**MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA**

## **THESIS**

**AGHAS, SHEIKS, AND DAESH IN IRAQ:  
KURDISH ROBUST ACTION IN TURMOIL**

by

Christopher M. Couch

June 2015

Thesis Advisor:

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**AGHAS, SHEIKS, AND DAESH IN IRAQ:  
KURDISH ROBUST ACTION IN TURMOIL**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

**MASTER OF SCIENCE IN DEFENSE ANALYSIS**

from the

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## **ABSTRACT**

The conflicts in Iraq and Syria are protracted civil wars with multi-state and non-state actors vying for influence. Iraqi Kurdistan is arguably the most important partner for the United States in our current fight against Daesh, which has exploited the factional politics of Iraq. Special Operations Forces (SOF) will be maintaining persistent engagement in the region for the foreseeable future, and must understand the formal and informal relational structures that underpin these conflicts. This project is a social network and social movement theory analysis of the power structures of Iraqi Kurdistan. It attempts to provide more awareness to Special Operations Command Central (SOCCENT) and U.S. policy makers on the patrons, influencers, and brokers that they can leverage in their efforts to understand and influence the Kurds. This thesis thoroughly examines the patronage nature of Iraqi Kurdistan since WWI and provides insight into individuals from minority groups and political parties that are structurally located in positions of brokerage and influence. With this information, SOCCENT, the project's sponsor, will be better able to understand the region. Furthermore, the conflicts of the future will likely involve protracted, multi-factional, intrastate civil wars, where the lessons learned from the Kurdish situation will serve future SOF well.



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## **LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS**

ARSOF	Army Special Operations Forces
BSP	Boundary Spanner Potential
IKF	Iraqi Kurdish Front
IRGC-QF	Iranian Republican Guard Qods Force
KAZ	Kurdish Autonomous Zone
KDP	Kurdish Democratic Party
KDP-I	Kurdish Democratic Party-Iran
KIG	Kurdish Islamic Group
KIU	Kurdish Islamic Union
KRG	Kurdish Regional Government
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
OIF	Operation Iraqi Freedom
PSN	Power Structures Network
PUK	Patriotic Union of Kurdistan
SITREP	Situation Report
SOCCENT	Special Operations Command Central
SOF	Special Operations Forces
SMT	Social Movement Theory
SNA	Social Network Analysis
TSOC	Theater Special Operations Command
UN	United Nations
USSOCOM	U.S. Special Operations Command



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## I. INTRODUCTION

According to the guiding documents of U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM), entitled *SOCOM 2020*, and U.S. Army Special Operations Command (USASOC), entitled *ARSOF 2022*, it is essential to preventing future conflict, as well as achieving success in current conflicts, to build and maintain a Global Special Operations Forces (SOF) Network.<sup>1</sup> Crucial to that goal is persistent engagement with and understanding of the human domain.<sup>2</sup> Persistent engagement is particularly important in the arena of special warfare. Special warfare is defined as:

The execution of activities that involve a combination of lethal and non-lethal actions taken by specially trained and educated forces that have a deep understanding of cultures and foreign language, proficiency in small-unit tactics, subversion, sabotage and the ability to build and fight alongside indigenous combat formations in a permissive, uncertain or hostile environment.<sup>3</sup>

In order to conduct successful special warfare in the future, it will be important to build an in-depth understanding of the important social networks in any area of operations, and to understand the social movements in which those networks fall. The Theater Special Operations Commands (TSOCs) are responsible for managing the persistent engagement and building the understanding of the important social networks of their areas. Special Operations Command Central (SOCCENT) is looking for help analyzing influential social networks in Kurdistan, the stateless nation that encompasses the northern parts of Iraq, the eastern parts of Syria, the southern areas of Turkey, and the western areas of Iran. Currently, SOCCENT lacks an in-depth knowledge of the institutions and networks that exercise influence on the population and politics within Kurdistan.

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<sup>1</sup> United States Special Operations Command, *SOCOM 2020*, <http://www.defenseinnovationmarketplace.mil/resources/SOCOM2020Strategy.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Army Special Operations Command, *ARSOF 2022* (Headquarters, Department of the Army, 2012), [http://www.soc.mil/Assorted%20Pages/ARSOF2022\\_vFINAL.pdf](http://www.soc.mil/Assorted%20Pages/ARSOF2022_vFINAL.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

## **A. PURPOSE AND SCOPE**

Given the rapid growth of Daesh<sup>4</sup> and the disintegration of the Iraqi state,<sup>5</sup> the Kurdish region is becoming increasingly important to U.S. national interests. The Kurds have been historically staunch allies to U.S. interests, and when the United States sent SOF to help combat Daesh, it set up a joint operations center not only with the Iraqi military, but also with the Peshmerga (militia) forces of the Kurdish region. The Kurdish region of Iraq has complex political and social networks, the understanding of which is essential for SOCCENT's forces during current operations and while maintaining persistent presence in Kurdistan into the future.

The main purpose of this thesis is to understand the networks surrounding the leaders of the major Kurdish political parties and connective tissues between and among them. The political parties of the most interest are the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), and Gorran. However, there are also smaller minority groups and political parties traditionally overlooked by U.S. efforts, which appear to occupy essential structural positions within Iraqi Kurdistan. This report's social network analysis (SNA) attempts to identify the key players on which SOCCENT should focus its engagement efforts. SNA provides insight into how enmeshed these networks have become not only between each other, but also with other major groups in Iraq, Syria, Turkey, and Iran.

## **B. RESEARCH QUESTION AND ARGUMENT**

This thesis seeks to answer the following questions: What influential networks in Iraqi Kurdistan can be utilized for special warfare purposes? In particular, who are the emerging leaders of the political parties? Who are the brokers and boundary spanners? How connected or separate are the different parties with each other? And, finally, how connected are the parties to outside entities, especially independence movements in

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<sup>4</sup> Douglas Ollivant and Robert H. Scales, "Terrorist Armies Fight Smarter and Deadlier than Ever," *Washington Post*, August 1, 2014, [http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/terrorist-armies-are-fighting-smarter-and-deadlier-than-ever/2014/08/01/3998ae00-18db-11e4-9e3b-7f2f110c6265\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/terrorist-armies-are-fighting-smarter-and-deadlier-than-ever/2014/08/01/3998ae00-18db-11e4-9e3b-7f2f110c6265_story.html).

<sup>5</sup> Tim Lister, "Iraq to Split in Three: So Why Not?" *CNN*, July 8, 2014, <http://www.cnn.com/2014/07/07/world/meast/iraq-division-lister/>.

Turkey and Iran, and the Iranian government? We know that the Iranian Government is working with the Peshmerga, but how connected are they to Kurdish political networks?<sup>6</sup>

The combination of social network analysis and social movement theory provides insight to SOCCENT into which actors can best create long-term relationships (persistent engagement) in order to harness the power of the Kurdish nationalist movement (social movement) and benefit SOCCENT's regional mission. The linkage is clear between social network analysis and social movement theory,<sup>7</sup> as well as how social movement theory applies to the conduct of special warfare.<sup>8</sup> It will be imperative that as SOCCENT operates in this critical area of Iraq during its current engagement with Daesh, and, as it maintains its engagement long into the future, SOCCENT must use the insight from both methods to shape their efforts.

### **C. METHODOLOGY AND THESIS ORGANIZATION**

After an overview of the sociology of influence, social movement theory (SMT) and social network analysis (SNA) (in Chapter II), the first step in this research process was to understand what influence and power look like in Kurdistan, and build a fundamental understanding of the culture and traditions of the Kurds (reviewed in Chapter III). Then, in order to conduct SNA, as much data as possible was collected on the ties between actors in the region and each of the interconnected, and many times redundant, power structures. Using the tools SNA, the relational data was analyzed in order to gain an understanding of the social networks involved in Iraqi Kurdistan (outlined in Chapter IV). Finally, drawing on SMT and research into the history of the region, Chapter V places the results of the SNA into context in order to provide potential avenues of approach for SOCCENT's persistent engagement efforts in the human domain.

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<sup>6</sup> Shelly Kittleson, "US, Iran Woo Rival Kurdish Factions in Battle against IS," *Al-Monitor*, September 22, 2014, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/09/peshmerga-iraq-iran-kurd-isis-kr.html>.

<sup>7</sup> Mario Diani and Doug McAdam, *Social Movements and Networks: Relational Approaches to Collective Action* (London: Oxford University Press, 2003).

<sup>8</sup> Doowan Lee. "A Social Movement Approach to Unconventional Warfare," *Special Warfare*, Volume 26, issue 3, September 2013, [http://www.soc.mil/swcs/swmag/archive/SW2603/SW26\\_03.pdf](http://www.soc.mil/swcs/swmag/archive/SW2603/SW26_03.pdf).

SOCCENT must operationally determine if the individuals this project identifies have the agency to take advantage of their structural positions. This thesis provides information for SOCCENT on what role the individuals identified potentially plays, and how they will be useful for harnessing the power of the social movement. Hopefully, future students will continue to contribute knowledge of the power networks in Kurdistan; as such, this is not a definitive or final project, but the start of an ongoing one.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

To answer the research question, this thesis draws on insights from three bodies of knowledge: the sociology of authority and influence, social network analysis (SNA), and social movement theory (SMT). The following research provided the starting point for identifying the key personnel within Iraqi Kurdistan for SOCCENT to focus their engagement. The codebook used in the SNA mapping takes into account the lessons learned from this literature and ensures that individuals this project identifies are not only located in potentially advantageous positions within the social structure, but that they have the right attributes and agency to contribute to the situation in Kurdistan.

### A. INFLUENCE

Max Weber, in his *Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, identifies three sources of authority and influence: Rational authority, which is derived from rules and laws; traditional authority, which is derived from the traditions a society lives by; and finally charismatic authority gained from the extraordinary character of an individual. Weber demonstrates the strengths of all three types but cautions against the instability of charismatic authority.<sup>9</sup> For social movements, it is important to make sure leaders of all three types are represented because they serve different purposes. In the case of Kurdistan, there is a complex interaction of all three forms, with the traditional and charismatic authority tending to be dominant.

Weber's analysis raises some interesting points for approaching Kurdistan from a social movement and network analysis approach. Though all types of leadership exert influence, charismatic leaders have the greatest potential to do so because they are able to mobilize support through the legend of their personality. The only exception would be the potential for former royalty to carry endowed influence beyond their own charisma.<sup>10</sup> In Kurdistan, both Jalal Talibani and Masud Barzani possessed such clout, which was

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<sup>9</sup> Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2009).

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.



endowed to them by their families tribal and religious leadership positions; however, they also became charismatic leaders of their movements. Although charisma is the most desired trait for a movement's leader, it must eventually be rationalized or traditionalized; because it is unstable, the transfer of power, whether from assassination or otherwise, can undo all the leader has accomplished.<sup>11</sup> When thinking in a social movement perspective, a structure must be erected around even a charismatic leader for the movement to succeed. This structure will also likely contain the future leaders of the movement, and we can identify those with this leadership potential through SNA of the leaders' ties. Kurdistan is at a turning point in its history because the state leadership is rationalizing. Recently, there has been a slow shift to more inclusionary politics brought on by the Kurdish Spring, the coming end of Barzani's presidency, and the aging of Talibani.<sup>12</sup>

In *When Do Leaders Matter? Hypotheses on Leadership Dynamics in Social Movements*, Sharon Erickson Nepstad and Clifford Bob bring leadership specifically into the social movement realm, and highlight the important roles leaders play.<sup>13</sup> Leaders are essential in mobilizing the disaffected population, activating third-party actors internal and external to the situation, and determining how the group deals with the inevitable state repression. Nepstad and Bob argue that not only do leaders make movements, movements make leaders. They distill the ideas of Weber and others, in particular Pierre Bourdieu,<sup>14</sup> into an easy-to-grasp idea of leadership capital. In essence, they argue that every type of leader (and Weber argues all leaders are really a combination of the three types) is able to lead by possessing a large amount of leadership capital. Comprised of cultural, social, and symbolic capital, leadership capital allows a leader to play an essential role in a movement. Cultural capital is the comprehensive understanding of the issues, grievances, and experiences of the local people and how they fit into the society,

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<sup>11</sup> Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*.

<sup>12</sup> Mohammed A. Salih, "Fate of Iraqi Presidency Divides Iraqi Kurds," *Al-Monitor* May 22, 2015, [http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/05/iraq-kurdistan-president-barzani-term-parliamentary-system.html?utm\\_source=Al-Monitor+Newsletter+%5BEnglish%5D&utm\\_campaign=ab65373d51-May\\_26\\_2015&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_28264b27a0-ab65373d51-102392297](http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/05/iraq-kurdistan-president-barzani-term-parliamentary-system.html?utm_source=Al-Monitor+Newsletter+%5BEnglish%5D&utm_campaign=ab65373d51-May_26_2015&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_28264b27a0-ab65373d51-102392297).

<sup>13</sup> Clifford Bob and Sharon Erickson Nepstad "When do Leaders Matter? Hypotheses on Leadership Dynamics in Social Movements," 1–22.

<sup>14</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991).

which allows leaders to tailor policies to the people's needs.<sup>15</sup> This is an important part of the narrative framing of the Kurdish nationalist movement. Social capital is the amount of strong and weak ties people have from a SNA perspective. The former make it easier for a group to mobilize and minimize free riding, while the latter help leaders disseminate information, recruit followers, and appeal for support to far larger audience than direct social ties (i.e., strong ties) can reach.<sup>16</sup> Finally, symbolic capital is the prestige and honor of holding a position of social recognition<sup>17</sup>—something the current leaders of Kurdistan certainly enjoy. These types of capital explain why civil rights leaders in the U.S. United States were largely ministers—a position that gave them understanding of the people, many social ties, and the symbolism of being clergy. It also explains why many of the powerful Kurds are from families of Sheiks and tribal leaders. These forms of leadership capital are more useful than Weber's influence factors for studying Kurdistan.

Important for identifying future leaders of a social movement in general, and Kurdistan in particular, is determining how well a movement will respond to the loss of its leader, and how to help structure the movement so it is resilient to such assassination. Unfortunately, assassination is fairly common among resistance leaders; so, what factors lead to some having continued success and others not? In *Kill a Leader, Murder a Movement* Nepstad and Bob suggest 12 hypotheses that seek to provide tentative answers to that problem and, in turn, offer insight into how to assassination-proof a movement. The following are the broad categories the hypotheses fall under. First, the type of leader matters, and prophetic leaders (charismatic) tend to create outrage and a chance for growth as long as succession issues are planned for and resolved quickly. Second is how strong the ideology of martyrdom of the group and society is—if it is high, the group is likely to grow after the death of a leader; if not, then it is far less likely to. Third is how much of the movement is embodied by the leader—if the leader's embodiment is high,

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<sup>15</sup> Bob and Nepstad, "When do Leaders Matter? Hypotheses on Leadership Dynamics in Social Movements," 1–22.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 1–22.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 1–22.

third party groups' interest will raise with his or her death.<sup>18</sup> An example of this occurred in the wake of Mullah Mustafa Barzani's death (though it was not an assassination). After Barzani's death, the KDP fractured, and the PUK was able to take the mantle of the Kurds in Iraq. The fourth category is how united the group is without the leader. Is the leader holding two different groups together through charisma alone? In Kurdistan, the PUK and KDP have become largely tied to the Talibani and Barzani families. However, the ability of these leaders to dominate the Kurdish movement has dissipated in recent years. Talibani's PUK divided when Fouad Massoum created the Gorran, and there is a growing movement within Kurdistan to move away from control by traditional elites.

According to Aminzade, Goldstone, and Perry, it is important to associate with self-effacing leaders such as Mandela and Gandhi as opposed to self-aggrandizing leaders like Stalin, Mao, and Robespierre. They argue that the former create more lasting effects than the latter.<sup>19</sup> It is essential to identify these leaders within the context of Kurdistan and Kurdish culture. The leadership of Mustafa, Masud Barzani, and Jalal Talibani demonstrates some of the dangers of self-aggrandizing leaders in that they failed to fully mobilize all of Kurdish society. There is a slow shift away from these types of leaders, and potentially self-effacing leaders are beginning to emerge.

Kurdistan possesses a complex mix of tribal, familial, economic, religious, and political power structures that create a complex patronage system. These structures, their interaction, and the effect they have on power and influence in Kurdistan are all explored in *The Kurds: A Nation Denied*, *The Kurds: Nationalism and Politics*, and *The Agha, Shaikh and State*.<sup>20</sup> Understanding these complex dynamics is essential to contextualize relational data and social network analysis. Specifically, in Kurdistan, it will be difficult to identify honest brokers. Historically, even when opportunities arose for Kurdish

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<sup>18</sup> Bob and Nepstad, "When do Leaders Matter? Hypotheses on Leadership Dynamics in Social Movements," 1–22.

<sup>19</sup> Ron Aminzade, Jack A. Goldstone and Elizabeth J. Perry, "Leadership Dynamics and Dynamics of Contention," *Silence and Voice in the Study of Contentious Politics* (2001): 126–154.

<sup>20</sup> David McDowall, *The Kurds: A Nation Denied* (London, UK: Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, 1992) ; Fālih 'Abd al-Jabbār and Hosham Dawod, *The Kurds: Nationalism and Politics* (London, UK: Saqi Books, 2006); Martin Van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh, and State: The Social and Political Structures of Kurdistan* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Zed Books, 1992).

independence, the leaders of the different groups in the country fought each other for power instead of fighting together for independence. Because of this, and the complex interaction between the tribes, families and political parties, identifying potential brokers and future leaders can help SOCCENT identify who to leverage in order to affect the internal politics of Kurdistan.

