Foreign Influences on
the Kurdish Insurgency in Iraq

by
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It is almost inevitable that foreign powers will be tempted to intervene in a state torn by internal minority problems. Over the years the rivals and enemies of Iraq have done just that with respect to the Kurdish problem, as a way of exerting pressure on Baghdad. During the 1950s and 1960s, President Gamal Abdul Nasser toyed with supporting the Kurds on a number of occasions as a means to pressure Iraq in pursuit of his pan-Arab designs.[1] In 1963, the Egyptian leader even saw Jalal Talabani, the sometime representative of Mullah Mustafa Barzani who was the leader of the Iraqi Kurds, and announced that he saw nothing excessive in the Kurds' demands. Nasser always had to be cautious, however, lest he be seen as supporting a non-Arab separatist movement against a fellow Arab country, and in the end his flirtation with the Kurds came to nothing.

Iran, Turkey, and to a lesser extent Syria presented more serious problems because they shared common borders with Iraq and also contained large Kurdish minorities of their own. Since a Kurdish revolt in any of these three states could well foment one in the others, the three usually tried to cooperate on the issue. Thus the Saadabad Pact in 1937 and the Baghdad Pact in 1955, in part, obligated the three to cooperate on the Kurdish issue.[2] This collaboration included measures to prevent cross-border communication and support among the Kurds and, in general, sought to prevent any joint, transnational Kurdish action that might challenge their current international boundaries.

These understandings were disturbed when the Iraqi monarchy was overthrown in 1958. In time, Iran grew alarmed at the rise of Arab nationalism in Iraq and the possibility that it might be directed at its Arab-populated province of Khuzistan and the Gulf. In addition, given the weakness of Iraq during the 1960s, Iran began to seek amendment of the 1937 treaty that gave Iraq the entire Shatt al-Arab river which served as their common border in the south. Increasingly, therefore, the Shah began to see the Kurdish card as a way to pressure Iraq. It was in this context that the United States, an ally of Iran, entered the picture.

This essay examines contemporary foreign influences on the Kurdish insurgency in Iraq. It focuses largely, but not exclusively, on American involvement with the Kurds. The central thesis of the article is that the policies pursued by the US after the 1991 Gulf War transformed the Kurdish situation inside Iraq, providing a kind of "window of opportunity" for the creation of a *de facto* Kurdish state.

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THE UNITED STATES

After General Abdul Karim Kassem came to power in 1958, he soon gained the animus of the US by restoring diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union, lifting the ban on the Iraqi Communist Party (ICP), and suppressing pro-Western parties. This happened during the period in which the CIA attempted to assassinate a number of troublesome world leaders. In February 1960, the chief of the CIA's Directorate for Plans, Near East Division, proposed that Kassem be assassinated with a poisoned handkerchief prepared by that organization's Technical Services Division. Two months later Richard Helms, the Chief of Operations of the Directorate for Plans and the future Director of the CIA, endorsed this proposal as "highly desirable."[3] Although the handkerchief was sent to Kassem, it is not known whether it actually reached him. Certainly it did not kill him, as this was done by his own countrymen three years later. The CIA's role in Iraq was to take a different turn.

As early as 1962, Mullah Mustafa Barzani reportedly told the *New York Times* correspondent, Dana Adams Schmidt: "Let the Americans give us military aid, openly or secretly, so that we can become truly autonomous, and we will become your loyal partners in the Middle East."[4] In time, the United States and Iran were to exercise an important and eventually tragic foreign influence on the Iraqi Kurds.

The details of the American role were revealed in 1976 by the unauthorized publication in the *Village Voice* of the House of Representatives (Pike) Committee Report on the CIA.[5] This document shows that in May 1972, the Shah of Iran, who already was supporting Barzani because Iran and Iraq "had long been bitter enemies," asked US President Richard M. Nixon and soon-to-be Secretary of State Henry Kissinger — who were returning from a Moscow summit meeting — to help him in this project. Although similar proposals had been turned down three times earlier,[6] they agreed, and funding was approved. Although the US aid was "largely symbolic," "the US acted, in effect, as a guarantor that the insurgent group [the Kurds] would not be summarily dropped by the foreign head of state [the Shah]." The Pike Committee Report explained that "on numerous occasions the leader of the ethnic group [Barzani] expressed his distrust of our allies' [i. e. Iran's] intentions. He did, however, trust the United States as indicated by his frequent statements that 'he trusted no other major power.'"[7]

Nixon and Kissinger had decided to act now for several reasons. First, according to the Pike Report, "the project was initiated primarily as a favor to our ally [Iran], who had cooperated with US intelligence agencies, and who had come to feel menaced by his neighbor [Iraq]." Former US Ambassador William Eagleton, Jr., concurred with these findings when he wrote: "My impression ... is that by far the most important reason for the US intervention was a desire to respond positively to the Shah's request, which was apparently based on

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Barzani's insistence that some kind of big power support was needed to balance Iraq's Soviet connection."[8] A second reason for the US action, alluded to above by Ambassador Eagleton, was the Cold War. A continuing Kurdish insurgency would sap the strength of Iraq, which had signed a "Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation" with the Soviet Union on 9 April 1972, and thus was perceived as a Soviet ally. Did Nixon and Kissinger — who, as mentioned above, were just returning from a summit conference in Moscow — believe they were somehow serving the interests of detente by checkmating the Soviets here?

