THE KURDS IN IRAN

The Past, Present and Future

KERIM YILDIZ | TANYEL B. TAYSI

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To my wife Bridget and my son Dara

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The Kurds in Iran: An Overview

INTRODUCTION

The Kurds, between 24 and 30 million strong, are the world's largest stateless nation. Spread mainly over four nation states spanning Asia Minor and the Middle East, including the Caucasus, the range of land known as greater Kurdistan has no fixed territory, and its exact dimensions, which have fluctuated with history as well the motivations of various groups, states and individual actors, are open to contention.[1] The Kurds represent a distinct nation of peoples, sharing a common culture and language. Although there exists no monolithic Kurdish identity, and Kurdish language varies from region to region, the people that call themselves Kurds share a culture distinct from that of their surrounding neighbours.[2]

Given current geopolitical realities resulting from the invasion of Iraq by US-led coalition forces as well as Turkey's bid for EU entry, the world's eye has recently been turned towards the Kurds that live in these states, and much has been written on the subject as of late, both academic and journalistic. This is a welcome change, as the situation of the Kurds has, for the most part, been under-investigated by most of the international community. However, what of the Kurds outside these nation states? Turkey and Iraq are but two of the states with a Kurdish population, and the geopolitical changes resonating through the region necessarily have an impact on the Kurds residing in neighbouring states, especially Iran. As Iran's power and position in the region increases due to the overthrow of the Ba'athist regime in neighbouring Iraq, the ongoing nuclear crisis and the situation

between Israel and Hizbullah (backed by Iran), it becomes more important than ever to understand the complex nature of internal politics within this state. As the Kurds have historically played a key role in oppositional politics in Iran, insight into the history, culture and politics of the Iranian Kurds becomes invaluable, not only in understanding the Kurds themselves, but also in order to understand the role that the solution of the Kurdish issue could play in achieving a lasting peace in the region.

This book presents a comprehensive study of the past, present and future of the Iranian Kurds, an as yet understudied Kurdish population some 7–9 million strong.[3] Little has been written concerning these Kurds for multiple reasons, perhaps the greatest being the fact that it is difficult to gain access to information concerning Iranian Kurds, given the closed nature of the regime of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Furthermore, as will be discussed in subsequent chapters, in the recent past, due to multiple reasons including a lack of international support and the harsh choking of the Kurdish political movement, the Kurds of Iran have been relatively less inclined than the Kurds of Turkey and Iraq towards creating an independent Kurdish state, but rather seek a level of autonomy within the Iranian state. In general, as with the Kurds of Syria, they have gained less media attention than the Kurdish populations of Turkey and Iraq. This study seeks to address this gap in the literature by presenting a comprehensive study of this often overlooked yet integral piece of the Kurdish puzzle.

After all, it is in what is now the modern Iranian state that the Kurds are thought to have originated,[4] as well as where the term 'Kurdistan' first appeared in the twelfth century when Saandjar, a Seljuk prince, created a province that roughly coincides with the current Iranian province of Kurdistan.[5] Further, it was in Iran that the first and only (to this date) independent Kurdish republic, Mahabad, existed from 1945 to 1946, which still stands as a beacon of light for Kurdish movements throughout the region.[6] In examining Iran's Kurds, this book pays special attention to illuminating how the relationships among the Kurds of Iran, other

Kurdish actors, the Iranian state, and regional and international forces shape the past and present of the Iranian Kurds, as well as how the changing regional and international environment will continue to inform the future of the Iranian Kurds.

THE KURDS OF IRAN

Although existing statistics concerning the population of greater Iranian Kurdistan as well as the number of Kurds that live within this region are unreliable at best, due to a lack of census data, it is estimated that there are roughly 7–9 million Kurds living within the borders of the Iranian state. These Kurds represent approximately 12–15 per cent of the population of Iran, a country inhabited by several distinct nations of people, including Arabs, Azeris, Baluchis, Gilakis and Mazandranis, Lurs and Turcomen. The Kurds are the second largest ethnic group after the Azeris. Ethnic Persians make up less that 50 per cent of the population of Iran. The vast majority of Kurds occupy the mountainous region in western Iran, stretching some 95,000 square kilometres, from the Turkish and Iraqi borders in the west to Lake Urmiyeh in the north-east. As with greater Kurdistan, the exact boundaries of northern and southern Kurdistan in Iran are problematic, with the nation states inhabited by Kurds hostile to Kurdish nationalism, maintaining a vested interest in downplaying the actual size of their Kurdish communities, and also offering more conservative views on the geographic borders, as well as the amount of Kurds that live in Iran. Conversely, Kurdish nationalists themselves are sometimes known to exaggerate these numbers.[7] Given the difficult nature of determining the accuracy of these sources, as well as the fact that the information provided by these sources obviously varies greatly, in this study we will utilise the most widely recognised non-governmental figures, and these will be offered as approximations only.