## **B. SOCIAL MOVEMENT THEORY AND SOCIAL NETWORK ANALYSIS**

After analyzing influence and power and how they relate to SNA and SMT, the strengths and weaknesses of charismatic leaders is clear. This is also a traditional problem for the Kurds. In his article “George Washington and the Whig Conception of Heroic Leadership,” Barry Schwartz presents a different type of charismatic leader who is better suited for leadership positions. The key is to find the right type of person who has the right intentions (agency) and is located in the proper cultural and social structural positions within society. In essence, the type of leader that is better suited for long-term stability is someone who is intelligent but not power seeking. He or she must be a believer in the cause, but not solely in himself or herself. Most importantly, the leader must fit the proper needs of the society and movement at the time. Congress knew, in the beginning, that George Washington was acceptable to all groups looking to challenge Britain, but it was the military fervor that transformed him into the symbol of the revolution. When the revolution shifted to peace, Washington was known more for his fight to relinquish power than trying to keep it. This endeared him to a nation that was inherently skeptical of power.<sup>21</sup> Though the specifics in Kurdistan differ, SOCCENT will need to identify who meets the Kurdish ideals of heroism, who is more interested in the success of the movement than personal accolades, and who occupies key structural positions within the complex power structures of the region.

When using SNA and SMT to analyze the power networks of Iraqi Kurdistan, it is essential to understand the role brokers play in movements, and the importance of agency

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<sup>21</sup> Barry Schwartz, “George Washington and the Whig Conception of Heroic Leadership,” *American Sociological Review* (1983): 18–33.

in identifying the proper brokers. The following literature thematically deals with what agency is, what brokers are, and the roles that they play.

The article “Network Analysis, Culture, and the Problem of Agency” provides the theoretical framework used to identify the right kind of brokers. In it, Mustafa Emirbayer and Jeff Goodwin argue that in order for SNA to be effective, it must incorporate the insights of social theorists and historical sociologists. After detailing three broad theoretical perspectives within SNA—structural instrumentalism, structural determinism and structural constructionism—they argue that the latter is the only one to use. In order for change to happen, it is not the place in the network alone that matters, but the will, or agency, of the actors as well. Networks do largely impact the behavior of actors, but the opposite is also true: actors can dramatically change the networks in which they are embedded through their actions.<sup>22</sup> Thus, with regard to the Kurdish power networks, it is insufficient to simply identify those who occupy key leadership or brokerage positions; we also have to gain an understanding of the practices and cultural norms that govern the ties and agents within the context of the greater movement.

In his analysis of Paul Revere’s and Joseph Warren’s roles as brokers within the American Revolution, Shin-Kap Han identifies key aspects of brokerage that are applicable to the SOCCENT project. First, he accepts that brokers occupy a specific location within social networks. They are on the periphery of multiple groups, cross structural gaps within the network, and they likely do not occupy formal positions within any group. However, location is not enough to be a good broker. What made Revere and Warren so effective was their ability to occupy positions in the major revolutionary groups from both the politically elite class and the lower class. Revere, being a silversmith with a genius for being in the middle of important events, and Warren, being a doctor who treated members of all classes, were able to link the two groups together. In order to be an exceptional broker they had to be respected and trusted in multiple important groups, not use that key location to profit off the power the position affords, and be willing to introduce people from the different groups to close the structural gaps

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<sup>22</sup> Mustafa Emirbayer and Jeff Goodwin, “Network Analysis, Culture, and the Problem of Agency,” *American Journal of Sociology* (1994): 1411–1454.

that makes them brokers. Good brokers try to work themselves out of their job. In this way, Revere and Warren connected the intellectual center of the revolution with the militiamen and masses necessary for a successful revolution.<sup>23</sup> With regard to the Kurds, someone who fills this role would need strong relations between two tribes, be a member of one of the political parties that is not usually linked to their tribe, and through their work be tied to the workers of Kurdistan who are not tribally oriented. The very best would also, currently or historically, participate in the Peshmerga (militia). However, they must also have the personality and agency to connect these groups and not exploit their unique position for gain.

Works by Kevan Harris and Killian Clarke analyze the role that brokers played recently in the Iranian green movement of 2009 and the ousting of Hosni-Mubarak in Egypt in 2011. Brokerage was different in these two very different movements, but both offer insight into how social movement's work, as well as insight into the future of Kurdistan, which had its own Kurdish Spring in 2011.

Kevan Harris discusses how three things turned a previously apathetic populace into spontaneous revolutionaries in 2011 Iran. The first was the perceived safe place for brokered exuberance offered by the political campaign and the spontaneous party like atmosphere the televised debates created in the public squares. In this atmosphere, people's perceived risk dropped to the point where they would take risks and protest. When the election's outcome did not match the movement's expectations, they continued to gather. The second was the role that these political gatherings played in creating face-to-face contact between previously un-networked people. This face-to-face brokerage between individuals from previously separate groups created grass roots gatherings, which were hard for the state to predict or control. The Internet was not as useful as the international media portrayed it to be. It was really only useful for messaging and not for face-to-face interaction for organizing the movement. Finally, it was the increased size of

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<sup>23</sup> Shin-Kap Han, "The Other Ride of Paul Revere: The Brokerage Role in the Making of the American Revolution," *Mobilization: An International Quarterly* 14, no. 2 (2009): 143–162.

the middle class that exercised newfound power in this movement.<sup>24</sup> In Kurdistan, these similar forces may be accessed by analyzing the political groups in the last Kurdish elections, and identify those who participated.

Killian Clarke discusses how it was the Egyptian youth on the periphery of the political opposition, the Egyptian Labor Movement, and the Muslim Brotherhood who turned themselves into brokers when the opportunity to oust Mubarak presented itself. The youth on the periphery were active in NGO's and worker's issues and connected the political opposition with the labor movement. The youth reformers within the Muslim Brotherhood, who had long hoped to moderate their organization and work alongside opposition, recognized the sudden change in the opportunity structures and convinced the Brotherhoods leadership to join the uprising. These individuals occupied key brokerage roles only for the fourteen days of the movement yet were key to its success.<sup>25</sup> This ability to take advantage of the shift in opportunity structures is where the Kurds have been historically weak. If those who occupy ideal positions in social networks and have the proper agency can be lead to act as the brokers like in Egypt, they could potentially bring the traditionally feuding groups together in Kurdistan. At the same time the Arab Spring was sweeping Egypt, there was a similar phenomenon, the Kurdish Spring, happening in Kurdistan. Members of the reformist Gorran party, Kurdish Islamist parties, students, intellectuals, and labor organizations protested the patronage nature of Kurdistan's politics.

For historic data on the Kurdish nationalist movement of Kurdistan, David Romano analyzes the Kurdish nationalist Movement from a social movement perspective, identifying historically where it has been strong and weak. His analysis looks at how the movement has dealt with structural opportunities, resource mobilization, and identity framing. Though he focuses on the movement in Turkey, he uses Iraq as a case study because it is the subset of the movement that has managed to come the closest to autonomy. Generally speaking, he argues that the Kurds have been unable to take

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<sup>24</sup> KeVan Harris, "The Brokered Exuberance of the Middle Class: An Ethnographic Analysis of Iran's 2009 Green Movement," *Mobilization: An International Quarterly* 17, no. 4 (2012): 435–455.

<sup>25</sup> Killian Clarke, "Unexpected Brokers of Mobilization: Contingency and Networks in the 2011 Egyptian Uprising," *Comparative Politics* 46, no. 4 (2014): 379–397.

advantage of structural opportunities such as the Iran-Iraq war because of infighting along tribal, religious, and economic lines. Because of divisions between leadership, the Kurds have been unable to mobilize resources within Kurdistan or gain support from outside. The Kurds of northern Iraq have been the best at this of all the Kurdish diaspora. The Iraqi Kurds in general have done a great job of identity framing and creating a sense of being “Kurdish” but have fallen short in creating a unified identity, specifically in bringing the tribally aligned Kurds (with a focus on traditional elites) together with the working class and peasant Kurds. However, Iraqi Kurds have done the best of all Kurdish groups with grievance framing, and this is a main reason why they have gained international support for the Kurdish Autonomous Zone in Iraq after 1991.<sup>26</sup>

The book, *Conflict, Democratization, and the Kurds in the Middle East: Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria*, analyzes the current situation of the Kurds in the region and the role they potentially play in the democratization of the Middle East. Its authors analyze past issues of the social movement for context, but focus on how far the Kurds have come, especially in Iraq, and where they are going. They discuss the democratic example the Kurds of Iraq present and the success of their federal region of Iraq. They note how the rest of Iraq, primarily the Sunni areas, can apply similar ideals and Iraq will be more successful. The Kurdish Spring is also discussed and how it is moving away from traditional elite power structures to a democracy more inclusive of minority ideas and groups.<sup>27</sup> This became especially important when the SNA identified minority individuals with key structural location in the power networks of Kurdistan.

Dr. Sean Everton’s *Disrupting Dark Networks* identifies which metrics are associated with power and influence in social network analysis. “SNA is a collection of theories and methods that assumes that actors’ behavior is profoundly affected by their ties to others and the networks in which they are embedded.”<sup>28</sup> Rather than viewing actors as unaffected by those around them, SNA assumes that interaction patterns affect

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<sup>26</sup> David Romano, *The Kurdish Nationalist Movement: Opportunity, Mobilization and Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

<sup>27</sup> David Romano and Mehmet Gurses, *Conflict, Democratization, and the Kurds in the Middle East: Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

<sup>28</sup> Sean F. Everton, *Disrupting Dark Networks* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 5.



what actors do, say, and believe. “SNA differs from more traditional approaches in that that others tend to focus on actors’ attributes (e.g., gender, race, education)”<sup>29</sup> in that it examine on how interaction patterns affect behavior. It notes that while attributes typically do not vary across social contexts, most interaction patterns do, “suggesting that interaction patterns are just as (or perhaps more) important for predicting and understanding behavior than are attributes.”<sup>30</sup> Consequently, a primary goal of SNA has been to develop metrics that help analysts gain a better understanding of a particular network’s structural features.<sup>31</sup>

The basic measurements of power, influence and prestige are the centrality measures of a network. In short the more connections an actor has, the more central and, likely, the more powerful that actor is in a network. There are also those who are structurally located between two or more groups, and have the ability to connect those two groups. These are called brokers and are essential for the spread of information, innovation, ideas or goods across the network. Generally they have high betweenness centrality and are located on the periphery of two distinct groups.<sup>32</sup> As such, SNA has the potential to reveal a great deal about the structure of Kurdish networks, which will help indicate the resiliency and usefulness of different groups for future engagement.

Doowan Lee, in his “A Social Movement Approach to Unconventional Warfare,” discusses social movement theory (SMT) as a comprehensive analysis framework consisting of the common ingredients to collective action against the power structures of society. It consists of an analysis of how a movement deals with the structural or political opportunities that the state or international community presents, what the organizational capacity of the movement is to mobilize its human and material resources, and how well the movement frames its narrative to create strategic framing. The civil rights movement

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>30</sup> Everton, *Disrupting Dark Networks*, 7.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 277–280.

in the U.S. and the Arab spring throughout the Middle East are both examples of social movements.<sup>33</sup>

Not only does Lee give a good background of SMT, but he also provides the necessary connection of SMT to successful special warfare.<sup>34</sup> This connection is key to Iraqi Kurdistan because the U.S. has conducted special warfare in Kurdistan sporadically throughout the last two decades, and continues to do so today. It is essential for SOCCENT and the U.S. to understand how the Kurds have succeeded and failed as a social movement so as to best tailor policy and strategy to the region.

### **C. ROBUST ACTION**

John Padgett and Christopher Ansell's "Robust Action and The Rise of the Medici," is an excellent analysis of how Cosimo De Medici built a robust political network that out-performed his rivals, the Oligarchs.<sup>35</sup> The lessons learned from the study apply to the building of any robust network today and are especially applicable to the Kurdish region of Iraq. Cosimo centralized political power in Renaissance Florence by understanding the networks that surrounded him and changing his persona to best take advantage of each network. Through the use of marriage, patronage, and business ties, Cosimo placed himself as the only bridge between the new rich, many of the old families, and the different geographic areas of the city. He intentionally ensured that the different groups only interacted through him. In this way, he was able to ride the macro-economic forces that he did not (and could not) control.

Padgett and Ansell call the activities that Medici conducted, robust action, which consists of the ability to be multi-vocal. That is, the ability to have one action viewed coherently and favorably, yet differently from multiple perspectives, and have single actions be moves in multiple games at once.<sup>36</sup> In this way, it is possible to be the judge and boss mentioned above and not parse public and private motives.

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<sup>33</sup> Lee, "A Social Movement Approach to Unconventional Warfare."

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> John F. Padgett and Christopher K. Ansell, "Robust Action and the Rise of the Medici, 1400–1434," *American Journal of Sociology* (1993): 1259–1319.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

Padgett and Ansel discuss how Cosimo De Medici became not only a boundary spanner but extremely central to Florence. Because he never “sought” political office and only reacted when others requested his involvement, he was able to be the boss and the judge, a dichotomy that is traditionally difficult in governance.<sup>37</sup> Moreover, it always appeared that he was not acting in self-interest but in the interest of the city. In many ways his Oligarch rivals were very similar, except that their networks were closed, while De Medici acted as the broker between multiple networks. When the time came to mobilize resources, the Oligarchs were unable to mobilize their networks, while de-Medici was able to quickly rally his.<sup>38</sup>

With regard to Kurdistan, the methods employed by Cosimo De Medici can be very instructive. Kurdistan, like Renaissance Florence, has multiple overlapping power networks. There are the political parties, powerful families, tribes, regional alignments, religious groups, linguistic groups, and different economic groups. There are many similarities between Cosimo and Mullah Mustafa Barzani, the legendary leader of the Kurdish movement from the 1930s through 1975. He, like De Medici, was able to build alliances with multiple different groups, shift his persona, and continue to gain leverage from exile. Though not as successful, his ability to execute robust action left little room for rival factions during his prime. However, after his death, no single leader has shown the capability conduct robust action as he had. Does Fouad Massoum of Gorran have the connections and ability, or is there another future leader of the Kurds that is still relatively unknown?

Maryjane Osa’s, “Troublemakers and Counter-Revolutionaries: Network Development and Protest Cycles in Authoritarian Regimes,”<sup>39</sup> studies nine separate opposition networks to the Leninist polish government during the cold war. She stresses the importance of the Catholic Church, its associations, and how it served as the sole structural element and maintained continuity in the movement. She analyzes how protest

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<sup>37</sup> Padgett and Ansell, “Robust Action.”

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Maryjane Osa, “Troublemakers and Counter-Revolutionaries. Network Development and Protest Cycles in Authoritarian Regimes” *Conference on Social Movement Analysis: The Network Perspective*, Ross Priory, Loch Lomond, Scotland, vol. 22, no. 25.6. (2000), 91.

cycles work under eastern authoritarian regimes and seeks to dispel the idea that social movement theories are biased towards Western democracies and do not apply outside of that framework.

She argues that with an authoritarian environment the same principles apply, yet have to be implemented differently. Even though there is suppression of political activity, media and individual due process rights, there are still political opportunities with elite allies and short-term changes in the environment. Movements must find other ways to spread their message outside the media. In the case of Poland, the Catholic Church provided the political space, venues, and means to spread the narrative. It built the networks needed to take advantage of temporary changes in the opportunity structures.<sup>40</sup> In a similar fashion, the religious networks of the Naqshibandi and Qadiri Sufi orders were instrumental in mobilizing the Kurds against Baghdad, throughout the twentieth century.

Roger Gould, in “Power and Social Structure in Community Elites,” conducts an empirical study of power in social structure. He develops a quantitative measure (inter-clique betweenness) of an individual’s structural capacity for brokerage. As it increases, the broker potential and perceived influence of the individual also increases. He argues that position in elite social networks is a better indicator of power than the ability to mobilize resources because brokers can orient groups toward a single goal, while those who possess the ability to mobilize resources often undermine each other. Those with resources tend to not have impartiality, while being a broker requires it.<sup>41</sup> This is related to the power of Cosimo De Medici. He could execute robust action because he lay embedded within and was the broker between multiple cliques or groups. Chapter IV identifies a number of individuals with high inter-clique betweenness who occupy these key structural positions.

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<sup>40</sup> Osa, “Troublemakers and Counter-Revolutionaries. Network Development and Protest Cycles in Authoritarian Regimes,” 91.

<sup>41</sup> Roger V. Gould, “Power and Social Structure in Community Elites,” *Social Forces* 68, no. 2 (1989): 531–552.

Finally, in “Patronage Politics and Contentious Collective Action: A Recursive Relationship” Javier Auyero, Pablo Lapegna and Fernanda Page Poma discuss the recursive relationship between patronage politics and contentious collective action in contemporary Argentina. They argue that these are not opposite political phenomena. Rather, they interact when the network breaks down, they receive clandestine support, or they react to threats. This is counter to the common belief that patronage networks undermine collective action. Auyero, Lapegna and Poma argue that in specific circumstances, the two actually are mutually beneficial: In particular, when the break down of patronage networks leads to collective action, when patrons validate or certify a movement for benefit, when the patronage network provides clandestine support to the movement, and when the patronage network is responding to an attack.<sup>42</sup> All of these situations were present in Argentina, but they also help explain how the power structures of Kurdistan have historically reacted. There is clear patronage politics in Kurdistan, which has many times worked in conjunction with the Kurdish Nationalist Movement, specifically in response to threats. However, in Kurdistan, it has also hindered the movement because of the inability of the patronage groups to work together or gain support from the whole society.

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<sup>42</sup> Javier Auyero, Pablo Lapegna and Fernanda Page Poma, “Patronage Politics and Contentious Collective Action: A Recursive Relationship,” *Latin American Politics and Society* 51, no. 3 (2009): 1–31.

### III. THEIR OWN WORST ENEMY: A SOCIAL MOVEMENT ANALYSIS OF THE IRAQI KURDS

“If only there were harmony among us,  
if we were to obey a single one of us,  
he would reduce to vassalage  
Turks, Arabs and Persians, all of them  
we would perfect our religion, our state,  
and would educate ourselves in learning and wisdom.”