Third, a continuing Kurdish problem in Iraq would tie down Baghdad's troops at home and make it less likely that Iraq would enter any future Arab-Israeli conflict. As Kissinger later noted in his memoirs: "The benefit of Nixon's Kurdish decision was apparent in just over a year: Only one Iraqi division was available to participate in the October 1973 Middle East War."[9] Given this reasoning, argued the Pike Committee Report, "it is particularly ironic that ... the United States ... restrained the insurgents [the Kurds] from an all-out offensive on one occasion when such an attack might have been successful because other events were occupying the neighboring country."[10] The reference was to Kissinger's shuttle diplomacy at the end of the October 1973 War, and how a Kurdish offensive at that time would have hindered it. Thus, as the Pike Committee Report shows, Kissinger had the following message sent to the Kurds: "We do not repeat not consider it advisable for you to undertake the offensive military action that [another government [Israel]] has suggested to you." In his memoirs, however, Kissinger argues "that the decision to discourage the Kurds from launching a diversionary offensive during the October 1973 was based on the unanimous view of our intelligence officials and the Shah that the Kurds would be *defeated* in such an offensive; this judgment was concurred in by the Israeli government."[11]

The final reason for US support of the Kurds concerned the Iraq Petroleum Company, which had just been nationalized. Barzani had made a series of unfortunate promises that if he won his struggle against Baghdad he was, "ready to become the 51st state."[12] The Kurdish leader also declared that he would "turn over the oil fields to the US" and that "the US could look to a friend in OPEC once oil-rich Kurdistan achieved independence."[13] Thus, American support for the Kurds might be a way to help solve the US oil and energy crisis that had begun with the Yom Kippur War.

To implement this US policy, the normal watchdog procedures for an intelligence operation were suspended. "There was no Forty Committee meeting at which a formal proposal paper containing both pros and cons could be discussed and voted on."[14] The Pike Committee Report declared that "the highly unusual security precautions and the circumvention of the Forty Committee were the product of fears by the President and Dr. Kissinger that details of the project would otherwise leak — a result which by all accounts would have mightily displeased our ally [the Shah]." The secrecy also "was motivated by a

desire that the Department of State, which had consistently opposed such ventures in the region, be kept in the dark.... Elaborate measures were taken to insure that the Department of State did not gain knowledge of the project." The precautions went so far "that not even the Ambassador to the country involved was to be told. In addition, evidence in the Committee files is conflicting on whether Secretary of State William P. Rogers was ever informed."[15]

The problem with all this secrecy was that it prevented the decision-making process from receiving wider input that might have led to a more rational and honest policy. Since the Shah's support for the Kurds was an open secret anyway, it is difficult to understand why such elaborate secrecy was still thought necessary to disguise it.

The real tragedy of this foreign interference, however, was that it reinforced the Baathist concern that Barzani's ultimate objective was the dismantling of Iraq and thus helped lead to the breakdown of the March Manifesto of 1970 that had promised real Kurdish autonomy. Even more, the US-Iranian aid was never intended to be enough because, if Barzani were actually to win, the Kurds would no longer be able to play the enervating role against the Baathists the US and Iran desired. Thus, the US and Iran actually "hoped that our clients [the Kurds] would not prevail. They preferred instead that the insurgents simply continue a level of hostilities sufficient to sap the resources of our ally's [Iran's] neighboring country [Iraq]." Of course, "this policy was not imparted to our clients, who were encouraged to continue fighting. Even in the context of covert action, ours was a cynical enterprise." [16]

As shrewd and tough as Barzani was in his own mountainous homeland, he was naive and weak when it came to trusting the US. Indeed, "his admiration for Dr. Kissinger was expressed on two occasions when he sent a gift of three rugs and later on the occasion of Dr. Kissinger's marriage, a gold and pearl necklace."

The joint Iranian and Kurdish actions did exert considerable pressure on Iraq from 1973 to 1975. However, a major escalation of hostilities was prevented through the mediation of the Algerian premier. On 6 March 1975, Iran and Iraq signed the Algiers Accord under which Iraq recognized the middle of the Shatt al-Arab river as the boundary between their two states, while Iran undertook to halt its aid to Barzani. "The cut-off of aid ... came as a severe shock to its [the Kurds'] leadership," and made it impossible for the Kurdish rebellion to continue.[17] Barzani sent the following message to the CIA: "There is confusion and dismay among our people and forces. Our people's fate [is] in unprecedented danger. Complete destruction [is] hanging over our head.... We appeal [to] you ... [to] intervene according to your promises." The Kurdish leader also appealed to Kissinger: "We feel your Excellency that the United States has a moral and political responsibility towards our people who have committed themselves to your country's policy." Despite these pleas, "the US [even] refused to extend humanitarian assistance to the thousands of refugees created by the abrupt

termination of military aid." As the Pike Committee Report explained, the US had become such "junior partners" of the Shah, that it "had no choice but to acquiesce."[18]

At the time, Barzani justified his disastrous reliance on the Shah and the US by arguing that "a drowning man stretches his hand out for everything,"[19] but later, in exile, admitted: "Without American promises, we would never have become trapped and involved to such an extent."[20] In reply, Kissinger simply stated that "covert action should not be confused with missionary work."[21] In April 1991, the Iraqi Kurds were to learn this lesson again.