The area that can be described as Iranian Kurdistan stretches over three or four administrative provinces. These are Kurdistan in

the central area, western Azerbaijan in the north and Kermanshah in the southern area. Some also feel that Ilam in the south is part of wider Kurdistan. Although the province of 'Kurdistan' (the only province that is governmentally recognised as Kurdish) is populated entirely by Kurds, the other provinces are home to a significant Kurdish population. The Kurds in western Azerbaijan share their area with the Azeri population there, and in Kermanshah although the population is mainly Kurd, the region is shared with ethnic Lurs, and the majority of Kurds are Shi'ite. For purposes of this study, when discussing Iranian Kurdistan we will use a maximalist definition, necessarily including all four provinces, and the Kurdish population that occupies them. There is also a Kurdish enclave numbering around 2 million that live in the north-eastern province of Khorasan. It is believed that Kurdish tribes came to the region in the late 1500s during the Safavid period to defend the province from invaders. These Kurds, most of whom speak Kurmanji, are isolated from greater Kurdistan.

Within Iranian Kurdistan, as with greater Kurdistan, there is no geographic, economic or cultural homogeneity. Geographically, Iranian Kurdistan contains mountains, plains, villages and large urban centres. Along with these geographic differences, important economic discrepancies exist among the mountain and plains, cultural villages and urban areas.[8] While the Kurds that live in the Zagros mountain range rely on pastoralism and herding in a modified tribal economic set-up, the Kurds of the plains live in villages and rely mainly on agriculture and, to a lesser extent, pastoralism. The main crops of the region are tobacco, barley, wheat and rice. Finally, there are also urban areas in Iranian Kurdistan, and the Kurds that live here exist as teachers, traders and shopkeepers.[9] It is important to note that on the whole, the Kurdish regions of Iran have historically been left out of infrastructure projects by the Iranian state, and unemployment is high.[10]

While the Iranian Kurds are historically a tribal people, there is no homogeneous Kurdish culture. In the mountain areas, tribal

affiliations are still strong, and in general, Kurdish life, although no longer nomadic, was traditionally. Despite the sedentirisation of these tribes, brought about primarily by restrictions on migration begun by Reza Shah and continued under the reign of his son, Mohammed Reza Shah, the tribal affiliations are still very strong. These tribes, through adaptation, have ensured their own survival, with many, post-sedentirisation, affiliating with the Kurds of the Iranian plains, who have traditionally lived in villages.[11] The urban Kurds, although often in conflict with the traditional tribal leadership, have maintained ties with the tribal sector, mainly for political reasons. It is from the ranks of urban Kurdish society that the Kurdish national leadership has primarily been drawn.

As with the Kurds in greater Kurdistan, The Iranian Kurds are predominantly a Muslim people, both Sunni and Shi'a. Existing information on the exact numerical dimensions of the split between Sunni and Shi'a Kurds is unreliable at best, thus we can only state in these pages that Shi'a Kurds appear to be the slight majority. Leaving aside the problematic nature of ascertaining the exact numerical dimensions of the Sunni Kurd population, it is important to note that these Kurds find themselves in a situation in which they are subjected to double discrimination, both as an ethnic and as a religious minority. Kurds in Iran speak a variety of dialects, with Kurmanji spoken in the northern areas, and Sorani and Gurani spoken in the south. In Iran, the Kurdish language is written in Persian (Arabic script). As stated earlier, the Kurds are but one of the many ethnic groups that make up Iran and it is important to remember that Shi'a Persians, although dominating Iran, do not make up the majority of the population.

Although the Kurds as a whole represent a distinct nation, or culture, there exist strong ties between Persians and Kurds, given their shared history and related languages.[12] Kurdish culture, especially that of the tribes in the Kurdish region of Iran, has more similarities and common links with Persian culture than with Turkish, Arab-Syrian or Arab-Iraqi culture. Therefore, cultural

factors favouring secession are not as prevalent among Iranian Kurds, as they see the dominant Persian culture as less alien to them than Arab and Turkish culture is viewed by the Kurds of other nation states.[13] Furthermore, the Kurds of Iran have been subject to the tides of international politics perhaps more than other Kurds, based on their location in a nation state that has been a pariah in the region, facing difficulties both regionally and internationally.

As with the wider Kurdish population, the relationship between the Iranian Kurds and the ruling governmental apparatus, in all of its various forms, has historically been and continues to be difficult. Although outside of the scope of this discussion, it is important to note that there are differing perspectives in the literature, both academic and popular, on how much freedom the Kurds are given by the Iranian state, as well as whether or not their lot is any better than that of the Kurds of the other regional states. The dynamic representing the relationship between the Iranian Kurds and the ruling apparatus is an important one that will be explored in detail throughout this book. At this point, we will note that the Iranian state has historically allowed space for a modicum of cultural (never political) activity for Kurds that, although small, has at times outshined what was and is offered to some of the other Kurdish populations.