—Kurdish Poet Ahmad-I Khani, 1692<sup>43</sup>

The Kurds are the largest supranational nation in the world. They occupy contiguous territory spanning from northeast Syria, southern Turkey, northern Iraq, and western Iran. The Kurdish ethnicity, with a distinct cultural and linguistic identity, has existed for over two millennia, yet they have no state.<sup>44</sup> Most importantly for this particular project is what has shaped the fault lines between the major Kurdish political groups and how the answer to this question matters to the study of collective actions outside of Iraq. The short answer is that the traditional power struggles between rival tribal, geographic, religious, and linguistic groups continually hinder the collective action of the Kurds of Iraq, especially when the opportunity for autonomy presents itself. This is especially important because similar dynamics play out in many nationalist movements, yet academics and policy makers largely ignore them.<sup>45</sup> One critique of social movement theory is that it has a Western, liberal bias. This study of the Kurds falls outside such a norm.<sup>46</sup> It is important for SOCCENT and its endeavor to better understand the human domain of northern Iraq, and it may also provide insight for SOF that will likely have to

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<sup>43</sup> Van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh, and State: The Social and Political Structures of Kurdistan*, 267.

<sup>44</sup> Abd al-Jabbār and Hosham Dawod, *The Kurds: Nationalism and Politics*, 11; McDowall, *The Kurds: A Nation Denied*, 11.

<sup>45</sup> Hanna Yousif Freij, “Tribal Identity and Alliance Behaviour among Factions of the Kurdish National Movement in Iraq,” *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 3, no. 3 (1997), 86–110.

<sup>46</sup> Osa, *Troublemakers and Counter-Revolutionaries. Network Development and Protest Cycles in Authoritarian Regimes*, 1–2; Romano, *The Kurdish Nationalist Movement: Opportunity, Mobilization and Identity*, 1–24

wade through similarly murky waters when aiding collective action in future conflicts elsewhere.

Although the Kurds have existed for millennia, the idea of a Kurdish nation is relatively recent, beginning its coalescence around the turn of the 20th Century.<sup>47</sup> The analysis that follows will examine the Kurdish nationalist movement in Iraq at five distinct epochs, in particular, when the political structures over the Kurds offered the most space for collective action. The following periods are analyzed: The period between the end of WWI and the end of WWII, the rise of the Ba'ath Party in Iraq through the Iran-Iraq War, the Gulf War of 1991, post the 2003 invasion of Iraq and removal of Saddam Hussein from power, and the current situation for Iraqi Kurds. For each of these periods, this chapter analyzes the opportunity structures, the resource mobilization, and the identity framing of the nationalist movement. Finally, it explains why the Kurds are in the best situation they have ever been in for collective action and why that matters to SOCCENT and U.S. policy makers.

## **A. BACKGROUND**

A social movement is the collective action of a group of people united with a common purpose, engaged in sustained interaction with the established power structures, and intent on improving their standing within their state. In this particular case, whether the end goal is independence or regional autonomy is currently a matter of debate in Iraqi Kurdistan.<sup>48</sup> Social movement theory (SMT) examines how the movement deals with the structural opportunities presented by the state and the international community, its ability to mobilize both human and material resources, and how well it creates a shared collective consciousness.<sup>49</sup> SMT interacts with the SNA in Chapter IV by providing the overarching framework and background for the Kurdish power structures analyzed there. Without understanding the social movement the social network is a part of, the true value of the SNA lacks context. Conversely, without the SNA provided in Chapter IV, the

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<sup>47</sup> McDowall, *The Kurds: A Nation Denied*, 81–85

<sup>48</sup> Romano, *The Kurdish Nationalist Movement: Opportunity, Mobilization and Identity*, 20–21.

<sup>49</sup> Lee, “A Social Movement Approach to Unconventional Warfare.”

understanding of the social movement alone is very difficult to operationalize for those looking to affect change in the region. It is the combination of both analyses that provide the best way for SOCCENT to look at the power structures of Iraqi Kurdistan.

Iraqi Kurdistan is a region that, while the vast majority of the population identifies as being Kurdish, is historically divided along tribal, religious, linguistic and regional lines. These interactions and divisions help explain much of the nationalist movement's successes and failures. Generally speaking, the Kurds from the more mountainous northwestern areas of Iraqi Kurdistan, with Erbil as their cultural center, are more tribally-oriented and traditional. They are Naqshibandi Sufi's and speak Kurmanji Kurdish. The Kurdish Democratic Party represents this group with the Barzanis being the largest patrons and their tribal power base being the tribes surrounding the village of Barzan.<sup>50</sup> The Kurds of the plains and desert of southeastern Iraqi Kurdistan, with Sulaymaniyah as their cultural center, are more urbanized, less traditional, and less tribally-oriented. They are Qadiri Sufi's, and speak Sorani Kurdish.<sup>51</sup> The Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) represents this group with the Talibanis being the largest patrons. Though generally less tribally affiliated, the Talibanis garner much of their support from the large Zangana tribe. Both the Talibanis and Barzanis are not only tribal leaders but are also members of prominent sheikly families within the Qadiri and Naqshibandi orders respectively.<sup>52</sup> These traditional elites continually engage in patronage politics and compete for power and resources, often at the expense of the social movement.

When the Ottomans disbanded their emirates system in the late 19th century, it removed much of the tribal power structure. Before its end, the Ottomans would choose one tribal Agha to rule an area and all of the tribes within it as the Emir. When this system ended, the power base of tribal Aghas retreated back into their localized area. The tribes lacked administrative structure to mediate disputes and reverted to intertribal

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<sup>50</sup> 'Abd al-Jabbār and Dawod, *The Kurds: Nationalism and Politics* (London, UK: Saqi Books 2006), 142, 266.

<sup>51</sup> Freij, "Tribal Identity and Alliance Behaviour among Factions of the Kurdish National Movement in Iraq," *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 3, no. 3 (1997): 86–110.

<sup>52</sup> Van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh, and State: The Social and Political Structures of Kurdistan*. 221, 231.



conflict.<sup>53</sup> The Sufi Sheiks filled this power vacuum. They soon became religious leaders, dispute mediators between tribes, and wealthy landowners. They married into the Aghas families and eventually became more powerful than the Aghas themselves. A few Sheiks became both Sheiks and Aghas, a status that carried a great deal of authority. Muhammed Barzani, the grandfather of the current president of Kurdistan Masud Barzani, was one of these men. It is these families, both tribally and religiously powerful, that still rule Iraqi Kurdistan and this is why the Barzanis and Talibanis remain so significant.<sup>54</sup> There are many similarities between these powerful families and the Medici family discussed above, and an analysis of the intermarriages of these families is one area of future study this thesis recommends.

The traditional tribal structures, as well as Sufi religious networks, have at times served the nationalist movement well. They provide charismatic leaders with clout endowed by traditional roles, as well as mobilizing structures and networks for the movement to co-opt.<sup>55</sup> However, the rivalries between different factions have often come to the forefront whenever the opportunity for true independence arisen. The chance to increase power over traditional rivals has at times become more important than the cause of independence for many Kurdish elites. The best example of this is the rivalry between the Barzanis and Talibanis, which has at times thrown Iraqi Kurdistan into civil war. That situation may be changing, as Iraqi Kurdistan enters a new era of greater political inclusion and internal as well as international pressures.<sup>56</sup>

## **B. WWI THROUGH WWII**

With the end of WWI, the Kurds gained their first real opportunity for independence. With the League of Nations and British espousal of self-determination, the Turks fighting the Armenians and Greeks and therefore unable to suppress a Kurdish uprising, the structures of the state and the international community appeared to offer the

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<sup>53</sup> Van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh, and State: The Social and Political Structures of Kurdistan*, 193.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 221–252.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 210–211.

<sup>56</sup> Michael M. Gunter, “The Kurdish Spring,” *Third World Quarterly* 34, no. 3 (2013): 441–457, 445.

opportunity necessary for the Kurds.<sup>57</sup> The first leader of the nationalist movement, Sheik Mahmud Barzinji, misread this perceived openness of the political space, failed to overcome internal divisions and fully mobilize resources, and was unable to frame the struggle in a way that could overcome traditional rivalries.

The Kurds were encouraged by the rhetoric coming from the League of Nations and the British. However, the British proved disingenuous and were unwilling to risk their significant oil interests in northern Iraq. Instead, after occupying Iraq in 1918, they installed the Hashemite king, Faisal, as ruler and determined that Iraq needed to be a contiguous state comprised of the three former Ottoman provinces of Mosul, Baghdad, and Basra. This combination created the modern state of Iraq, the Mosul portion of which contained the oil rich areas of Iraqi Kurdistan. Sheik Mahmud Barzinji, then the governor of Sulaymaniyah, desired more control and independence than the British and King Faisal were willing to give. When Barzinji revolted, the British violently suppressed the Kurds with aerial bombardments of civilian areas before occupying Kurdistan. With the British betraying their promises of Kurdish autonomy and the League of Nations unwilling to enforce self-determination, the political space for the Nationalist Movement quickly disappeared.<sup>58</sup>

The power structures opened up again when the British mandate ended in 1930 and the Iraqi government gained independence in 1932. Barzinji led one final revolt. This time, it was not the ability of their adversaries, it was Barzinji's inability to overcome traditional divisions and mobilize the Kurds against the monarchy that ended the revolt. Barzinji, both an Agha of the Barzinji tribe and a Sheik of the Qadiri order, had grown powerful in his new role as a revolutionary. This led his traditional tribal rivals to throw their support against him. One example is the large and powerful Baban tribe who were hostile to Barzinji's ambitions and supported Baghdad and the British against him.<sup>59</sup> In

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<sup>57</sup> Romano, *The Kurdish Nationalist Movement: Opportunity, Mobilization and Identity*, 26–27.

<sup>58</sup> Van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh, and State: The Social and Political Structures of Kurdistan*, 275; Romano and Gurses, *Conflict, Democratization, and the Kurds in the Middle East: Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria*, 43–47.

<sup>59</sup> Romano, *The Kurdish Nationalist Movement: Opportunity, Mobilization and Identity*, 186.

each one of Barzinji's revolts, he could not unify the Kurds, and rival tribes allied with the Iraqi state.<sup>60</sup>

Following Barzinji's failures, there arose the first charismatic leader of the Iraqi Kurds, and the first to begin to build the idea of Kurdishness in earnest: Mullah Mustafa Barzani, who was an Agha and the son and brother of prominent Sheiks of the Naqshibandi order.<sup>61</sup> That the first leaders of the nationalist movement were both tribally and religiously powerful demonstrated that Kurdistan still required leaders with the endowed authority of their traditions.<sup>62</sup> In addition, the religious networks established by the Sufi Orders, especially the Naqshibandi's, were essential in providing the structure and framework for the movement.<sup>63</sup>

When the British and Hashemites attempted to "Arabize" the administration of Kurdistan, and consolidate their power, the tribal leaders led by Barzani made common cause with urban intellectuals, who would become the Politburo of the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) led by Ibrahim Ahmed and Jalal Talibani.<sup>64</sup> Barzani, because of his ability to mobilize his large tribal and religious base with over 6000 militiamen, convinced the nationalists to allow him to wed his cause to theirs, which allowed him to mobilize much larger and more heterogeneous groups than previous revolts.<sup>65</sup> Even though often leftist, urban, anti-tribal, and critical of traditional elites, the nationalists recognized that the greatest chance for Kurdish success lay with Barzani. The way in

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<sup>60</sup> Romano, *The Kurdish Nationalist Movement: Opportunity, Mobilization and Identity*, 188.

<sup>61</sup> McDowall, *The Kurds: A Nation Denied*, 81–85.

<sup>62</sup> Romano, *The Kurdish Nationalist Movement: Opportunity, Mobilization and Identity*, 188.

<sup>63</sup> Van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh, and State: The Social and Political Structures of Kurdistan*, 210–211. The Naqshibani religious network spanned the entirety of Kurdistan and the Ottoman Empire. In organization and ability, it was similar to mafia organizations, and it crossed tribal and international borders. The access to these networks was essential for the mobilizing of the Kurdish national movement.

<sup>64</sup> Romano and Gurses, *Conflict, Democratization, and the Kurds in the Middle East: Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria*, 46–47.

<sup>65</sup> Van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh, and State: The Social and Political Structures of Kurdistan*, 210.

which Barzani rose to power has many parallels to Cosimo De-Medici's rise in Renaissance Florence and is robust action in much the same way.<sup>66</sup>

Though this coalition was necessary to boost political resources at the time, it hindered the nationalist movement's ability to be more inclusive in the future. The inclusion of Barzani and his tribal forces pushed the leftist-leaning elements of the nationalist movements out. Barzani's rising power and his status as an Agha and wealthy landowner also threatened rival tribes and prevented them joining the movement. The non-tribal peasant class had little faith that their situation would improve under the traditional structures Barzani represented and thus remained generally outside of the movement. Significantly, the KDP's alliance with the Iraqi Communist Party broke, costing the movement an ally with significant influence in the rest of Iraq. Had the nationalists not chosen the quick growth Barzani offered, and had instead methodically grown its base by incorporating all of the disaffected groups, the movement would likely have been more inclusive and would have potentially avoided the inter-group conflicts of the next half-century.<sup>67</sup>

The weakness of the security structures of the nascent Iraqi State seemed to offer another opportunity for revolt in 1943. This time Barzani led the revolt, and the Iraqi military proved incapable of suppressing it. However, once again the British military intervened and removed any structural opportunity for independence. Mullah Mustafa was pushed out of Iraq and into Iran, where he was influential in the short-lived Kurdish Republic of Mahabad, until he was exiled to the Soviet Union until 1958. Though Barzani had a larger base and was able to resist the Iraqi Government more than Barzinji, old tribal rivalries again emerged. This time it was the Barzani's traditional rival, the large Zibari tribe, which defected to the Iraqi government's side and helped defeat Barzani.

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<sup>66</sup> Padgett and Ansell, *Robust Action and the Rise of the Medici, 1400–1434*, 1259–1319. The rise of Barzani is very similar to the Robust Action written about by Padgett that describes how Cosimo De Medici used his understanding of the networks that surrounded him and harness multiple power networks to rise to dominance in renaissance Florence.

<sup>67</sup> Romano, *The Kurdish Nationalist Movement: Opportunity, Mobilization and Identity*, 189

Though Barzinji succeeded in starting to frame the struggle for independence as a Kurdish nationalist movement, it was Barzani who took the seed of ethnic nationalism and began to bring it to fruition. Until his death in 1979, his name became inseparable from the movement. Though unable to frame a narrative that coalesced the Kurds at this juncture, one positive thing emerged for Kurdish grievance framing. The Anglo-Iraqi statement of intent regarding the Kurds in 1922 granted them the right to establish a Kurdish government within Iraq's boundaries, as well as the form of government of their choosing and the relationship they would have with the Iraqi Government. Initially, this countered the grievance framing of the Kurds by removing many of their complaints, at least on paper. In the long run, however, it helped the Kurds. The Kurds would never again have to argue whether they had legal right as a special group within Iraq.<sup>68</sup> From this agreement onward, they fought for what was due to them, and by not receiving it they were being denied their legal rights as a recognized group.

Other than the growing legend of Mustafa Barzani and his Peshmerga as fighters capable of defeating the Iraqi army, and the recognition given in the Anglo-Iraqi statement, the period was a failure. By not incorporating the grievances of the non-tribal peasant class, and re-enforcing the connection between the nationalist movement and traditional elites, the movement failed to include the entirety of the Kurdish state.<sup>69</sup>

### **C. THE RISE OF THE BA'ATH PARTY AND THE IRAN-IRAQ WAR**

From the fall of the Monarchy in 1958 until the end of the Iran-Iraq war, there were several instances where the structures of the state and international community seemed to offer the Kurds chances for control of their political destiny. Once again the factional lines identified above prevented the Kurds from taking advantage of these structural opportunities.

When General Abdel Karim Qassim overthrew the Monarchy in 1958, he established some semblance of democracy. Qassim was looking for allies in his fight against former Monarchy sympathizers, as well as other dissident groups, and he

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<sup>68</sup> Romano, *The Kurdish Nationalist Movement: Opportunity, Mobilization and Identity*, 185–187.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 189–190.

embraced the Kurds in this role. He declared his desire for strong relations with the Kurds, welcomed Barzani back to the country, and legalized the KDP. In return, Barzani helped him suppress his opponents. The new constitution recognized and guaranteed Kurdish rights within Iraq, several Kurds were given high offices in the government, Kurdish periodicals began to grow in number, and the general opportunity for the Kurds seemed to increase.<sup>70</sup>

However, the structural opportunities began to shrink when Qassim became worried about Barzani's growing power. He was not alone, and there were ample Kurdish rivals available for Qassim to use against Barzani. While Barzani was in exile, the KDP had re-established relations with leftist groups and made inroads with the non-tribal groups. However, when Barzani returned, those gains were lost. Because Barzani provided an easy source of fighters and commanded so much respect, the nationalist movement once again mortgaged their future for the chance at a quick fix when they gave him control of the movement. Qassim quickly backtracked on his promises and armed rival tribes against Barzani.<sup>71</sup> Telling of Barzani's inability to unite the Kurds Barzani is how that when he revolted, instead of attempting to include all Kurds, his first targets were his Kurdish rivals.<sup>72</sup>

Initially, the Politburo kept the KDP from fighting because they concerned about the ease in which Barzani had returned to power. They were also wary of the cult of personality growing up around him. Many saw Barzani's revolt as more of a power-grab than one with true nationalist motivations.<sup>73</sup> As exclusionary as Barzani could be toward some groups within Kurdistan, he did one significant thing for the resource mobilization of this era and into the future. In order to broaden his base, he brought to his side the Assyrian Christians.<sup>74</sup> Fighting the repression of the Iraqi state created a cause shared by all groups of the region, something that continues in the present day. Barzani also

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<sup>70</sup> McDowall, *The Kurds: A Nation Denied*, 84–87.