At first glance, it seems difficult to understand how Barzani had become so hopelessly dependent on Iranian aid that he could not continue without it, when during the 1960s he had managed to battle Baghdad to a standstill on his own. The explanation is multifaceted. First of all, Barzani *had* received some assistance from the Iranians during that earlier campaign. This aid had played a secondary role in helping him withstand the Iraqi government at that time. Second, and more important, Baghdad governments during the 1960s had been weak and unstable. Thus, Barzani had been able to hold out against the central authorities despite their repeated attempts to subdue him. All this began to change dramatically in July 1968, when the Baathists returned to power and constructed a much more stable and modern political and military infrastructure than had previously existed. By 1975, the institutional prerequisites for subduing the Kurds were in place and Barzani's career came to a quick end. Third, Barzani's reliance on Iranian and US aid led to such self assurance that he did nothing to win over progressive Arab, European, or Third-World support. Furthermore, Barzani called for Kurds throughout Iraq to come to the area he held in the north, where he created a bloated, inefficient bureaucracy that made fighting the war more difficult. Moreover, exaggerated denunciations of the government's bombing attacks created panic that triggered mass refugee problems. Finally, the heavy weapons received from Iran lulled Barzani into trying to maintain fixed lines and to fight a conventional war that he could not win, given the government's new found energy and its Soviet-equipped military.[22] For these reasons, the Kurds' first encounter with US foreign policy ended in disaster.

ISRAEL

Israel, perceiving itself in a precarious position amidst the Arab world and particularly threatened by Iraq's frequent hostility towards its very existence, inevitably took an interest in the Kurdish problem as a possible way to divert Iraqi resources and antagonism from itself. Even before the creation of the state of Israel, the Jewish Agency planted an operative in Baghdad. From there, under journalistic cover, Reuven Shiloah, who later became the founder of the Israeli intelligence community, trekked through the mountains of Kurdistan and worked with the Kurds in pursuit of a "peripheral concept" as early as 1931.[23]

During the 1960s, Israeli military advisers trained Kurdish guerrillas as a way to reduce the potential military threat Iraq presented to the Jewish state and also to help Iraqi Jews escape to Israel. This training operation was codenamed "Marvad" (Carpet). In the mid-1960s, Shimon Peres, the Israeli Deputy Minister of Defense and later Prime Minister, met secretly with Kumran Ali Bedir-Khan, a Kurdish leader who had spied for the Israelis in the 1940s and 1950s. Aryeh (Lova) Eliav, an Israeli Cabinet member, personally rode a mule over the mountains in 1966 to deliver a field hospital to the Kurds. The important defection of an Iraqi air force MIG pilot and his plane to Israel in August 1966, was effected with Kurdish help, while Israeli officers apparently assisted Barzani in his major victory over Baghdad at Mt. Hindarin in May 1966.[24]

Following the Six Days War in 1967, Israeli assistance for the Kurds increased considerably. Yaakov Nimrodi, the influential Israeli military attache in Tehran, served as the main channel. At times, Israeli advisers wore Iranian uniforms. In September 1967, Barzani visited Israel and presented Moshe Dayan, the Israeli Defense Minister, with a curved Kurdish dagger. Barzani found Israeli mortars superior to those he had been using and asked for more. Many believed that a particularly successful Kurdish mortar attack on the oil refineries at Kirkuk in March 1969 was the work of the Israelis. Israeli officers helping the Kurds remained in constant radio contact with Israel.[25]

Basing his story on a CIA account, the American reporter Jack Anderson, wrote: "Every month ... a secret Israeli envoy slips into the mountains in northern Iraq to deliver $50,000 to Mulla Mustafa al-Barzani.... The subsidy ensures Kurdish hostility against Iraq, whose government is militantly anti- Israel."[26] Former Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin admitted that his country gave the Kurds "money, arms, and instructors."[27]

Writing about the 1960s, Sa'ad Jawad concluded that "it is an open secret that they [the Israelis] sent some sophisticated weapons through Iran, particularly anti-tank and anti-aircraft equipment, accompanied by instructors," and added that "some Kurds had military training in Israel, while several KDP leaders made visits to Israel and high-ranking Israeli officials to Kurdistan."[28] Both the Israeli Mossad and the Iranian Savak helped Barzani establish "a sophisticated intelligence apparatus, Parastin [Security] ... to gather information on the Iraqi government and its armed forces."[29] As late as 1990, it was understood that the Mossad still maintained contacts with the Iraqi Kurds.[30]

AFTER THE FALL

After Barzani's collapse in 1975, his Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) broke into several factions. In time Massoud Barzani, the son of Mullah Mustafa, became the leader of a new KDP. For his part, the elder Barzani's sometime ally, sometime foe, Jalal Talabani, canvassed Kurds who had been able to escape from Iraq, and in June 1975, announced the creation of the

Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) in Damascus, Syria. Baathist Syria probably provided such help because of its long-standing feud with Baathist Iraq and also because of the grandiose ambitions of its ruler, Hafez Assad. (For other reasons Syria also supported Kurdish insurgents in Turkey.)

Although it adopted the same slogan as the KDP, "autonomy for Kurdistan, democracy for Iraq," the PUK advocated Marxist principles and denounced the Barzanis as "reactionary." By 1976, the PUK became the first Kurdish party to return *peshmergas* [those who face death or Kurdish guerrillas] to Iraq. The KDP followed and soon the two groups had several hundred, highly mobile guerrillas who were able to mount raids far from their bases.

The Kurdish national movement in Iraq long remained divided between these two poles, although a virtual plethora of other, smaller groups also proliferated.[31] Only in May 1988 did most of them come together loosely to form the Iraqi Kurdistan Front with Massoud Barzani and Jalal Talabani serving as the co-presidents.