Finally, this study examines the situation of the Iranian Kurds in the past, present and future, in a holistic manner. The Iranian Kurds, as with all other Kurds, are a stateless nation, and their struggle for recognition has historically been affected by the repressive nature and policies of the states they live in, as well as by the 'vagaries of regional and international politics'.[14] It is thus important to delve into the tangled web of relationships that the Kurds find themselves in with the various state and non-state actors that affect their reality through 'competing nationalisms, regional power struggles and international politics'.[15]

In illuminating the complex nature of the context in which the Iranian Kurds exist, this study presents a much-needed

examination of the past, present and future of Iran's Kurds, examining how the relationships among the Kurds of Iran, other Kurdish actors, the Iranian state, and the politics and policies of various international forces, both regional and western, presently inform the past and present trajectory of the Iranian Kurds, as well as how the changing international context may continue affecting them.

By examining the Iranian Kurds not in a vacuum but in the reality of their location, situated between these often competing environmental actors, this book investigates and illuminates key factors that have influenced the shape and content of Iranian Kurdish reality.

We have chosen to frame this examination of the Kurds of Iran in this way as it is our belief that given the realities of the Kurds situation as a stateless nation in a world system based on nation states, it is important to look at all of the factors and forces that influence the trajectory of the Kurdish realities in Iran, and to do so in a systematic, rigorous way in order to present a truly informed, well-grounded examination of the past, present and future of the Iranian Kurds. Therefore, this book offers a description as well as an analysis of the Iranian Kurds' politic and cultural situation over time, and also provides, at the end, a clearer picture of how their situation has changed and what the nature of those changes are, given the state of the external environment in which they operate.

It is important to note that this volume is not theoretically driven, but is theoretically informed by approaches such as the state–society framework that has become 'one of the major approaches in the field [of Comparative Politics]'[16] which seek to bring the state back in as well as to examine the complex relationships between the nation state, external state and non-state actors (other Kurds), and the society located within the nation state in question.

We advocate looking at the situation in this way, as this approach is especially suited to the study of the Kurds, providing

a more complete understanding of internal state issues such as the relationship between the state and those minority groups that live within its borders. Theda Skocpol highlights the range of this theory, laying out some guidelines for the utilization of 'bringing the state back in' that are particularly salient to examining the situation of stateless nations, such as the Kurds:

> States conceived as organizations claiming control over territories and people may formulate and pursue goals that are simply not reflective of the demands or interests of social groups, classes, or societies. This is what is usually meant by 'state autonomy'. Unless such independent goal formulation occurs, there is little need to talk about the states as important actors. Pursuing matters further, one may then explore the 'capacities' of states to implement official goals, especially over the actual or potential opposition of powerful social groups or in the face of recalcitrant socioeconomic circumstances.[17]

The history of the Kurds in Iran, as well as all other states in which Kurds live, clearly illustrates that the state in question has pursued goals that are not reflective of the demands of Kurdish society. This phenomenon that Skocpol highlights, the 'independent goal formulation' of the Iranian state, as well as, to a lesser extent, the various nation states of the region in relation to the 'Kurdish question' of Iranian Kurds, will be examined in this book. This approach also lends itself to the examination of other environmental factors affecting the Kurds. The driving premise behind those that utilise this approach is that in order to obtain more than a partial view of the relations between people and states and how they influence the phenomenon under enquiry, we must examine not only the impact of states on their societies but also how external international forces affect the situation, for, as Joseph Migdal aptly notes, 'the calculus of state–society relations has changed dramatically, as we shall see, because of forces outside the society altogether'.[18] Again, as discussed, it is

widely recognised that the Kurds as a whole have historically been influenced by their relationships among themselves, with the various state apparatus they find themselves living in (or forming coalitions with), as well as the international arena, making this approach a natural fit.

2
A History

As with the Kurds of neighbouring countries, the Iranian Kurds have had their share of historical battles and large personalities. Kurdish uprisings have occurred in the region since the early sixteenth century, often aided by outside influence. Accordingly, these uprisings have been regarded in less than favourable terms by the ruling power structure in Iran, which usually dealt a swift retribution.

This chapter will focus on providing a contextual overview of the history of 'modern' Iranian Kurdistan (post-First World War), and will offer a discussion of some of the more powerful figures in the Iranian Kurdish nationalist movement. An in-depth assessment of the nature of the relationship between the Iranian state and Kurds will be offered in the following chapter.