<sup>71</sup> Romano, *The Kurdish Nationalist Movement: Opportunity, Mobilization and Identity*, 190; McDowall, *The Kurds: A Nation Denied*, 86.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 190.

<sup>73</sup> McDowall, *The Kurds: A Nation Denied*, 87.

<sup>74</sup> Romano, *The Kurdish Nationalist Movement: Opportunity, Mobilization and Identity*, 191.

mobilized the external support of Iran and Turkey, which provided both passive and active support against Qassim.<sup>75</sup>

There were four military campaigns between 1961 and 1969. Because of Barzani's military successes and issues in Baghdad, Qassim's regime crumbled in 1963, yet the fighting continued with the following regimes. In these clashes, the Kurds generally got the better of the Iraqi forces but could never gain full independence. When in 1966, after Iraqi forces were defeated by Barzani's forces in the Battle of Hendrin, the civilian prime minister at the time, Abd al Rahman Bazzaz, sued for peace. The resulting 1966 Bazzaz Declaration offered the Kurds far-reaching autonomy, including a provision for parliamentary democracy in all of Iraq. However, Iraq's military leadership did not support Bazzaz and his lenient policy towards the Kurds, so they deposed him, which caused the violent confrontation with the Kurds to continue for four more years.<sup>76</sup>

Throughout the 1960s, during his war with the Iraqi state, Barzani attacked and, at times, destroyed the villages of his tribal rivals. Though this gained him the support of some smaller tribes who joined his cause out of fear, it caused some of the much larger tribes, such as the Baradostis, Herkis, and Surchis, to side with the government against him.<sup>77</sup> Barzani accepted a cease-fire in 1964 with Abd el Aslam Arif; this led to a final split between the KDP Politburo and Barzani. The terms were worse than Qassim had offered four years before, and Barzani did not bother to consult the rest of the party in accepting them. This illuminated the differences between the Politburo, which believed in an inclusive nationalist movement, and Barzani, who they believed wanted to dominate as its sole leader. Barzani, controlling more military forces, drove the Politburo into exile in Iran.<sup>78</sup>

In 1968 the Ba'ath party took control of the Iraqi government and looked to make peace with the Kurds. The Kurds, having seen Barzani's recent success in fighting the Iraqi military, and harboring distrust of the honesty of the new peace offer, declined the

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<sup>75</sup> McDowall, *The Kurds: A Nation Denied*, 87.

<sup>76</sup> Romano, *The Kurdish Nationalist Movement: Opportunity, Mobilization and Identity*, 191–192.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 192.

<sup>78</sup> McDowall, *The Kurds: A Nation Denied*, 88.

deal. The infusion of U.S. CIA, Israeli, and Iranian support of Barzani against the Ba'ath further convinced the KDP that success was possible.<sup>79</sup>

The structural opportunity for the Kurds against the Ba'ath seemed quite enabling until the divisions within the Kurdish areas re-emerged. This time the former KDP Politburo, under the leadership of Jalal Talibani, entered negotiations with the Ba'ath and returned from exile. Talibani accepted a Ba'ath peace deal and moved back into Iraq with Iraqi military support. However, even with Iraqi support, he could not compete with Barzani's charismatic leadership, the Peshmerga he commanded, and the external support he received from Iran, Israel and the CIA. In 1970, the Ba'ath turned away from Talibani and were forced to negotiate with Barzani. The resulting terms were some of the best yet for Kurds. Because their military campaigns had gone poorly against the Kurds, and they needed to focus on consolidating their power over the whole Iraqi state, the Ba'ath required temporary quiet on the Kurdish front.<sup>80</sup>

The terms of the agreement, however, were never implemented. Almost immediately the debate on the boundaries of Kurdistan and the inclusion of the oil-rich areas surrounding Kirkuk resurfaced.<sup>81</sup> Even with this position of strength, the opportunity structures for full independence did not exist. Although Israel and Iran wanted to weaken the socialist Ba'ath, they did not support full autonomy for the Kurds.<sup>82</sup>

When the Ba'ath failed to make good on their promises to the Kurds in 1970, the Kurds under Barzani created a strong narrative for all Kurds that was counter-productive to negotiate with the Ba'ath government in the future<sup>83</sup> Not only was Barzani able to paint the Ba'ath as dishonest, but he successfully framed Talibani as a traitor for negotiating with them.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Romano, *The Kurdish Nationalist Movement: Opportunity, Mobilization and Identity*, 192–193.

<sup>80</sup> McDowall, *The Kurds: A Nation Denied*, 90.

<sup>81</sup> Romano, *The Kurdish Nationalist Movement: Opportunity, Mobilization and Identity*, 191–193.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 193, McDowall, *The Kurds: A Nation Denied*, 94.

<sup>83</sup> Romano, *The Kurdish Nationalist Movement: Opportunity, Mobilization and Identity*, 194.

<sup>84</sup> McDowall, *The Kurds: A Nation Denied*, 90.



The USSR entered the fray with the Soviet-Iraq friendship and cooperation treaty of 1972 and began to close off the political opportunity the Kurds enjoyed since 1960. The Soviets provided drastically more military capability than Israel, and Iran did. By 1974 The Iraqi state's ability to repress became unprecedented, and it threw overwhelming force at the Peshmerga, which, failing to recognize the shift in the power balance, had not reverted to guerilla tactics yet and mistakenly tried to continue a more conventional war.<sup>85</sup> Even in the face of such an overwhelming force, the Peshmerga maintained the struggle until the Algiers Treaty between Iran and Iraq in 1975, which ended the political opening afforded by external support for the Kurds. Iran withdrew all support of Barzani and convinced the CIA and Mossad to do the same. Without external support the Ba'ath quickly defeated Barzani. Thousands of Kurds fled to Iran, including Barzani, who died four years later of cancer.<sup>86</sup>

It is a significant demonstration of how polarizing Barzani was that, even in these dire circumstances, he was unable to unite enough Kurds, resulting in rivals fighting with the Ba'ath. In addition, the non-tribal proletariat and peasants were disillusioned by the traditional elites who Barzani championed and still remained out of the fray. This severely hurt the chances of success and the ability to fight a guerilla war once Barzani switched tactics, because it was easy for the Ba'ath to target Barzani's support base.<sup>87</sup> With control of the north, the Ba'ath began Arabization by infusing up to 250,000 Arabs into the oil rich cities of Kirkuk, Khanaqeen and their surrounding areas. At the same time the Ba'ath forcibly moved up to 300,000 Kurds into southern areas of Iraq.<sup>88</sup>

It was now Jalal Talibani's turn to put on the mantle of Kurdish nationalism. Talibani mobilized the former leftist, intellectual, urban Politburo of the KDP as well as the Qadiri Sufi, Sorani-speaking plains Kurds and other disaffected former members of the KDP. This new group, called the PUK, returned to Iraqi Kurdistan and took up a

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<sup>85</sup> Romano, *The Kurdish Nationalist Movement: Opportunity, Mobilization and Identity*, 194.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 193–197.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 195.

<sup>88</sup> McDowall, *The Kurds: A Nation Denied*. 99; Romano, *The Kurdish Nationalist Movement: Opportunity, Mobilization and Identity*, 198.

protracted guerrilla struggle. Talibani and the PUK successfully framed Barzani as abandoning the nationalist cause, and used it as an opportunity to create a narrative with themselves as the true nationalists, a position they held until the Iran–Iraq war, and one which they have shared with the KDP ever since. From this new position of leadership the PUK petitioned the UN on human rights with regard to the military crimes and Arabization policies of the Ba’ath.<sup>89</sup>

In a sign that Kurdistan was rapidly moving towards a system run purely by patronage politics, the previously ideological groups that formed the PUK now behaved in a manner so close to the KDP under Barzani that most Kurds, especially the non-tribal, peasant class, could not tell the difference. Because of this, they did not support the PUK either. Barzani’s son Masud mobilized the remnants of the KDP and began their own guerilla campaign, as well as other small groups. Even facing the overwhelming force of the Iraqi’s, the Kurds could not look past the power struggle between the different groups and a civil war broke out in 1978. Talibani even mobilized Syrian Kurdish fighters to help his cause against both the Ba’ath and his Kurdish rivals.<sup>90</sup>

When the Ayatollah Khomeini overthrew the Shah of Iran in 1979, both the PUK and KDP sought support of the new Iranian leadership. It was the new KDP that secured it in exchange for help fighting against the KDP-I. This willingness to fight other Kurds, even outside of Iraq, angered many and damaged the nationalist image the KDP was trying to cultivate.<sup>91</sup>

The former vice president of Iraq, Saddam Hussein, came to power in 1979 and launched a full-scale invasion of Iran in 1980. The Iranians found willing allies with the Iraqi Kurds, who were anxious to regain what they had lost in 1975 and willing to open a northern front against Saddam. At the same time, Saddam aided the KDP-I against the Iranians. When towards the end of the war it appeared the Iranians would win, there was

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<sup>89</sup> McDowall, *The Kurds: A Nation Denied*, 100–101; Romano, *The Kurdish Nationalist Movement: Opportunity, Mobilization and Identity*, 197.

<sup>90</sup> McDowall, *The Kurds: A Nation Denied*, 101; Romano, *The Kurdish Nationalist Movement: Opportunity, Mobilization and Identity*, 197.

<sup>91</sup> McDowall, *The Kurds: A Nation Denied*, 101; Van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh, and State: The Social and Political Structures of Kurdistan*, 31.

a brief opening in the opportunity structures. However, fearing the “fundamentalist” Iranian victory, Western nations threw their support to Saddam, which effectively closed off the Kurds chance at separating from Iraq at the time.<sup>92</sup>

During the Iran–Iraq war, the Kurdish groups on both sides of the border had the opportunity to greatly increase their negotiating power. Again, factional politics proved too powerful. Even while fighting the Iraqis the PUK and KDP fought each other until 1987. This greatly hurt their ability to mobilize against their enemies in Iraq and Iran.<sup>93</sup>

In 1987, prompted by extreme losses and the recognition of a real chance to defeat Saddam while he was distracted fighting the Iranians, the Iraqi Kurds united. The PUK, KDP, and other Kurdish groups joined together to form the Iraqi Kurdish Front (IKF). The IKF reached out to other dissident Iraqi groups to form the Iraqi National Front the express goals of which were to overthrow Saddam, end the Iran–Iraq war, Kurdish national rights, democratic choice, and the safeguarding of minority rights throughout Iraq.<sup>94</sup> This alliance created the first really strong narrative of unity for the region. However, the movement was unable to successfully court the more modern, intellectual, non-tribal Kurds and the landless peasants.<sup>95</sup> That they still failed to form a more inclusive narrative in word or deed demonstrates how close to the KDP and PUK had become in practice. The PUK and KDP were both seen by many as more interested in growing their patronage network and dominating Iraqi Kurdistan than building a modern nationalist state, the goal the leadership of the PUK once held.<sup>96</sup>

When the tide turned more in Iraq’s favor, and even before the war was over, it began punishing the Kurds. The now infamous Anfal campaign of the late 1980s was an attempt to finally resolve the Kurdish issue for Saddam. It was an extremely violent drive to pacify Kurdistan and included the use of chemical weapons on the villages of Shaikh Wisan, and Halabja. The Iraqi state “showed a capacity and propensity for repression not

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<sup>92</sup> Romano, *The Kurdish Nationalist Movement: Opportunity, Mobilization and Identity*, 198,

<sup>93</sup> McDowall, *The Kurds: A Nation Denied*, 105–106.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 107.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 107.

<sup>96</sup> Romano, *The Kurdish Nationalist Movement: Opportunity, Mobilization and Identity*, 197.

seen since the time of the National Socialists in Germany or Stalinism in the USSR.”<sup>97</sup> With this unprecedented violence, the ability of the Kurds to mobilize dissipated.<sup>98</sup>

The Anfal campaign was so dominant that it temporarily overwhelmed any ability for a strong narrative to succeed. At the time, any idea of forming a shared Kurdish consciousness would have seemed unwise and unlikely.<sup>99</sup> However, it may have become the strongest tool for grievance framing to date. Not only did their suffering provide the Kurds a boost in shared identity, but because it was so horrific and involved the use of chemical weapons, it became a powerful tool in gaining the international community’s support. The memory of its horrors would play a major role in the UN’s establishment of the no-fly zone in 1991.

#### **D. THE GULF WAR OF 1991 AND THE NO-FLY ZONE**

Before Saddam invaded Kuwait in 1990, the Kurds had possibly the smallest amount of structural opportunity in their history. The 1991 Gulf War rapidly changed those structures. The United States encouraged the Kurds and the Shia from southern Iraq to revolt against Saddam after their rout of his military in Kuwait. Believing they had the support of the military that had dispatched the Iraqi army in only 100 hours, they thought the structural opportunity had opened for them.

In March, revolts erupted across Kurdistan, and by the end of the month the Kurds controlled all of Kurdistan to include Kirkuk. Saddam quickly turned the remaining might of his military with its tanks, multiple launch rocket systems, artillery and helicopter gunships toward the Kurds. Initially the Bush administration, failed to intervene and help the Kurds. The Kurdish leadership pleaded for the United States to intervene. Quickly the Kurds were driven from Kirkuk, and within 72 hours hundreds of thousands of refugees were heading to the Turkish and Iranian borders.

With an exploding humanitarian crisis and the possibility of another Anfal campaign, the international community responded. The UN established a no-fly zone

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<sup>97</sup> Romano, *The Kurdish Nationalist Movement: Opportunity, Mobilization and Identity*, 201

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 198–204.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 104.

covering most of Iraqi Kurdistan. Even though the UN resolution guaranteed Kirkuk, Sinjar, and Khanaqeen, Saddam never agreed to the stipulations and never signed an autonomy agreement. However, the Kurds had enough military strength to defend their area along with the UN guaranteed no-fly zone, and for the first time in the century, the Kurds controlled their own political life.<sup>100</sup>

Although the Kurds desired independence, they were more interested in showing the world that they could self govern.<sup>101</sup> They understood that the international community, most importantly the Turks and the United States, did not support full independence, and that their improved situation was contingent on the no-fly zone provided by these nations. Instead, they focused on governing the Kurdish Autonomous Zone (KAZ) and held elections for the first Kurdish Regional Government (KRG).<sup>102</sup>

In the first session of the KRG, the PUK and KDP ruled with an almost perfect 50/50 split. This was a good sign in some capacity because the two largest patrons of the region were cooperating, but it disillusioned other non-affiliated Kurds who wanted more inclusion. The KRG became a façade of a true democracy with the actual decisions of state made within the leadership of the PUK and KDP, not Parliament. The KDP and PUK became the largest employers, still paying and maintaining their Peshmerga, paying pensions to veterans, and supporting the families of the fallen, the two parties completed the transition into a patronage system. No longer were the KDP and PUK reliant on their traditional bases, and the Aghas often switched sides depending on which patron offered them more benefits. This system even incorporated the minority groups, traditionally outside the PUK and KDP rivalry. During this time The KRG relied on illicit trade with Turkey for funding, as well as meager international aid. The parties needed these resources for their clients, and because it controlled the Turkish border, the KDP was winning the money war. For this reason, the PUK likely started the Civil War in 1994.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> McDowall, *The Kurds: A Nation Denied*, 117; Romano, *The Kurdish Nationalist Movement: Opportunity, Mobilization and Identity*, 204–208.

<sup>101</sup> Romano, *The Kurdish Nationalist Movement: Opportunity, Mobilization and Identity*, 204–208.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 209.

<sup>103</sup> Romano, *The Kurdish Nationalist Movement: Opportunity, Mobilization and Identity*, 210; ‘Abd al-Jabbār and Dawod, *The Kurds: Nationalism and Politics*, 151–155, 162, 165, 172.

Even though the majority of Kurds understood the need for unity in the face of Saddam's forces, as well the need to appear united for the support of the international community, the leadership of the parties could not work out a resource sharing agreement. In the civil war that ensued, the PUK managed to gain control of Erbil and most of the KAZ. In a sign that even with the structural opportunity a protected zone provided the Kurds, they still could not overcome their traditional grievances; the KDP invited the Iraqi army into Kurdistan to help remove the PUK from Erbil. When the Iraqi military left, the PUK retook their traditional zone of influence but not Erbil. The struggle between the two groups lasted until 1998, when they signed a peace agreement and effectively split Kurdistan in half. Although all parties would still view Iraqi Kurdistan as one entity, it had two governments with the PUK controlling Sulaymaniyah and the southeast and the KDP controlling Erbil and northwest.<sup>104</sup>

The Kurds constructed internally and externally resonating narratives during this period. First, their successful framing of Saddam as a "modern day Nebuchadnezzar intent on genocide"<sup>105</sup> who had committed the chemical weapons attack on the Halabja was a driving force in the establishment of the no-fly zone over their territory. The international media and humanitarian organizations propagated the grievance framing of the Kurdish narrative, generated sympathy within the United States and Britain, and created the moral justification for the establishment of the no-fly zone. The Kurds also succeeded in framing the initial election of the KRG as successful and demonstrative of their ability to handle democracy and self-rule. This greatly helped with their perceived legitimacy to the international community.<sup>106</sup> In addition, during this time the shared hardship of the Arabization experienced before the Gulf War, created a sense of shared suffering between the Kurds and the minority groups within the region, helping to incorporate them into the Kurdish state more than ever before.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> 'Abd al-Jabbār and Dawod, *The Kurds: Nationalism and Politics*, 37; Romano, *The Kurdish Nationalist Movement: Opportunity, Mobilization and Identity*, 210.

<sup>105</sup> Romano, *The Kurdish Nationalist Movement: Opportunity, Mobilization and Identity*, 211.