Early in 1979, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini overthrew the Shah and established a fundamentalist, Islamic government in Iran. This new regime either did not want to or could not enforce the provisions of the Algiers Agreement on preventing cross-border Kurdish activities. This led the Iraqi Kurds and especially the KDP to reestablish bases in Iran again to challenge Baghdad, a situation that helped lead to the Iran-Iraq Gulf War.

THE IRAN-IRAQ WAR

In September 1980, Iraq invaded Iran.[32] After initial Iraqi successes, the war bogged down into a long stalemate and thus created tremendous, potential opportunities for the Kurdish national movement in Iraq. Indeed, for much of the 1980s, the Iraqi Kurds partially ruled themselves as Saddam Hussein fought for the very existence of his regime against the attacking Iranians.[33]

On the other hand, both Iran and Iraq began to use each other's Kurds as a fifth column. In Iraq, the KDP supported Iran and at times acted almost as advanced units for its invading armies. The PUK, however, wavered between the two antagonists, only breaking off negotiations with Baghdad at the end of 1984. For their part, the Iranian Kurds — tragically, but understandably — supported Iraq. Thus, for several years, the war saw the Kurds supporting both sides in the bloody conflict.

During the first few years of the war, relations between the KDP and the PUK alternated greatly. Iran's major Haj Omran offensive into northern Iraq, which began on 21 July 1983, however, led to major misunderstandings and hostilities between the two. The KDP saw the situation as an opportunity to magnify its armed opposition to Baghdad with Iranian aid in concert with such other dissident Iraqi groups as the Shiite Dawa Party [Party of the Islamic Call].

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The PUK, however, believed that in such a moment of weakness, Iraq would be more willing to negotiate a favorable deal. Indeed, the defeats on the front and unrest among the Kurds had already caused Hussein to begin to try to appease them.

Baghdad reemphasized the rights already enjoyed by its Kurds and the threat fundamentalist Iran represented. This point concerning Iran appealed particularly to the more secular emphasis of the PUK, rather than the more traditionalist KDP. Kurds accused of anti-government activities (but not of killings) were pardoned. Kurdish soldiers who had deserted from the Iraqi army were also pardoned, and the government even ruled that they could serve in what, until the summer of 1983, had been the relatively quiet north. In August 1983, elections took place for the Legislative Council of the so-called [Kurdish] autonomous region with results slightly more favorable to the Kurdish nation-alists than had existed in the previous Council appointed by the Baathists.

As the combined Iranian-KDP offensive forced the PUK out of its sanctuary and deeper into Iraq, the PUK and the Iraqi government agreed to a cease-fire in December 1983. With the help of Baghdad's Iranian Kurdish ally, Abdul Rahman Ghassemlou, the leader of the Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran (KDPI), a "Comprehensive Political and Security Agreement" was then signed between Baghdad and the PUK. At first Iraq seemingly agreed to alter the autonomy law in favor of the Kurds and to extend it to other areas. Although the PUK came under heavy criticism from its former Kurdish allies, as well as the KDP, for dealing with Baghdad, it replied that the ceasefire offered it a necessary breathing space and the chance to achieve the long-standing Kurdish goal of genuine autonomy.

It is doubtful, however, that either Baghdad or the PUK viewed their negotiations as anything more than a way to gain time. Although they continued to talk until October 1984, the PUK finally terminated the attempt at the beginning of the following year and eventually joined the KDP in the Iraqi Kurdistan Front mentioned earlier.

The failure to achieve an agreement with Baghdad was due to a number of different causes. Turkish-Iraqi cooperation and joint action against both the Turkish and Iraqi Kurds was one.[34] Second, Iraq also began to receive help from the United States, France, and the Soviet Union to prevent it from being defeated by Iran. This increased Iraq's military strength. Another reason was Baghdad's refusal to abandon its irregular Iraqi Kurdish allies, derisively termed the *josh* [little donkeys] by the Kurdish nationalists, but the "Light Brigades" and "Saladin Knights" by the government. Still a further factor was the execution of twenty-four young Kurds in March 1984, for desertion and avoidance of the draft, as well as the shooting of several Kurdish students at Arbil University. In addition, Talabani's brother, Shaikh Hama Salih, and his two daughters were also killed by government forces. Finally, many Iraqi Kurds began to support Iran because they anticipated an Iranian victory.

Although the KDP and the PUK, therefore, became allies of Iran in its war against Iraq, the end of the conflict in 1988 dealt another cruel finish to their hopes. Their quick defeat following the end of the war in August 1988 — with its legacy of chemical warfare and refugees — left them exhausted, demoralized, and suffering from a depleted population. Indeed, secret Iraqi documents seized by the Kurds during their March 1991 uprising indicate that at least 100,000 noncombatant Kurds were slaughtered between February and September 1988.[35]

THE 1991 GULF WAR

Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait in August 1990, and the international alliance it provoked, once again created new possibilities for the Iraqi Kurds since they were obviously potential allies against the Baghdad regime. Amidst much speculation about a possible Kurdish role, Jalal Talabani journeyed to Washington, but warned: "We have been deceived many times by foreigners. We are determined not to make the same mistakes again."[36] For its part, the US appeared wary of alienating Iran, its important Turkish ally, and new coalition partner Syria by supporting the Kurds.

Asked whether the Kurds would join the Allies if war broke out, Talabani replied: "We would not," and even threatened that "if the Turkish Army invades Iraq's Kurdistan, we would stand against it." The Kurdish leader softened his position, however, by noting that "we have fought Saddam since he assumed power and will continue to fight him until he is toppled," adding that "if the Arab forces liberate Kuwait, we would urge the Kurdish troops to join them." He maintained, though, that "our fighting would be Kurdish, independent, and separate ... not ... as part of foreign armies invading or fighting Iraq."[37]

Once the war began in January 1991, however, Talabani declared that "the Kurds are really happy because they believe that this war will put an end to Saddam Husayn's dictatorship."[38] This belief, the fear that they would be left out of the postwar settlement, and US President George Bush's call for the Iraqis to overthrow Saddam after he was defeated in late February, help to explain why the Kurds rebelled when their earlier statements indicated a much more circumspect position.

Talks with the Turks

On 8 March 1991, Turkey broke its long-standing policy against negotiating with any Kurdish groups when Ambassador Tugay Ozceri, undersecretary of the foreign ministry, met in Ankara with Jalal Talabani and Mohsin Dizai, an envoy of Massoud Barzani. A second meeting between Ozceri and Dizai occurred on 22 March. Talabani declared "that a new page had been turned in relations between Turkey and the Kurds of Iraq."[39]

For the first meeting, the two Kurds arrived together in Istanbul on a flight from Damascus and were immediately flown to Ankara's military airport by

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personnel of the National Intelligence Organization (MIT). After it was over, Talabani said that for the Iraqi Kurds, "the most significant result ... was Turkey's lifting its objection to the establishment of direct relations between the Kurdish front in Iraq and the United States."[40] He also repeated that the Kurds did not want to establish an independent state in northern Iraq and that he had calmed Turkey's apprehensions in this regard. Talabani then elaborated on the following points:

> Turkey has for years been putting forth effective and significant obstacles to the struggle we have been waging in northern Iraq. We wanted to explain our goals and eliminate Turkey's opposition.... We were received with understanding. I believe that we were able to convince them that we do not pose a threat to Turkey.... Our goal is to establish a federation of Arabs, Turkomans, and Kurds.[41]

The talks created a furor in Turkey. To some, Turkish President Turgut Ozal was simply being realistic in seeking to build reasonable relations with those who looked likely to establish an autonomous Kurdish region on Turkey's border. To others, however, he, in effect, was lending support to circles threatening Turkish territorial integrity. If the Turkish President could countenance some sort of federal solution for the Kurds in Iraq, might he not also be contemplating one for the Kurds in Turkey where the separatist *Partiya Karkaren Kurdistan* (Kurdish Workers Party) or PKK had been waging a guerrilla insurgency since 1984.[42] Former President Kenan Evren and the Chief of the General Staff Dogan Gures both spoke of the possible dangers of the Ozal overture. The military commanders added that, "we believe that there will be subsequent demands and we think that this is harmful to our national integrity."[43]

Victory into defeat

In the wake of the Iraqi defeat at the end of February, the Kurds rose once again. With astounding alacrity, most of the major cities in Iraqi Kurdistan fell to the rebels in early and mid-March: Arbil, Sulaymaniya, Jalula, Dohuk, Zakho, and Kirkuk, among others. Barzani declared: " I feel that the result of 70 years of struggle ... is at hand now. It is the greatest honor for me. It is what I wanted all my life."[44]

On 26 March, Talabani departed from Syria and crossed into northern Iraq in a triumphal motorcade. He entered Zakho to a tumultuous welcome to tell more than 10,000 cheering Kurds: "This is the first time ever that the whole of Iraqi Kurdistan has been liberated."[45] He also announced that he would confer with other opposition leaders — some seventeen, loosely organized groups known as the "Free Iraqi Council" or "Joint Action Committee" — about the formation of an interim government in the Kurdish region.

However, defeat proved equally as swift as victory. Indeed, in retrospect, the victory had been false because the territorial gains made by the Kurds had

little strategic importance and could not be held once Hussein subdued the Shiites in the south and turned his modern army north. Barzani charged that by permitting the Iraqi armed forces to use helicopters, the US had given him the "green light ... to continue massacring Iraqi civilians."[46] Talabani declared that "the rebels were left in the lurch at the decisive moment, when ... Saddam was permitted to use any kind of planes, helicopter, heavy artillery, gasoline and napalm-phosphorous bombs."[47]

US role

With hindsight, the US could have helped the Kurds to avert defeat by: continuing its war against Iraq longer so that more of its army would have been destroyed, thus depriving Iraq of the capacity to crush the Kurds; preventing Hussein from using fixed-winged airplanes and helicopters which were so effective against the Kurds and were supposedly denied Baghdad by the terms of the ceasefire; and by giving actual military support to the Kurds. For a variety of reasons none of these options was taken.

The US originally justified its decision to halt the war when it did on the grounds that the goal of ejecting Iraq from Kuwait had been achieved, and virtually all the Iraqi armor appeared to be trapped. There was no UN mandate to go any further. In addition, the US did not want to appear to be slaughtering an already beaten enemy. A month after the ceasefire, however, the US admitted that "the number of Iraqi tanks and armored vehicles that survived the war is much greater than American military authorities initially reported," adding that "many of the weapons have been used by the Government of President Saddam Hussein to quell resistance by Iraqi insurgents." These new estimates "raise questions about the wisdom of the Bush Administration's decision to halt the ground war ... when the White House did."[48]

The Allied commander, US General Norman Schwarzkopf, agreed, claiming that had the war continued just another day, "we could have inflicted terrible damage on them." Ending it earlier, "did leave some escape routes open for them to get back out."[48] Talabani concurred: "If President Bush had only continued the fighting two more days, Saddam's armed forces would have completely broken down."[50]