<sup>106</sup> Romano, *The Kurdish Nationalist Movement: Opportunity, Mobilization and Identity*, 209–211.

<sup>107</sup> Gurses and Romano, *Conflict, Democratization, and the Kurds in the Middle East: Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria*, 51.

However, the civil war and the willingness of the KDP to use Saddam's forces in order to fight its rivals, greatly undermined the intended appeal of the Kurdish narrative. They still depended on an image of a united Kurdistan for the mobilization of international support, as well as growth of the nationalist movement. Opponents of Kurdish autonomy still harken back to this time when they argue that the Kurds in Iraq are too backward and divided to handle political self-determination.<sup>108</sup>

## **E. 2003 INVASION**

When the United States overthrew the Ba'ath regime of Saddam Hussein in 2003 during Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), they drastically increased the structural opportunities for the Kurds. When the Turks proclaimed Iraqi Kurd independence a *casus belli* if allowed, it demonstrated that the structures of the international community remained against complete autonomy. However, there were advantages to not gaining independence at the time. First, the coalition and the new government in Baghdad provided resources to the Kurds. Second, the Kurds soon gained a great deal of influence within Iraq with the signing of the Iraqi constitution of 2005. The Kurds essentially became king makers within Iraq with the veto power they gained over any new law. They also found themselves in a key brokerage position between the Shia and Sunni factions in Iraq. The Kurds controlled 19% of the Iraqi Parliament and the Iraqi Presidency. This meant that when they voted in a united block, the Kurds became an indispensable part of any coalition government in Baghdad.<sup>109</sup>

For the first time since the end of WWI, the Kurds largely avoided the infighting that had characterized them for so long. They transcended the split between the PUK and KDP and operated as a united government. Though rivalries still remained, they presented a united front to the world. Importantly, the political diversity and participation within Kurdistan increased greatly. The Gorran party (Change Movement), with a

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<sup>108</sup> Romano, *The Kurdish Nationalist Movement: Opportunity, Mobilization and Identity*, 211.

<sup>109</sup> Romano, *The Kurdish Nationalist Movement: Opportunity, Mobilization and Identity*, 210–212; 'Abd al-Jabbār and Dawod, *The Kurds: Nationalism and Politics*, 233, 272–273; Romano and Gurses, *Conflict, Democratization, and the Kurds in the Middle East: Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria*, 116, 114–124, 159.

platform for reform, emerged as a significant force within the KRG. A mobilization of the youth, intellectual and working class that traditionally remained above the fray joined the political conversation and caused the power of the traditional elites to begin to shrink.<sup>110</sup>

Militarily, the Kurds became the coalition's go-to force and operated under coalition command and control in the early years of Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF). Later they infused Peshmerga into the Iraqi army as well as maintaining their own forces. This gained them representation within the Iraqi military, while maintaining the capability to forcefully secure their gains in autonomy.<sup>111</sup> In terms of the ability to mobilize economic resources, the Kurds still gained a majority of their funds from Iraq and oil sharing revenue. The ability of the Kurds to export directly to Turkey was, until recently, a matter of contention between Erbil and Baghdad.<sup>112</sup>

The Kurds were very successful at framing themselves as the only democratic and reliable allies within Iraq for U.S. forces. Internally, the repression of the previous decades created a stronger sense of Kurdishness than at any time in their past and a vast majority of Kurds in 2005 identified as Kurds and not Iraqis. They almost universally believed in their right to full independence; however, they understood that the international system was still opposed it. Because they still needed the support of NATO, Iran, and the trade with Turkey, they could not push for independence.<sup>113</sup>

When framing their narrative to the international community, they needed one more essential element. They understood that if they were to eventually push for full independence, they had to demonstrate they had first exhausted all options in trying to remain under a federal Iraq.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Romano and Gurses, *Conflict, Democratization, and the Kurds in the Middle East: Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria*, 52, 114–124, 159.

<sup>111</sup> Romano, *The Kurdish Nationalist Movement: Opportunity, Mobilization and Identity*, 212–216.

<sup>112</sup> Romano and Gurses, *Conflict, Democratization, and the Kurds in the Middle East: Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria*, 52, 149.

<sup>113</sup> ‘Abd al-Jabbār and Dawod, *The Kurds: Nationalism and Politics*, 259; Romano, *The Kurdish Nationalist Movement: Opportunity, Mobilization and Identity*, 213; Romano and Gurses, *Conflict, Democratization, and the Kurds in the Middle East: Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria*, 110–113, 148–150.

<sup>114</sup> ‘Abd al-Jabbār and Dawod, *The Kurds: Nationalism and Politics*, 258.



## F. THE CURRENT SITUATION

Even with the recent spread of Daesh in Iraq, the structural opportunities for the Iraqi Kurds have never been as strong as they were after the fall of Mosul and the significant shifting of power structures that followed. Under the watchful eye of non-governmental organizations, student's groups, business professionals, and the international community, the political system of the KRG has become more inclusive. Maybe the greatest sign of this is that the Gorran party gained more seats in the 2013 parliamentary election than the PUK. There has also been an increase in minority political parties, with the current session of Parliament being the most inclusive in Kurdish history. Press coverage of protests against the PUK and KDP in 2011, dubbed the Kurdish Spring, precipitated a drastic drop in suppression of civil liberties by traditional patron families. Overall, there has been a slow shift away from the elite patronage politics of the past and toward a more modern and inclusive democracy.<sup>115</sup>

As dangerous as the Daesh capture of Mosul has been for overall regional stability, the weakness it exposed in the Iraqi military opened structural opportunities for the Kurds. The Kurds, with the support of U.S. airstrikes, secured Kirkuk, the Mosul Dam, Sinjar, and Khanaqeen, and now are in a defensive position that neither Daesh nor the Iraqi army can remove them from. Before the fall of Mosul, the Kurds understood that if they wanted full independence, they would have had to abandon their desire to include Kirkuk in their state. However, the Kurds are currently in a situation where they can win lasting control their newly gained territories by simply holding their position. If they choose to remain within a federal Iraq, they have already begun the census guaranteed by the 2005 Iraqi Constitution, which will likely show these areas rightfully fall under the KRG because of their Kurdish majority.<sup>116</sup>

If one of the key impediments to full independence was Turkey calling Kurdish independence a *casus belli* in 2003, that block may be slowly disappearing. Turkey is

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<sup>115</sup> Gurses and Romano, *Conflict, Democratization, and the Kurds in the Middle East: Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria*, 145, 150–159; Gunter, *The Kurdish Spring*, 441–457.

<sup>116</sup> ‘Abd al-Jabbār and Dawod, *The Kurds: Nationalism and Politics*, 252. Gareth Stansfield, “Kurdistan Rising: To Acknowledge Or Ignore the Unraveling of Iraq,” *Middle East Memo*, Number 33, Brookings Institute, (July 2014, 2014), 2–5.

now closer with the KRG than Baghdad and sees the Kurds in Iraq as allies in their efforts to aid rebel forces in Syria. They have recently shown support for the KRG in military, political, and economic ways. Simply put, they may not oppose Kurdish independence anymore. The Kurds also enjoy a silent friendship with the Israelis, and the Arab states have begun to warm to the idea of an independent Kurdistan.<sup>117</sup> Despite the aid the Kurds receive separately from Iran and NATO, these nations currently oppose Kurdish independence, and provide the only remaining international structural block to it.<sup>118</sup>

The unprecedented period of unity between the PUK and KDP, as well as the increase in participation from previously uninvolved groups, has created a drastic increase in nationalist pride. It has become political suicide for any Kurdish politician to espouse weakness on autonomy for the Kurds, even if it does not make sense in the greater context of the geopolitical situation.<sup>119</sup> The Kurdish Spring also demonstrated the ability of the youth, academics, and reformist political parties like Gorran to mobilize mass support and limit the power of the traditional elites. This has the potential to finally fully mobilize the Kurds.<sup>120</sup>

In terms of economic mobilization, the Kurds still receive their largest amount of funds from Baghdad, though that may be slowly changing. The Turks and Kurds have signed a bilateral trade agreement and there are currently 1,000 Turkish companies within Iraqi Kurdistan as well as a Pipeline for direct export of Kurdish oil into Turkey. This is all with the grudging approval of the Iraqi government, who cannot afford to lose the Kurds.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Romano and Gurses, *Conflict, Democratization, and the Kurds in the Middle East: Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria*, 255, 267–276; Stansfield, “Kurdistan Rising: To Acknowledge Or Ignore the Unraveling of Iraq,” 7–8.

<sup>118</sup> Stansfield, “Kurdistan Rising: To Acknowledge Or Ignore the Unraveling of Iraq,” 5, 10.

<sup>119</sup> Romano and Gurses, *Conflict, Democratization, and the Kurds in the Middle East: Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria*, 53.

<sup>120</sup> Gunter, *The Kurdish Spring*, 445.

<sup>121</sup> Romano and Gurses, *Conflict, Democratization, and the Kurds in the Middle East: Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria*, 149 255, 267–276; Stansfield, “Kurdistan Rising: To Acknowledge or Ignore the Unraveling of Iraq,” 3.

The Kurds have successfully framed themselves as the most democratic, representative, inclusive, and protective of civil liberties of any entity in the region. This is a major source of pride for the Kurds, and it greatly improves their narrative with the international community. They are possibly more united than ever before, and they have been successful in presenting that unity to the world. With the influx of minorities and Arabs fleeing the rest of Iraq, the Kurds are integrating these groups into their society and creating a narrative of themselves as the protectors of persecuted groups within Iraq.<sup>122</sup>

The Kurds, with all of their disagreements, have seemed to have finally created a narrative on which all groups agree. It is comprised generally of the following: 1) the Kurdistan region of Iraq has the right to self-determination through independence or through a federal state; 2) Kurdish nationalism and the Kurdish national culture are the foundation of that self determination, and the Kurds have exclusive right to the territory that falls under the KRG; 3) the KRG is the legal governing authority for the Kurds of Iraq; and 4) the Kurds should avoid going to war with each other as they did in the 1990s.<sup>123</sup>

## **G. SMT CONCLUSION**

This analysis of the Kurds' ability to capitalize on structural opportunities, mobilize resources, and frame their narrative provides the perfect context for the SNA of the next chapter. Though not featured prominently in the SMT analysis above, the minority groups in Iraqi Kurdistan occupy a unique position. They have enjoyed ever more inclusion in the politics of the region, yet have avoided the focus of coalition efforts within Kurdistan. The Assyrian Christians, the Yazidis, and the Turkmen have been integrated to varying degrees into the complex power structures of Kurdistan, and they likely occupy positions of insight, span boundaries between multiple Kurdish groups, and can potentially act as brokers between them. Especially for the United States, leveraging

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<sup>122</sup> Romano and Gurses, *Conflict, Democratization, and the Kurds in the Middle East: Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria*, 148–150.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 151.

these groups can help it further understand the human domain and maintain leverage within Kurdistan.

The Kurds are already in the best situation they have ever been to exercise autonomy, making them potentially one of the winners of the current crisis regarding Daesh. The United States cannot afford to fail to manage their rise in prominence or underestimate their position to act as brokers between rival factions within Iraq. Using the Kurds as an example of why federalism can succeed in Iraq can move Iraq in that direction. Even Ayed Allawi, a prominent Sunni politician in Iraq calling for a loose federal state, has argued recently that the Kurdish state should be an example for all Iraqi regions. Many argue this offers the greatest hope for the stability of Iraq.<sup>124</sup>

The Kurds are a great example of the documented phenomenon that happens when traditional structures are put through the crucible of intrastate conflict. These conflicts often turn traditional structures, which are the easiest to mobilize, into patronage systems. In addition, current and future conflict will often be characterized by multi-factional civil wars similar to the experience of the Kurds within Iraq. By looking at how the Kurds, one of the longest repressed groups in the world, finally united, rose to relative prominence, and rapidly shifted towards an inclusive democracy in the span of less than two decades is a good case study for other similar conflicts. The United States must learn lessons from the Iraqi Kurds when it inevitably tries to influence, understand, and manage similar conflicts now and into the future. The success of the United States in conflicts for the foreseeable future may well depend upon it.

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<sup>124</sup> Romano and Gurses, *Conflict, Democratization, and the Kurds in the Middle East: Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria*, 203–204.

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#### **IV. SOCIAL NETWORK ANALYSIS OF IRAQI KURD POWER STRUCTURES**

This chapter uses social network analysis (SNA) to analyze the major political parties of Iraqi Kurdistan, the Kurdish Regional Government's Parliament and Cabinet, the Ministers of Parliament in the Iraqi government, the political movements of Iraqi Kurdistan, the non-political organizations of Iraqi Kurdistan, and the military connections of Iraqi Kurdistan. Its purpose is to identify the formal, and more importantly, the informal power structures of this currently vital geopolitical region. The goal is to illuminate relatively unknown, yet important, individuals who currently occupy key locations within the power networks of Kurdistan, or more importantly, who will occupy positions of power in the future. This is a part of a larger project on the power structures of Iraqi Kurdistan. Finally, Special Operations Command Central (SOCCENT) has indicated interest in Iranian influence among the Kurds, so this chapter will identify potential locations where Iran has shown influence and provide recommendations on how to counter that influence. Hopefully, the individuals identified as important to these networks will prove useful to SOCCENT and the coalition efforts in Kurdistan as a whole.

The primary question to answer is what influential networks in Iraqi Kurdistan can be utilized for Special Warfare purposes. Particularly, who are the emerging leaders of the parties? Who are the brokers and boundary spanners? How connected or separate are the different parties with each other? And finally, how connected are the parties to outside entities, especially independence movements in Turkey and Iran, and the Iranian Government? We know that the Iranian Government works with the Kurdish militias (Peshmerga),<sup>125</sup> but how connected are they to Kurdish political networks?

The political history of the Kurdish nationalist movement during the 20th and 21st centuries is one of turmoil, infighting, and civil war. David Romano argues that these issues, stoked by outside powers and the Iraqi government, have prevented the Kurds

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<sup>125</sup> Kittleson, *US, Iran Woo Rival Kurdish Factions in Battle Against IS*.

from gaining true autonomy. Still, though limited, the Kurds of Iraq have managed to gain the most autonomy from within the Kurdish diaspora, and they currently have virtual autonomy within the Kurdish Autonomous Zone (KAZ) in Iraq.<sup>126</sup>

Originally, there was one major movement, the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP), which was led by the head of the Barzan tribe, Mustafa Barzani, which became the practical leader of the Kurdish nationalist movement within Iraq.<sup>127</sup> Barzani, as the leader of the mountain Kurds from northern Kurdistan, who are Naqshibandi Sufi's and speak Kurmanji Kurdish, faced opposition from the less mountainous and more urban southern, Qadiri Sufi, Sorani Speaking Kurds led by Ibrahim Ahmed and Jalal Talibani.<sup>128</sup> When Barzani died, Jalal Talibani rallied the southern Kurds to create the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) in 1975.<sup>129</sup> These two parties remain the dominant political and military forces within Iraqi Kurdistan today.

Though they have been at peace since 1991, they have divided up Iraqi Kurdistan into de facto spheres of interest: The KDP, with its center in Erbil, and the PUK, with its center in Sulaymaniyah. Each party maintains its own Peshmerga forces, which loosely serve together under the Ministry of Peshmerga affairs, and each party maintains ties with different international players.<sup>130</sup> In 2009, the Movement for Change, or Gorran, led by Nashirwar Mustafa, split from the PUK and formed an opposition party against the two party leading coalition. Gorran is popular among the youth and the more urban Kurds and believes the KDP and PUK have done a poor job of representing the Kurds.<sup>131</sup> Finally, there are two Islamist parties, the Kurdish Islamist Group (KIG) and the Islamic Union of

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<sup>126</sup> Romano, *The Kurdish Nationalist Movement: Opportunity, Mobilization and Identity*, 183–220.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 188.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 192–197.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 197.

<sup>130</sup> Kittleson, *US, Iran Woo Rival Kurdish Factions in Battle Against IS*.

<sup>131</sup> “Official website of the Change Movement (Gorran),” Gorran Headquarters, <http://www.gorran.net/En/Content.aspx?LinkID=181>.

Kurdistan (KIU), as well as small parties representing other minorities within Kurdistan such as the Turkmen, the Yazidi's, and the Assyrians.<sup>132</sup>

The data used in this SNA were coded from three major sources. The first is every article on Kurdistan in *Al-Monitor* written in 2014. Second, the websites for the KDP and PUK provided not only the structures of the parties, but also biographical data for most of its leadership. Finally, the website for the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) published the names and biographies of the Parliament and Cabinet members, and the Iraqi Government website published the Parliament and Cabinet members with their biographies, which provided historic affiliations to code, and attributes.

## **A. METHODOLOGY**

This report primarily deals with the formal structures involved in politics and power within Iraqi Kurdistan. Though part of a larger project on the power structures in Kurdistan, which has a larger scope and is more difficult to define, this project includes only the actual members of the KRG's Parliament, Cabinet, and Presidency, and the Iraqi Parliament, Cabinet, and Presidency, and the leadership structures of the political parties of Kurdistan. The parliaments are broken down by the political party of each representative as well as the parliamentary block or "list" they fall under. Included for the KRG are the last three parliaments and cabinets, which provide historical relational data. Also included is all the available biography data from the PUK and KRG websites and most of the KRG and Iraqi government websites. However, because the KDP website did not include biographies, there is a potential imbalance. Biographies for the Kurdish members of Iraqi Parliament exist but are not included in this data set because of time constraints. In addition, in order to balance the data set, this report has removed organizations unique to the PUK because of the lack of similar data. Finally, included is relational data from every *Al-Monitor* article dealing with Kurds over the past year, with a focus on military connections, especially with foreign powers.