As Hussein began to put the Kurdish rebellion down, Talabani and Barzani, the co-presidents of the Iraqi Kurdish Front, appealed to Bush for help by reminding him: "You personally called upon the Iraqi people to rise up against Saddam Hussein's brutal dictatorship."[51] In addition, Talabani pointed out that "with the approval of the allies a transmitter, 'Voice of Free Iraq,' was set up, which also called for an uprising."[52] The Kurdish leader was referring to secret orders Bush had given the CIA in January to aid rebels in Iraq with a clandestine, anti-government radio station.[53]

However, the US chose not to intervene in the internal Iraqi strife for a number of reasons. First, such intervention could have led to an unwanted,

protracted American occupation that would be politically unpopular in the US. Second, it could have created an unstable government in Iraq or even the "Lebanonization" of the country and further destabilization of the Middle East. Third, furthermore, the US also concluded that Hussein had the ability to win. Fourth, it was feared that Kurdish success in Iraq might provoke similar uprisings in Turkey, Syria, or Iran — countries whose cooperation the US needed. A US Senate Foreign Relations staff report written by Peter Galbraith and issued a month after Hussein had put down the rebellion confirmed that the US "continued to see the opposition in caricature" and feared that the Kurds would seek a separate state and that the Shiites wanted an Iranian-style Islamic republic.[54] Finally, the US had fought Iraq to vindicate the principle of Kuwait's territorial integrity, without which instability and chaos would reign. To support uprisings that threatened Iraq's territorial integrity would make the US look hypocritical.

Given the above factors, one might almost conclude that the US implicitly had returned to its pre-August 1990 policy of seeing Hussein as a source of stability in the volatile region. What is more likely, however, is that the US was simply reacting on an ad hoc basis to circumstances, but certainly did not want him to remain in power. The problem was how to remove him without exceeding what were felt to be the legitimate bounds of intervention.

Refugees

The failed rebellion quickly led to a human tragedy of unbelievable proportions. Reports spoke of "hundreds of thousands of Kurds fearing government reprisals ... fleeing by any means possible into the mountains along the Iranian and Turkish borders, turning roadways into ribbons of humanity."[55] By early May, Ahmad Hoseyni, the Director General of Foreign Nationals and Immigrants in Iran, announced that "the number of the Iraqi refugees arriving in Iran has surpassed 1.117 million."[56] In late April, Hayri Kozakcioglu, the Regional Governor in the southeast of Turkey, reported "that there are currently around 468,000 northern Iraqis in Turkey's border region with Iraq."[57] These new arrivals joined the 30,000 Iraqi Kurdish refugees remaining in Turkey from the 1988 exodus, which now seemed to pale into insignificance in comparison to the present one.

These new refugees threatened to overwhelm their hosts. Indeed, there were some in Turkey who thought the problem was in part Hussein's revenge for that state having supported the Allies in the recently concluded Gulf War. One Turkish writer commented, "This is the sneakiest form of aggression and Saddam should not be allowed to get away with it."[58]

In response, Turkish President Ozal called on all countries to join together as they had in that war, adding that "otherwise, a new dispute will be created in the Middle East and that a problem threatening peace and stability will be created." Elaborating, he argued that "even the most perfect organization cannot

cope with such an influx within such a short period.... It is impossible for any country to solve a problem of such proportions by itself."[59]

Safe havens

Initially proposed by Turkish President Ozal and then picked up and advocated by British Prime Minister John Major, the concept of "enclaves," later changed to "safe havens,"[60] in northern Iraq, where the refugees would be protected from being attacked by Saddam's forces, eventually caused the US and the UN partially to reverse their position on interference in postwar, domestic Iraqi strife. The US action produced a variety of political and legal problems. As noted earlier, it could have enmeshed the US in an interminable conflict between Baghdad and the Kurds, or resulted in an embryonic Kurdish state that would act as an unwanted model for the Kurds in other states. There was a risk that the safe havens could serve as a base for PKK guerrillas to stage raids on Turkey; indeed this began to occur in the summer of 1991. Finally, and perhaps most worrying was the possibility that the enclaves could become a second Gaza strip or home to generations of permanent refugees, stateless, embittered, and, therefore, disruptive.

Legally, it was doubtful that the UN Security Council would approve such a restriction of Iraqi territorial integrity because of the precedents it might set for the Soviet Union and its republics (which at that time were still not independent), as well as China and Tibet. The US, in effect, accomplished the functional equivalence, however, by warning Iraq not to use either fixed-wing airplanes or helicopters north of the 36th parallel, nor to interfere with relief work anywhere in Iraq. By June virtually all of the refugees who had reached the Turkish border had returned to the safe havens, although many remained in Iran. Some 8,000 US, British, and French troops occupied the zone, while thousands more were "just over the horizon" in Turkey and the eastern Mediterranean if needed.

Iraqi Foreign Minister Ahmad Khudayyir declared that the US action "constitutes a flagrant interference in the internal affairs of Iraq, an independent country and member of the United Nations,"[61] while *Al-Thawrah*, the official newspaper of the Baathist Party, denounced the move as a "precedent the likes of which never existed in the history or relations among countries."[62] Nevertheless, Iraq was in no position to offer overt opposition.

Although many observers might have had legalistic qualms, most still would have agreed that the egregious situation justified some such extraordinary action. As US President George Bush said: "We simply could not allow 500,000 to a million people to die up there in the mountains."[63] What is more, as the victor in the Gulf War, the US might be deemed to have had residual rights of conquest to take such action. In addition, some argued that the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide provided a legal basis.

Massoud Barzani was already on record as having described the concept of safe havens as "a great humanitarian gesture and a big step forward."[64]

A possible way out of the legal problem was offered by interpreting the US action as a logical extension of UN Security Council Resolution 688 of 5 April 1991 which condemned "the repression of the Iraqi civilian population ... in Kurdish populated areas, the consequences of which threaten international peace and security in the region" and demanded "that Iraq ... immediately end this repression."[65] It was the first time in its forty-six-year-old history that the world body had so explicitly addressed the Kurdish question in Iraq. This resolution was then followed by an agreement signed by the UN and Iraq on 18 April to permit the international organization to assume refugee assistance operations in Iraq.[66]

By the middle of July, however, the entire question had become moot because the Allied forces had been withdrawn. A delicate balance of power had formed between Saddam's men in the cities and the Kurds in the hills."[67] Indeed, by the fall of 1991, as Baghdad withdrew its troops southward, the Kurdish Front had reoccupied most of the cities in the north. The only practical solution would be to effect an adequate political settlement. Although the negotiations that started between Baghdad and the Kurds in late April constituted a very different approach to the situation, it is possible that the pressure put on Iraq by the existence of the safe havens helped get them started.[68]

CONCLUSION

Based on the above analysis, it would be difficult to argue with the Kurdish proverb: "The Kurds have no friends." The US and Iran, Israel, and then Iran and the US again, among others, used the Kurds in Iraq for their own ends only to drop them when it no longer served their purposes to continue the relationship. On the other hand, it was the massive international alliance which defeated Iraq in the 1991 Gulf War that led to the current situation in which an embryonic Kurdish state has arisen in northern Iraq. What is more, after the US seemingly betrayed the Kurds when they rose up after that war, the US partially reversed its policy by helping to create safe havens for the Kurds, which bolstered their de facto authority in this nascent entity. The continuing UN peacekeeping operation in northern Iraq reinforces this situation.

In addition, Turkey, a state which historically denied the very existence of Kurds within its frontiers, has begun to emerge as one of the main protectors of the Iraq Kurds. This dramatic reversal begun by President Ozal during the 1991 Gulf War has been furthered by the new government of Suleyman Demirel which assumed power in November 1991. Declaring that "Turkey has recognized the Kurdish reality,"[69] the new Prime Minister added, to the approval of the Iraqi Kurdistan Front: "We have to say to Iraq that if you opt for savagery you will find yourself face to face with us.... Not being insensitive to the

preservation of the Kurdish entity in Iraq is Turkey's new policy."[70] In October 1992, Turkey and the Iraqi Kurds furthered their understanding by, in effect, launching a joint operation to eliminate PKK camps in northern Iraq. Following elections in May 1992, a de facto Kurdish government was also created. In October this entity declared the territory under its control a "federated State." Although Baghdad may yet crush it or a new post-Hussein government absorb it, this embryonic Kurdish state and government bear close scrutiny as they may have incalculable consequences for the future of the entire region. Although it is not possible to predict the future, it is clear that the Kurds in Iraq have a rare opportunity to add a chapter to the new world order being constructed as the twentieth century draws to a close.

Endnotes

1. Sa'ad Jawad, *Iraq and the Kurdish Question, 1958-1970* (London: Ithaca Press, 1981), pp. 278-88; Edmund Ghareeb, *The Kurdish Question in Iraq* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1981), pp. 61; and Ismail al-Arif, *Iraq Reborn: A Firsthand Account of the July 1958 Revolution and After* (New York: Vantage, 1982), pp. 86-87.

2. This attempt at cooperation, however, was not built on firm historical foundations. Both the Ottoman and Persian Empires had continuously intervened in Kurdish affairs in attempts to manipulate matters. The Kurds, for their part, had also participated willingly. See M. M. van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State: On the Social and Political Organization of Kurdistan* (Utrecht: University of Utrecht, 1978), pp. 150-248. As to the effect on the Kurds of the Saadabad Treaty and Baghdad Pact, see Joyce Blau, *Le probleme kurde: Essai sociologique et historique* (Brussels: Centre pour l'Etude des Problemes du Monde Musulman Contemporain, 1963), p. 38. On the foreign policy of Iran during these years, see Ruhollah Ramazani, *The Persian Gulf: Iran's Role* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1972); and Shahram Chubin and Sepehr Zabih, *The Foreign Relations of Iran: A Developing State in a Zone of Great-Power Conflict* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974).

3. Thomas Powers, *The Man Who Kept the Secrets: Richard Helms and the CIA* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979), p. 130.

4. Quoted in Dana Adams Schmidt, "The Kurdish Insurgency," *Strategic Review*, 2 (Summer 1974), p. 54. Also see David Adamson, *The Kurdish War* (New York: Praeger, 1965), p. 94; and Lee Dinsmore, "The Forgotten Kurds," *The Progressive*, April 1977, p. 39. Even earlier, in March 1945, the Heva Party had presented a memorandum to the US Ambassador in Iraq, Loy Henderson, reminding him of President Wilson's twelfth point concerning Kurdish self-determination and requesting American support for Kurdish autonomy. See Hassan Arfa, *The Kurds: An Historical and Political Study* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 125.

5. "The CIA Report the President Doesn't Want You to Read," *The Village Voice*, 16 February 1976, pp. 70-92; hereafter cited as "Pike Committee Report." The part dealing with the Kurds is entitled "Case 2: Arms Support," and appears on pp. 85 and 87- 88. In addition, see the two essays William Safire wrote based on the Pike Committee Report: "Mr. Ford's Secret Sellout," *The New York Times*, 5 February 1976, p. 31; and "Son of `Secret Sellout,'" *The New York Times*, 12 February 1976, p. 31.