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<sup>132</sup> "Official website of the Kurdistan Parliament," Kurdistan Parliament, <http://www.perlemanikurdistan.com/Default.aspx?l=1>.



The four networks coded for this project were the two-mode affiliation networks of government organizations, political movements, non-political organizations, and military affiliations. A two-mode network involves two nodes that are of different types; the individuals, or agents, are one set, and their organizations are the other type. The main political parties, originally considered political movements, are coded as attributes because they are large enough as organizations to assume they are irrelevant to the social network analysis. Figures 1, 2, 3, and 4 are the sociograms for the two-mode networks of each network individually and then combined. The coded data were analyzed with the SNA tool, ORA.<sup>133</sup> In all of the sociograms (i.e., network maps) red nodes indicate the KDP, blue indicates the PUK, dark purple, Gorran, and light purple, unknown political or non-KRG political party. Any changes to this scheme are noted in the captions.

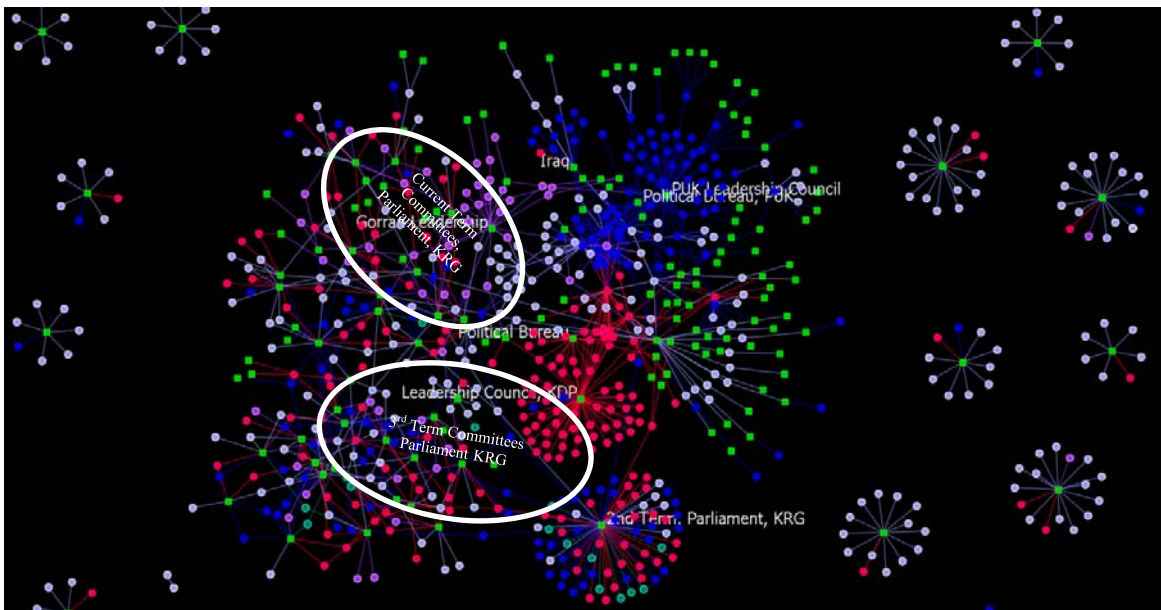


Figure 1. Two-Mode Network Map of Government Organizations. Green represents the organizations.<sup>134</sup>

<sup>133</sup> ORA Software. Kathleen M. Carley, Center for Computational Analysis of Social and Organizational Systems, Carnegie Mellon University, Copyright 2001–2011.

<sup>134</sup> ORA, for information concerning the data used in creating this image please contact the author.



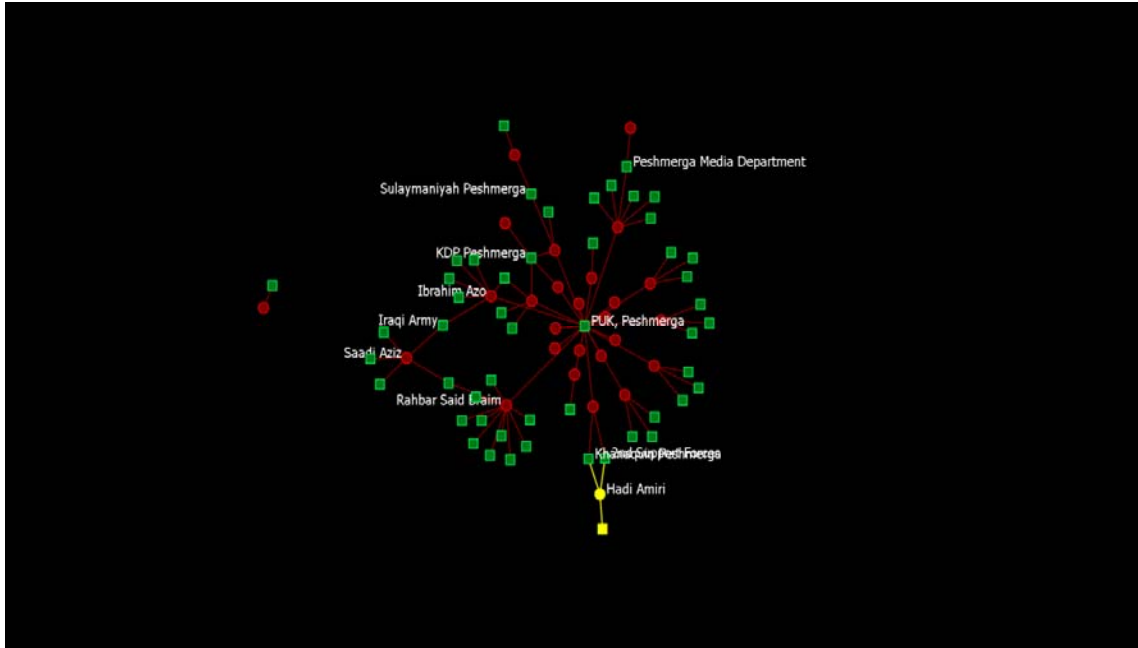


Figure 4. Two-Mode Network Map of Military Organizations. Yellow indicates the Badr Organization under Iranian Republican Guard Quds Force (IRGC-QF) influence.<sup>137</sup>

The next step was to transform each two-mode network into a one-mode network. One-mode networks involve only one type of node, in these cases, members of a Kurdish power structure where a tie between agents indicates their shared participation in an organization. The assumption is that a relationship exists between two agents who are members of the same organization if it is small enough. Tables 5, 6, 7, and 8 show the one-mode shared government organizations, political movements, non-political organizations, and military affiliation sociograms. These are followed by the combined network, which is called here the Iraqi Kurdistan power structures network (PSN). In the sociograms below, the nodes are sized by two factors to demonstrate nodes that occupy key structural positions. Cut points are individuals that lie on either side of a bridging tie between two separate groups, who if removed sever the ties between the networks. These individuals tend to broker influence and information flow. One actor with this position may not be significant, but if multiple actors are identified it can be useful building a strategy of influence. The other metric used to size nodes is boundary spanner potential

<sup>137</sup> ORA, for information concerning the data used in creating this image please contact the author.

(BSP), which is the ratio of the betweenness centrality of an individual to their degree centrality. Betweenness centrality is the number of paths between all other actors an individual lies on, and degree centrality is the total number of ties an actor has. Individuals high in betweenness centrality and low in degree are theoretically located in a position to act as ties between different groups.<sup>138</sup>

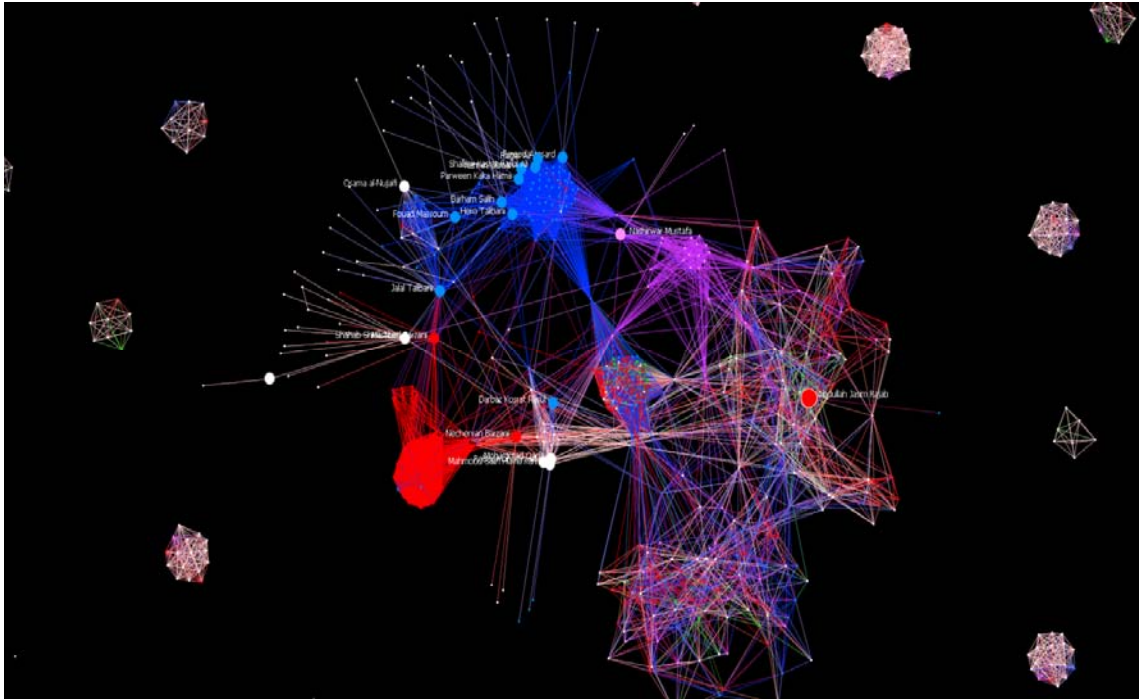


Figure 5. One-Mode Network Map of Individuals Who Share Membership in a Government Organization. The larger nodes with their labels visible are those identified as cut points.<sup>139</sup>

<sup>138</sup> Everton, *Disrupting Dark Networks*, 254–255, 269.

<sup>139</sup> Cut-points are nodes that when removed, disconnect the network. See Sean F. Everton, *Disrupting Dark Networks*, 264–271; ORA, For information concerning the data used in creating this image please contact the author

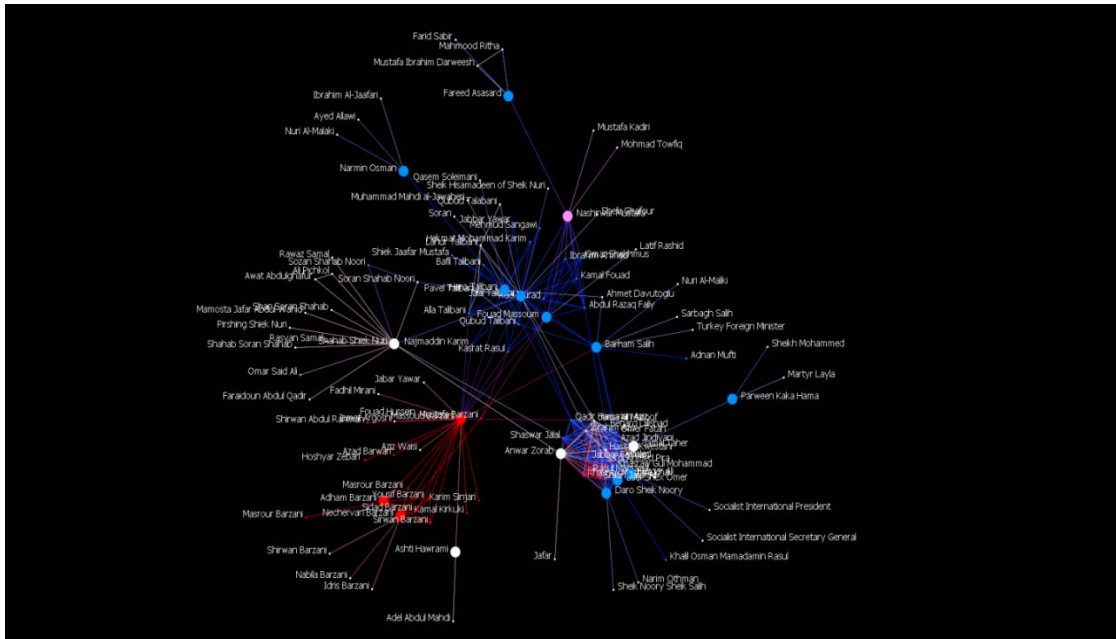


Figure 6. One-Mode Network Map of Individuals Who Share Membership in a Non-political Organization. Larger nodes are cut-points.<sup>140</sup>

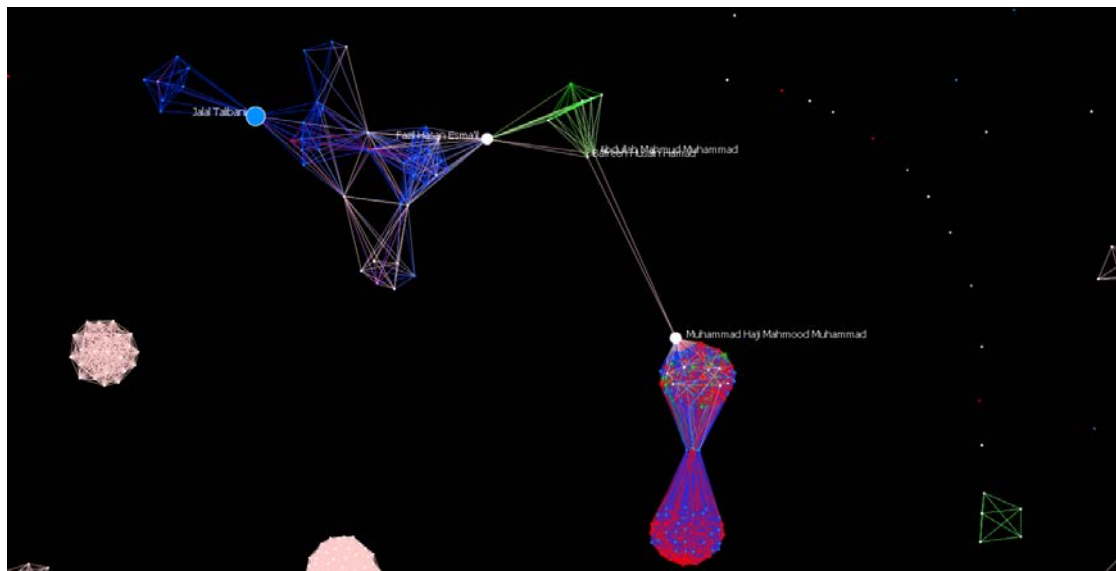


Figure 7. One-Mode Network Map of Individuals Who Share Membership in a Political Movement. The larger nodes are those identified as cut points. Green nodes indicate membership in the KIG or KIU.<sup>141</sup>

<sup>140</sup> ORA, for information concerning the data used in creating this image please contact the author.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

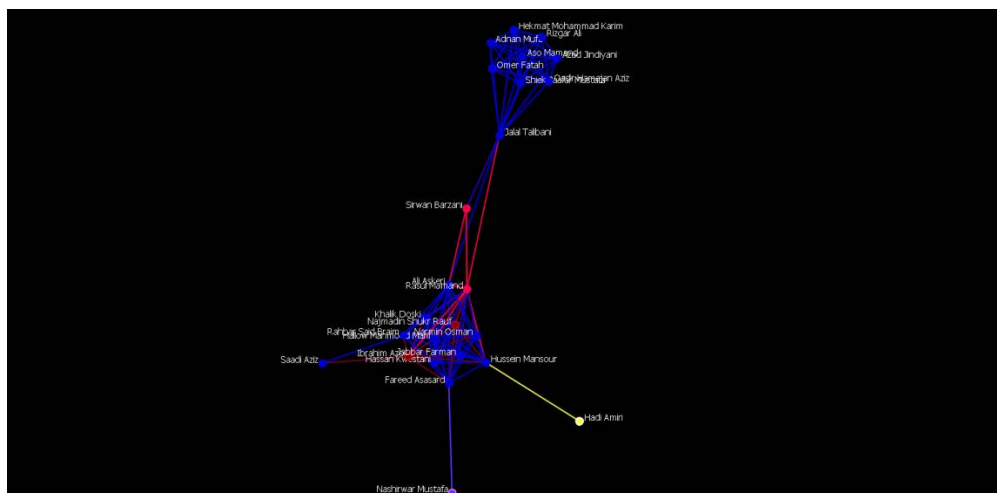


Figure 8. One Mode Network Map of Individuals Who Share Membership in a Military Organization. The yellow node is Hadi Amiri, the head of the Badr Organization connected to Iran.<sup>142</sup>

The union of the one-mode networks into one combined network provides a total view of the power structures of Kurdistan. The sociogram in Figure 9 includes all 919 nodes and forms the basis for most of the analysis moving forward.

<sup>142</sup> ORA, for information concerning the data used in creating this image please contact the author.



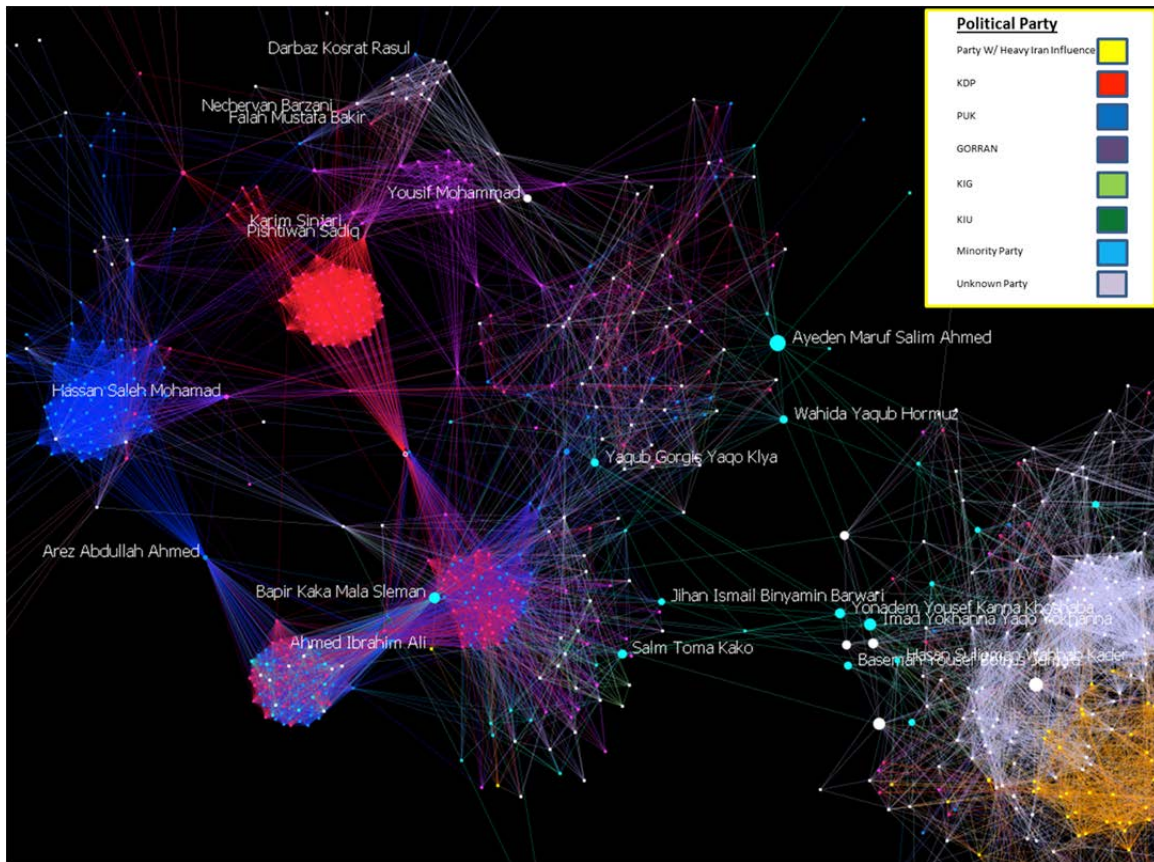


Figure 9. Network Map of the Power Structures of Iraqi Kurdistan. The nodes are sized by boundary spanner, potential.<sup>143</sup>

Although the leadership of the major political parties appears isolated in Figure 9, in reality they are not. In order for the SNA to identify key nodes, shared membership in the PUK or KDP alone was not considered a tie because of the large size of the groups. If a group has a large number of members, the assumption that they all share at tie is no longer valid. This does not mean they do not have relational ties to members of the political leadership, it just means the data on those relationships were unavailable, and it was not safe to assume they all knew each other. The appearance of isolation is an artifact of this assumption. There are many members of the KDP and PUK within the KRG and Iraqi Government, and it is safe to assume that they actually are relationally connected to their party. Because of this, when one of the below agents, especially the minority

<sup>143</sup> Boundary spanner potential capture the ability of an actor to broker between groups. See formal definition below in Section E (“Analysis of Individual Actors”); ORA, for information concerning the data used in creating this image please contact the author.

members, acts as a broker within the power structures of the KRG, they are able to influence the major political parties because the major parties share membership within their smaller organizations and cliques. Consider whether the leadership of the Democratic or Republican parties within the United States has ties with their elected officials. The answer is clearly that they do, and the KRG is no different.

## **B. NETWORK TOPOGRAPHY**

The standard measures of network topography are listed in Table 1. The network is large, with 919 nodes, with the longest path length between two nodes being eight, and the average distance between nodes being 3.59. The low average total degree, eigenvector, and betweenness centrality as well as the low overall density indicate that the network is not very dense, which is unsurprising because it represents distinct organizations that are often at odds with one another. However, the network is fairly cohesive, as demonstrated by the clustering coefficient of 0.67. To further demonstrate that the network is cohesive is to look at the fragmentation and connectedness scores, which are the additive inverse of one another. They indicate that only 20 percent of the network nodes cannot reach one another either directly or indirectly. For the Kurdish PSN, this is revelatory only in that it demonstrates that there are numerous pathways between groups, even traditional rivals such as the KDP, PUK and Gorran. There are also numerous ties between the Kurdish government, and the Iraqi Government, which indicates the KRG is integrated with the Iraqi government fairly well. Some policy makers and experts have contended that the KRG will split from Iraq,<sup>144</sup> the connectedness of the KRG with the Iraqi government could indicate this is unlikely. On average nodes are members of three cliques (see next section for definition of cliques).

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<sup>144</sup> Dexter Filkins, "A New Deal for the Kurds," *The New Yorker*, December 3, 2014, <http://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/new-deal-kurds>.



TOPOGRAPHIC METRICS	
Measure	Value
Row count	919
Column count	919
Link count	32252
Density	0.038
Reciprocity	1
Characteristic path length	3.591
Clustering coefficient	0.67
Network levels (diameter)	8
Network fragmentation	0.202
Krackhardt connectedness	0.798
Measure	Avg
Total degree centrality	0.003
Eigenvector centrality	0.017
Eigenvector centrality per component	0.011
Betweenness centrality	0.002
Clique membership count	3.033
Clustering coefficient	0.67

Table 1. List of Topographic Measures, calculated by ORA.<sup>145</sup>

### C. SUBGROUPS

Using the PSN combined one-mode network, the next step was to run clustering algorithms to detect subgroups within the network. The most revelatory for this project, and its goal of identifying brokers, was the clique calculation, because according to Gould, in “Power Structures in Community Elites,” those with high inter-clique betweenness hold positions of influence and are likely to be brokers.<sup>146</sup> A clique is defined as a group of which every member is tied to every other member.<sup>147</sup> The clique size statistics for the PSN are in Table 2, and the sociogram of the two mode network of shared clique membership is displayed in Figure 10.

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<sup>145</sup> ORA, for information concerning the data used in creating this table please contact the author.

<sup>146</sup> Gould, *Power and Social Structure in Community Elites*, 531–552.

<sup>147</sup> Sean F. Everton, *Disrupting Dark Networks*, 171.

Clique Size Statistics	
Min	3
Max	81
Avg	10.072
Stddev	9.029

Table 2. Clique Statistics.<sup>148</sup>

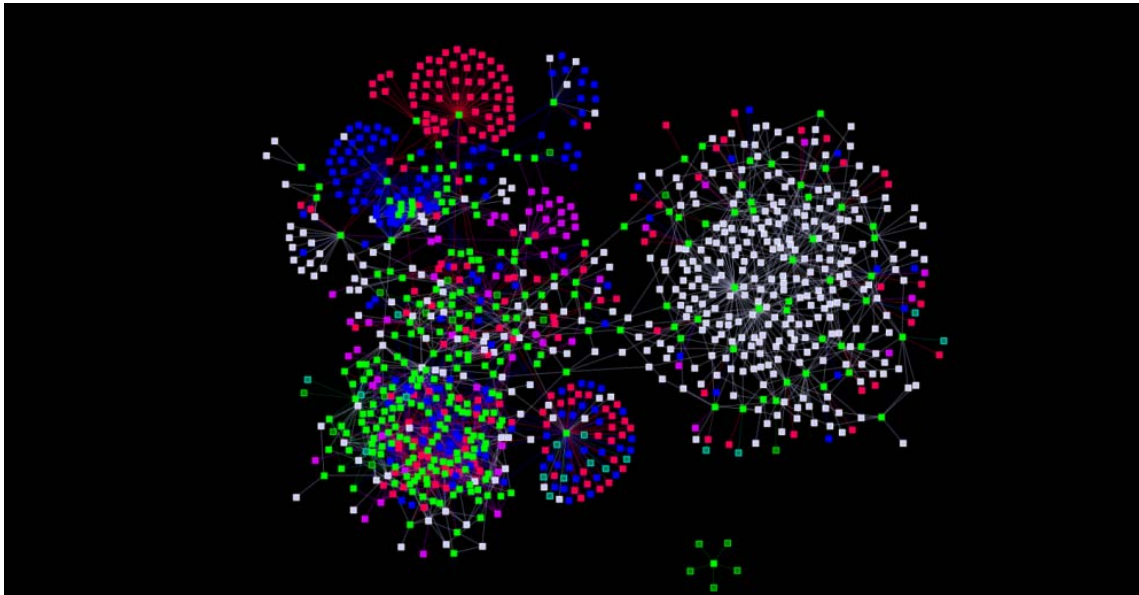


Figure 10. Two-Mode Clique Network. Cliques are green; agents colored by political party.<sup>149</sup>

Figure 11 is a sociogram of a one-mode network where a tie indicates a shared clique affiliation and depicts the shared clique network of the combined Power Structure network.

<sup>148</sup> ORA, for information concerning the data used in creating this table please contact the author.

<sup>149</sup> ORA, for information concerning the data used in creating this image please contact the author.

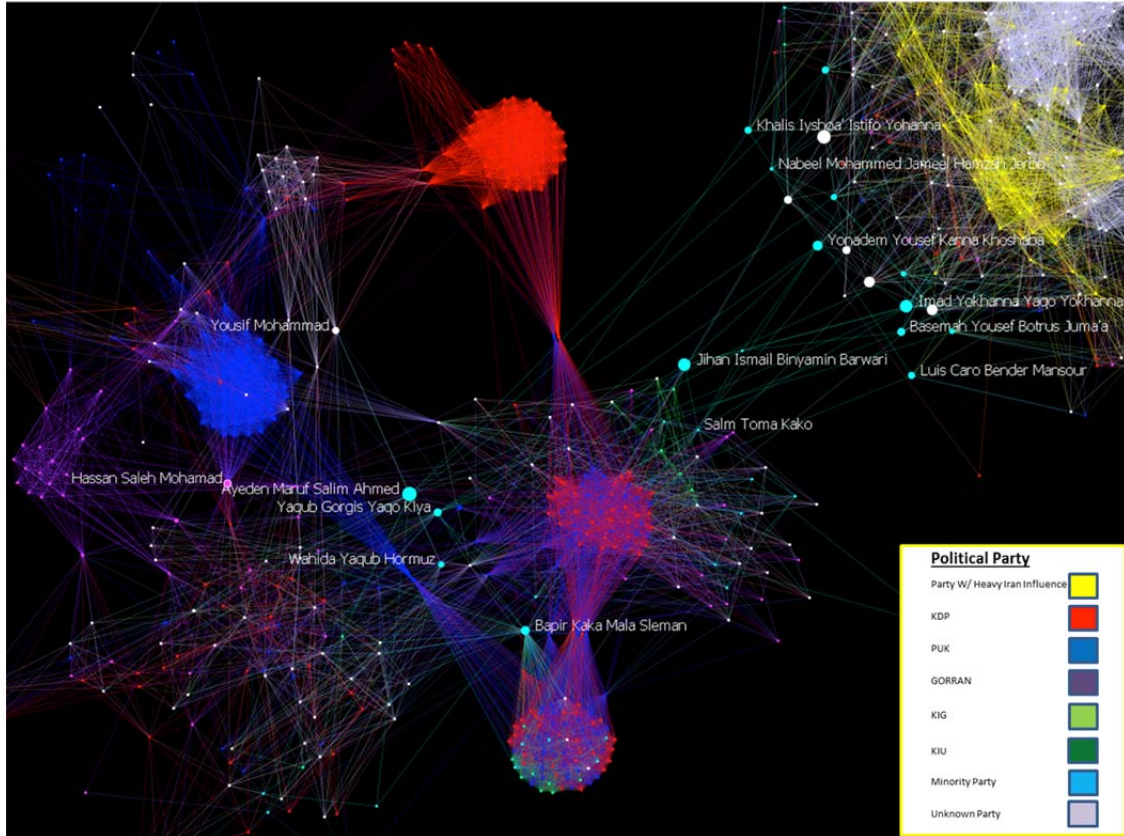


Figure 11. One-Mode Network of Shared Clique Membership. Nodes are sized by boundary spanner, potential (defined in Section E).<sup>150</sup>

#### D. ANALYSIS OF INDIVIDUAL ACTORS

The first step in gleaning anything of value from this network is to examine the metrics of individual actors, and identifying those who occupy key positions within the network. Table 3 identifies the top ten actors by standard network analysis measures. Degree centrality is the normalized count of how many ties an actor has. Betweenness centrality is the percentage of shortest pathways between all nodes that pass through a specific node.<sup>151</sup> Eigenvector centrality is a variation on degree centrality except that it prioritizes ties to actors with numerous ties over those with few ties.<sup>152</sup> And clique count indicates how many cliques (defined previously) to which an actor belongs. The more

<sup>150</sup> ORA, for information concerning the data used in creating this image please contact the author.

<sup>151</sup> Author used the ORA software definition of betweenness centrality.

<sup>152</sup> Everton, *Disrupting Dark Networks*, 208.

cliques an actor is a member of, the more groups that node works within, and therefore is able to spread information, or have access to information from.

Rank	Betweenness centrality	score	Eigenvector centrality	score	Total degree centrality	score	Number of Cliques	score
1	Bapir Kaka Mala Sleman	0.21	Omar Abdulrahman Ali Abdullah	0.18	Awni Kamal Sa'id Aziz Bazzaz	0.01	Salar Mahmud Murad Ali	31
2	Ayeden Maruf Salim Ahmed	0.08	Rozhan Abdullah Qadir Ahmed Bayz	0.18	Omar Abdulrahman Ali Abdullah	0.01	Sarwar Abdulrahman Omer	29
3	Arez Abdullah Ahmed	0.07	Awni Kamal Sa'id Aziz Bazzaz	0.18	Rozhan Abdullah Qadir Ahmed Bayz	0.01	Sa'adi Ahmed Pira	27
4	Sabah Jalloub Faleh Hami Al Sa'adi	0.07	Ismael Mahmood Abdullah	0.18	Ismael Mahmood Abdullah	0.01	Omer Fatah	26
5	Imad Yokhanna Yaqo Yokhanna	0.05	Sherwan Nasih Abdullah Sabghatullah Al-Haidari	0.18	Sherwan Nasih Abdullah Sabghatullah Al-	0.01	Arsalan Bayiz	25
6	Mathhar Khader Naser	0.04	Suzan Shahab Nuri	0.18	Suzan Shahab Nuri	0.01	Khasraw Mustafa Khal	25
7	Safiyah Taleb Ali Alshouhail	0.04	Arez Abdullah Ahmed	0.15	Arez Abdullah Ahmed	0.01	Tara Tahsin Yasin As'adi	23
8	Yaqub Gorgis Yaqo Klya	0.04	Kuestan Muhammad Abdullah	0.15	Abdullah Ali Ibrahim Husein	0.01	Qadir Hamajan Aziz	21
9	Salm Toma Kako	0.04	Bapir Kaka Mala Sleman	0.15	Dilshad Shahab Haji	0.01	Rizgar Ali	21
10	Abdullah Ali Ibrahim Husein	0.04	Farsat Ahmad Abdullah	0.15	Bapir Kaka Mala Sleman	0.01	Abdullah Mahmud Muhammad	20

Table 3. Standard Node-Level Calculations.<sup>153</sup>

Of the individuals high in the metrics presented in Table 3, Bapir Kaka Mala Sleman, Ayeden Maruf Salim Ahmed, Imad Yokhana, Safiyah Taleb Ali Alshouhail, Salm Toma Kako, Yousif Mohamed, Yaqud Gorgis Yago Klya, and Wahida Yaqub Hormuz are members of minority political parties.

The focus of this project, however, is to identify brokers, and the metric, boundary spanner potential, will be used to do so here. Formally, boundary spanner potential equals betweenness centrality divided by degree centrality; less formally, it identifies actors “that are potentially influential [because they] are positioned to broker connections between groups and to bring to bear the influence of one group on another or

<sup>153</sup> ORA, for information concerning the data used in creating this table please contact the author.

serve as a gatekeeper between groups.”<sup>154</sup> In Figure 10 above those actors with the highest boundary spanner potential are identified as larger nodes. These are potentially important individuals for SOCCENT when looking to exert influence on Kurdish power structure.

Rank	Agent	Value
1	Ayeden Maruf Salim Ahmed	0.046
2	Sabah Jalloub Faleh Hami Al Sa'idi	0.045
3	Imad Yokhanna Yaqo Yokhanna	0.04
4	Mathhar Khader Naser	0.034
5	Bapir Kaka Mala Sleman	0.031
6	Yonadem Yousef Kanna Khoshaba	0.03
7	Safiyah Taleb Ali Alshouhail	0.03
8	Yaqub Gorgis Yaqo Klya	0.025
9	Mahmoud Ali Othman Omar	0.024
10	Salm Toma Kako	0.023
11	Kathem Atiyah Alshammari	0.023
12	Jihan Ismail Binyamin Barwari	0.021
13	Basemah Yousef Botrus Jumaa	0.02
14	Wahida Yaqub Hormuz	0.02
15	Yousif Mohammad	0.019

Table 4. Boundary Spanner Potential of the PSN.<sup>155</sup>

Of these individuals, Ayeden Maruf Salim Ahmed, Imad Yokhanna Yago Yokhanna, Bapir Kaka Mala Sleman, Safiyah Taleb Ali Alshouhail, Yonadem Yousef Kanna Khashaba, Yaqub Gorgis Yago Klaya, Wahida Yaqub Hormuz, Salim Toma Kako, Safiyah Taleb Ali Alshouhail, and Yousif Mohammed are members of minority groups traditionally forgotten by United States engagement.

Table 5 lists the boundary spanning potential nodes in the shared cliques network. These agents are those who are members within many cliques and occupy these key positions.