6. The "Pike Committee Report," stated that these earlier proposals had been rejected first, some time before August 1971, again in August 1971, and once more in March 1972.

7. According to the "Pike Committee Report," it only amounted to "some $16 million."

8.   William Eagleton, Jr., letter to the author, dated 10 July 1991.

9.   Henry Kissinger, *White House Years* (Boston and Toronto: Little, Brown and Company, 1979), p. 1265.

10. "Pike Committee Report."

11. Kissinger, p. 1265.

12. Quoted in "Pike Committee Report."

13. Quoted in Ghareeb, *The Kurdish Question in Iraq,* p. 140.

14. "Pike Committee Report." The Forty Committee was an external bureaucracy in the executive branch of the US government established to oversee covert operations and thus prevent abuses. See Eberhard Blum, "Covert Action: Discussion," in Roy Godson, ed., *Intelligence Requirements for the 1990s: Collection, Analysis, Counterintelligence and Covert Action* (Lexington: Lexington Books, 1989), p. 231.

15. "Pike Committee Report."

16. Ibid.

17. Ibid.; see also Lenore G. Martin, *The Unstable Gulf: Threats From Within* (Lexington: Lexington Books, 1984), pp. 39-40.

18. "Pike Committee Report."

19. Quoted in Gwynne Roberts, "Kurdish Leader, Facing Possible Civil War, Looks to West for Support," *The New York Times,* 1 April 1974, p. 14.

20. Quoted in Ghareeb, *The Kurdish Question in Iraq,* p. 159.

21. Quoted in the "Pike Committee Report."

22. For a further discussion of these points, see Ismet Sheriff Vanly, "Kurdistan in Iraq," in Gerard Chaliand, ed., *People without a Country: The Kurds and Kurdistan* (London: Zed Press, 1980) pp. 189-92.

23. Dan Raviv and Yossi Melman, *Every Spy a Prince: The Complete History of Israel's Intelligence Community* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1990), p. 21.

24. Ian Black and Benny Morris, *Israel's Secret Wars: A History of Israel's Intelligence Services* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1991), pp. 184-85; Andrew Cockburn and Leslie Cockburn, *Dangerous Liaison: The Inside Story of the US-Israeli Covert Relationship* (New York: Harper Collins, 1991), pp. 104-5.

25. Black and Morris, pp. 327-28.

26. Jack Anderson, "Israelis Infiltrate Arab Regimes," *The Washington Post,* 17 September 1972, p. B7.

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28. Jawad, *Iraq and the Kurdish Question,* p. 303.

29. Ghareeb, *The Kurdish Question in Iraq,* p. 133. Parastin was created in 1966.

30. Black and Morris, p. 521.

31. For a good discussion, see Martin van Bruinessen, "The Kurds Between Iran and Iraq," *Middle East Report,* no. 141 (July- August 1986), pp. 14-27.

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33. The following analysis is based, in part, on David McDowall, *The Kurds*, Report No. 23 (London: Minority Rights Group, 1985), pp. 24-25; Malcolm Yapp, "'The Mice Will Play'": Kurds, Turks and the Gulf War," in Hans W. Maull and Otto Pick, eds., *The Gulf War: Regional and International Dimensions*, (New York: St. Martin's, 1989), pp. 109-15; Charles G. MacDonald, "The Impact of the Gulf War on the Iraqi and Iranian Kurds," *Middle East Contemporary Survey*, 7 (1982-83), pp. 261-72; Ali-Fuat Borovali, "Kurdish Insurgencies, the Gulf War, and Turkey's Changing Role," *Conflict Quarterly*, 7 (Fall 1987), pp. 29-45; Mohammed H. Malek, "Kurdistan in the Middle East Conflict," *New Left Review*, no. 175 (1989), pp. 87-94; and Nader Entessar, "The Kurdish Mosaic of Discord," *Third World Quarterly*, 11 no. 4, (1989), pp. 95-98.

34. On this point, see Michael M. Gunter, *The Kurds in Turkey: A Political Dilemma* (Boulder: Westview, 1990), pp. 72-73, 76, 78.

35. See Kanan Makiya, "The Anfal: Uncovering an Iraqi Campaign to Exterminate the Kurds," *Harper's Magazine*, May 1992, p. 61. Makiya earlier wrote an analysis of Hussein's regime under the pseudonym, Samir al-Khalil, *The Republic of Fear: The Politics of Modern Iraq* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).

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39. "Kurdish Leader on Significance of Talks in Ankara," Ankara Anatolia in English, 1515 GMT, 14 March 1991, *FBIS-NES*, 15 March 1991, p. 39.

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45. Alex Efty, "Rebels Hold North Iraq: Army Forces Claim South," *The Tennessean*, 27 March 1991, p. A-6.

46. "Kurdish Leader on US `Green Light' To Saddam," Paris AFP in English, 1645 GMT, 28 March 1991, *FBIS-NES*, 29 March 1991, p. 12.

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58. Turhan Dede, "The Iraqi Refugee Catastrophe," *The Turkish Times,* 15 April 1991, p. 11.

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62. "Paper Calls U.S. Presence 'Illegitimate,'" Baghdad INA in Arabic, 0650 GMT, 29 April 1991, *FBIS-NES,* 29 April 1991, p. 17.

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65. For the text of this Resolution, see "UN Security Council Resolution 688 on Repression of Iraqi Civilians," *US Department of State Dispatch,* 8 April 1991, pp. 233-34.

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