<sup>154</sup> ORA Software. Kathleen M. Carley, Center for Computational Analysis of Social and Organizational Systems, Carnegie Mellon University. Copyright 2001–2011.

<sup>155</sup> ORA, for information concerning the data used in creating this table please contact the author.

Rank	Agent	Value
1	Sabah Jalloub Faleh Hami Al Saidi	0.045
2	Ayeden Maruf Salim Ahmed	0.043
3	Imad Yokhanna Yago Yokhanna	0.038
4	Jihan Ismail Binyamin Barwari	0.037
5	Mathhar Khader Naser	0.033
6	Safiyah Taleb Ali Alsouhail	0.032
7	Yonadem Yousef Kanna Khoshaba	0.027
8	Bapir Kaka Mala Sleman	0.027
9	Mahmoud Ali Othman Omar	0.023
10	Kathem Atiyah Alshammari	0.022
11	Basemah Yousef Botrus Jumaa	0.021
12	Yaqub Gorgis Yago Klya	0.02
13	Yousif Mohammad	0.017
14	Luis Caro Bender Mansour	0.017
15	Modrika Ahmed Mohammed Hasan	0.017

Table 5. Boundary Spanner Potential of the PSN where Nodes Share Clique Membership.<sup>156</sup>

Ayeden Maruf Salim Ahmed, Imad Yokhanna Yago Yokhanna, Jihan Ismail Minyamin Barwari, Safihah Taleb Ali Ahlsouhail, Yonadem Yousef Kanna Khoshaba, Bapir Kaka Mala Sleman, Mahmoud Ali Othman Omar, Yaqub Gorgis Yago Klya, and Yousif Mohammad are all members of minority political parties.

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<sup>156</sup> ORA, for information concerning the data used in creating this table please contact the author.



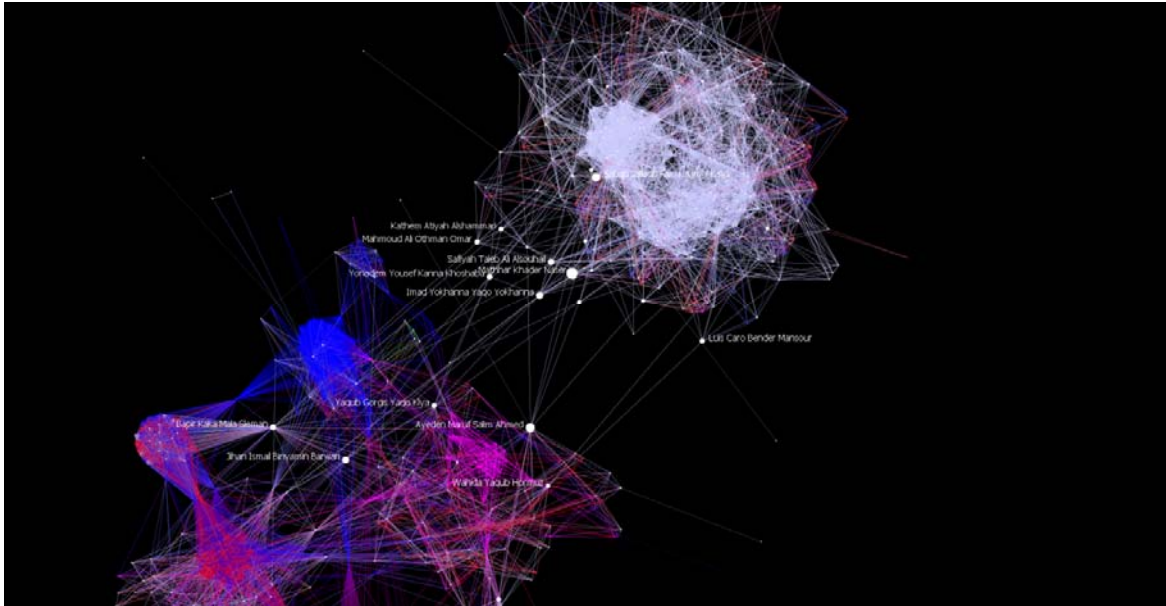


Figure 12. One-Mode Network of PSN Shared Clique Membership. The nodes are sized boundary spanner potential.<sup>157</sup>

## E. DISCUSSION

So what is important for SOCCENT to understand about this network? Yes, the traditional power brokers still have an enormous amount of power in Kurdistan. The Barzanis, Talibanis, and the leaders of the PUK and KDP are still dominant. However, there are other individuals, mentioned above, who occupy key locations within the network, such as Bapir Kaka Mala Sleman and Ayden Maruf Salim Ahmed. Many of those individuals, those with high boundary spanner potential and eigenvector centrality, are not widely known power players. Especially when trying to gain influence into the Kurdish power structures, building relationships with these individuals, who may have largely remained out of the focus of coalition efforts, will pay dividends when gauging Kurdish support for initiatives, or injecting coalition plans and ideas into Kurdish politics and power networks. Though not widely discussed, these minority groups have been represented within the Kurdish power systems for centuries, participating under the tribal patronage structures, fighting alongside and coexisting with the Kurds. Even today, though not considered powerful, the Turkmen occupy positions of prestige because they

<sup>157</sup> ORA, for information concerning the data used in creating this image please contact the author.

descend from the elites of the Ottoman Empire, which is remembered fondly by many Kurdish groups. The Assyrian Christians, or Nestorians, at times occupied positions of military and political power the Kurds were forced to deal with as peers.<sup>158</sup> Because of this, these groups are likely more integrated into Kurdish structures than in any other part of the Middle East. The members of these groups identified above are potential leaders of these groups, and are demonstrative of their potential as brokers between different Kurdish factions.

When looking at how the Iraqi Kurds interact with international actors, whether state or non-state, these individuals are important as well. The increased standing of minority groups an important part of the Kurds narrative which espouses inclusiveness and democracy, but it has become source of pride among Kurds that they are so accepting of disaffected groups. These groups are also important when looking at Iranian influence. In Figure 13, it is clear that the PUK has a much larger connection with Iran than the KDP. And in Figure 9, Bapir Kaka Mala Sleman, Salim Toma Kako, Yaqub Gorgis Yago Klaya, Mahmood Ali Othman Omar, and Yonadem Yousef Kanna Khoshaba all score high in terms of boundary spanner potential and have connections with the PUK. They are also not members of the major political parties of Kurdistan. Mahmood Ali Othman Omar and Yonadem Yousef Kanna Khoshaba are not even in the KRG, yet have connections to the PUK. If looking to counter Iranian influence by increasing interaction with the PUK, these individuals provide potential avenues to that goal.

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<sup>158</sup> Van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh, and State: The Social and Political Structures of Kurdistan*, 101, 105, 107–108, 164.



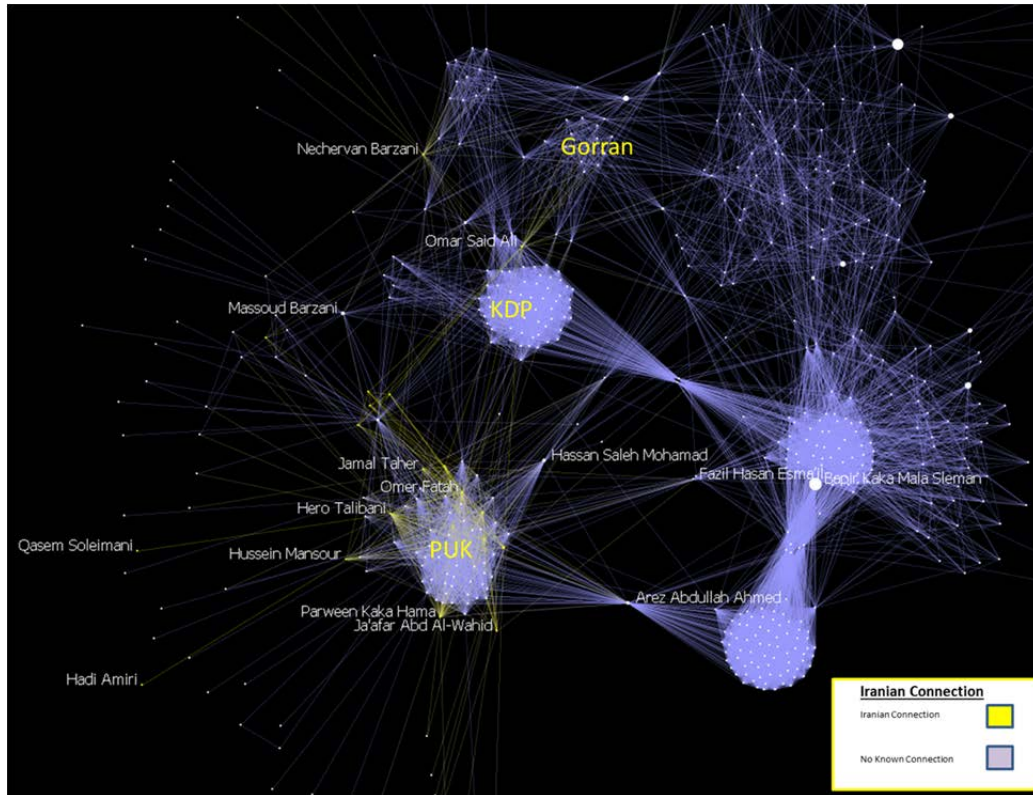


Figure 13. Power Structures Network Drilled down to KRG. Yellow indicates Iranian ties.<sup>159</sup>

If taking another route and looking to counter Iranian influence within the KRG by focusing efforts on the KDP or Gorran, again according to Figure 9, Yousef Mohamed has high boundary spanner potential and can potentially provide access. When looking at Figure 12, a few different names show themselves to be ideally located. Wahida Yaqub Hormuz is situated within the parliament of the KRG and has ties with both political parties, as well as scoring high in boundary spanner potential. Yaqub Gorgis Yago Klaya is Assyrian with high boundary spanner potential and has ties to both the KDP and PUK. This provides a non-Kurdish access agent with a key structural place within the critical region of Kurdistan.

<sup>159</sup> ORA, for information concerning the data used in creating this table please contact the author.

## **F. SNA CONCLUSION**

This thesis has identified individuals who possess the potential for countering Iranian influence by interacting more with the PUK, by continuing to put more effort into working with the KDP as they have been, or by engaging with the Gorran Party or one of the other minority groups. I recommend that SOCCENT continue its relations with the KDP, but put a renewed effort into working with the PUK and the PUK Peshmerga in order to gain influence in the south and east of Kurdistan, the region controlled by the PUK and influenced by Iran. I also recommend engaging with the Gorran Party and the minority groups. The future of Kurdistan will likely have a larger role for these groups, and to begin relationships with them now will improve future engagement.

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## V. CONCLUSION

### A. FUTURE RESEARCH RECOMMENDATION

While much insight has been gained from this project, it is nowhere near complete. There are numerous avenues of research I recommend for future study. First, further research into the biographies of the individuals identified in Chapter IV is needed in order to glean more relational data. To really understand the ability of these agents detailed information on their ego networks is needed.<sup>160</sup> In addition, further research must try to determine the agency they possess to take advantage of their structural position. It is clear the minority groups are integrated into the government of the KRG, but how integrated are they into the Peshmerga?

One way of determining this would be to use the relational data embedded in the Situation Reports (SITREPS) from United States forces in the region. Relational data from the SITREPS from United States units working with the Kurds can greatly improve the data from this project. Not only will this data potentially answer how integrated minorities are within the Peshmerga, but it can provide potential human pathways between United States personnel and the domain spanners that crosscut the patronage networks of the PUK and KDP.

Multiple sources claimed that the Aghas, until recently at least, decided how their entire tribe would vote in elections much like major voting blocs in American elections. If this is true, tracking the tribal loyalties to different political parties is another interesting avenue for research. In “Robust Action: Rise of the Medici,” Padgett and Ansell discuss how the Medici’s expanded their influence through marriage ties, and the Sheiks did the same thing in the 19th century. If any data are available on the intermarriage between different factions in Kurdistan, SNA of such data could add a great deal of insight.

Additional data sources should be explored too. Multiple business and academic forums are held each year in Erbil and Sulaymaniyah that are attended by heads of state,

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<sup>160</sup> An ego network is the network that surrounds an individual node within the network.

business leaders, and KRG members. To collect relational data of those who attend these forums may provide further insight into informal power structures. Just as in the United States economic power can be translated into political power, to map the business relationships of the political parties and government would add another layer of fidelity to the current data set of this project. It would also illuminate business connections with Turkey, Iran, and other parts of Iraq.

An SMT and SNA analysis of the Kurdish Spring, to augment the more broad analysis in this project, could provide an entirely new set of brokers and future leaders of the KRG. It would likely identify student leaders, academics, and non-tribal actors who are changing the face of Iraqi Kurdistan. Researchers and analysts have mapped the social media interactions of the Arab Spring, and the same methods should work for the Kurdish Spring, and would likely provide insight this project could not.

Finally, to build relational data for a network analysis of the interaction between the Iraqi Kurds, Kurds in Syria, Iran and Turkey, as well as the relationships between all Kurd groups and the governments of Iran, Iraq, Syria and Turkey could be an extremely valuable project for SOCCENT, as well as providing insight to policy makers.

## **B. SYNTHESIS OF SMT AND SNA**

The SMT analysis in Chapter III provided insight into a century of Kurdish repression allowed because the Kurds allowed infighting and patronage politics to prevent a full mobilization of the Kurds towards a full-fledged self-determination. With the Kurds possibly in the best position in their history, the United States should take into account how to leverage the current unity and status the Kurds enjoy. There are many reasons to be optimistic. The SNA in Chapter IV demonstrated the full integration of the regions minorities, as well as the emergence of Gorran and other political parties within the KRG. More significantly, minority groups occupy many of the structurally important brokerage positions within the KRG.

The SNA also confirms that the PUK, KDP and Gorran interact within the KRG, and have formed a fairly dense network. The inter-connectedness, and shared clique memberships between members of the PUK and KDP especially bode well for the Kurds

maintaining some level of unity into the future. Some regional experts believe the Kurds will declare autonomy from Iraq, yet the SNA would indicate the Kurds are fully integrated into the Iraqi government, and the SMT indicates the Kurds are still not in a structural position where it makes sense to separate. Though the situation can obviously change, it appears unlikely the Kurds will declare independence anytime soon.

With the knowledge from Chapter III, SOCCENT should understand that they must interact with the PUK and KDP, not only at the governmental level, but also at the ground level to identify the future leaders of these parties. More importantly, they must make an effort into engaging the Gorran party and other minority parties and groups. These groups are likely to hold positions of great power in the region, and to ignore them will undoubtedly hamper the United States' ability to influence the region. These groups also provide avenues into the networks of the PUK and KDP.

This is easier said than done, of course, but the SNA identified potential actors to help build relationships with the new groups. They not only are potentially influential and future leaders, but they likely know the current direction the KRG is heading, as well as the disposition and intentions of the PUK and KDP. To gain access to these individuals by identifying the minority representatives within the Peshmerga is within the abilities of SOF on the ground. It is likely that in a region still characterized by patronage, any officers within the Peshmerga that are Gorran or minorities are close with the powerful members of those groups.

### **C. RELEVANCE TO SOCCENT AND THE FUTURE OF CONFLICT**

SOCCENT will be engaged with the Kurds for the foreseeable future, and thus will need to build strong relationships with all groups to understand and influence the future of Kurdistan. Though conventional war can never be ruled out, the likely conflicts the United States, and especially USSOF, will engage in in the near future will resemble the situation in Kurdistan. Multi-factional civil wars that cross international boundaries are characteristic of current conflicts in Iraq, Syria, Egypt, and numerous conflicts in Africa. These conflicts are made more complicated by the emergence of the ugly sides of traditional power struggles and patronage systems.

The Kurds of the 20th century can offer insight into these types of conflict. Not only did they struggle for political control within the Iraqi state, but they fought one another. The Kurds finally united only after it was necessary to maintain international support. The international community was willing to maintain the no-fly zone, and protect the Kurds as long as they appeared united. Once the Kurds re-framed their narrative towards inclusion, they achieved their goals. The United States should learn from this. The Kurdish situation would seem to contradict the point of view of those who argue that the United States should remain completely disengaged when presented with complex situations such as this. The United States did not choose sides between Kurdish factions in 1991 or 2003; it just provided the space the Kurds needed to deal with their internal struggles and unite against their enemies. The United States is now in an influential position with the Kurds, and it has a strong ally in the region. Could a similar model have been used in Syria? If the United States had established a no-fly zone over Syria before the Islamists hijacked the uprising, less radical groups compatible with our interests could have carved out an autonomous zone in Syria like the Kurds have in Iraq. If they had, the result would have provided a better situation than the current one where the United States would have better access and placement to control the pace of the civil war as well as the expansion of Daesh.

With such success for the Kurds springing from such a tumultuous and factional history, the United States should hope for more outcomes like Kurdistan, rather than hoping entire states will become stable democracies. Instead, the United States should look to have strong allies, which they aid and possibly protect, as islands within otherwise violent and hostile regions. In order to do so, projects like this help provide the understanding of the human domain so essential in identifying with whom to engage. The engagement then has to begin well before the conflict becomes chaos, and continue throughout. The persistent engagement ARSOF 2022 espouses is exactly what policy makers will need to create success like Iraqi Kurdistan in the future.

The Kurds have shown that limited goals like this are achievable. They provide a quasi-state ally situated in the middle of the largest geopolitical disasters of recent decades. It is the only bright spot for the United States in an otherwise dark situation. The

United States should be looking for similar opportunities in its future conflicts. The United States has historically either done little or conducted full invasions in these situations. Instead the United States should actively engage the various factions within these multi-factional civil wars to determine which to support, and provide them resources and structural opportunities to succeed. In this way, opportunity will arise for the United States to gain influence out of chaotic situations.



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