POST-FIRST WORLD WAR

The regional power vacuum created by the end of the First World War presented a valuable opportunity for the Kurds to attempt to break out from under the hegemony of the ruling territorial powers. The dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, the Treaty of Sèvres, various revolts in both Iraqi and Turkish Kurdistan, and the general weakness of the powers in Tehran were all factors influencing the Iranian Kurds to revolt.

At this point in time, the Kurds as a whole were tribally oriented, and several tribal revolts broke out in greater Kurdistan. Iranian Kurdistan was no different, as Ismail Agha Simko, chief of the Shakak tribe, overcame neighbouring tribes to extend an unstable hold over a large portion of Iranian Kurdistan in the early 1920s until bitter fighting between Kurds and Azeris (who

made up a large portion of the population in Iranian Kurdistan and did not particularly want to be part of Simko's Kurdistan), and the forces of Reza Pahlavi, as Commander in Chief of the Iranian army, defeated him. Despite pledging support to Reza and the Iranian state, Simko continued to be a thorn in the side of the fledgling Pahlavi dynasty, and after being jailed in Turkey, returned to Iran where he was killed in 1930. There remains to this day debate surrounding the question of whether Simko died in battle, or whether he was set up by the Iranian state and murdered by state forces after accepting an invitation to meet with the Iranian army to negotiate a settlement to the Iranian revolt. Although failing to establish a Kurdish nation state, Simko's revolt was the first serious endeavour to form an independent nation state in Iranian Kurdistan.

As with other Kurdish attempts to control their region during this time period, many feel that Simko failed due to his own shortcomings, being generally more interested in the spoils of war as opposed to statecraft; his inability to create the bureaucracy needed for the running of a successful state also contributed. This uprising, although referred to by some as a 'nationalist' movement, was still very limited in its goals due to the tribal nature of its leadership. Simko, although fighting against the central state, was not seen as fighting for the Kurdish nation on a whole, but rather for clan, tribal and personal grievances against a central state that was forcing sedentarisation and settlement on the Kurdish tribes.[1]

Throughout the reign of Reza Pahlavi – who came to power in 1921 through a military coup, eventually taking on the title of Shah – the Kurds suffered under the yoke of his policies of enforced sedentarisation and westernisation. Furthermore, he took a hard-line approach against Iranian tribal chiefs, imprisoning some and forcing others into exile.[2] However, in 1941, geopolitical changes in Iran shifted the balance of power and provided an opportunity for the Iranian Kurds to make an attempt to control

their own destiny, as the allied armies entered Iran and forced the Shah into exile.

The combination of regional and internal Iranian political forces ultimately allowed the Kurds the opening needed to form the Republic of Mahabad in 1946, the most serious challenge to the authority of the Iranian state, as well as the only independent Kurdish republic to date. Unlike Simko's uprising, which was not based on concrete visions of Kurdish identity and was thus not a nationalist movement formed on a wider sense of Kurdish identity, the creation of the Mahabad Republic, in which the questions of nationalism and identity were very present in the hearts and minds of the leaders, is widely seen as a nationalist movement.[3]

THE MAHABAD REPUBLIC

When discussing the Mahabad Republic it is important to understand the wider geo-political context of its existence. At this point in time, Iran was affected by the Second World War and the country was split into spheres of influence, with the Soviet Union controlling the north of the country and Britain and, to a lesser degree, the United States, controlling the south. By this time Reza Shah had, due in large part to his flirtation with the Nazis, abdicated under pressure. He was replaced by his son Mohammed Reza, who was a mere 21 at the time, and viewed by many as ineffectual. Mohammed Reza's actual power was minimal, and it is widely accepted that for the most part the allied forces unofficially controlled Iran. Concurrently, the Soviets were aggressively fanning the flames of a separatist communist movement in Iranian Azerbaijan, in order to pressure Tehran into granting economic concessions.[4] Although Kurds and Azeris have historically not been the best of friends, the Soviets hoped to create a unified Kurdish-Azeri front. However, there were ultimately differences in Soviet policy concerning the Kurds and Azeris, and although the Soviets most certainly had a hand in helping to create the Republic of Mahabad, there is

evidence that the Soviets had mixed views on the question of Kurdish autonomy.[5]

Throughout the early 1940s greater Iranian Kurdistan experienced a number of uprisings, caused in no small part by the return of exiled and jailed tribal chiefs, designed to undermine the authority of the central government.[6] For the most part, Mahabad, a city in the province of western Azerbaijan that maintained a vibrant intellectual community and had historically been a centre of Kurdish nationalist sentiment, represented the core of the Kurdish independence movement.[7]

It was not, however, only the tribal Kurds that were organising; the urban intellectuals of Mahabad and other Kurdish towns and cities were coming together as well, and in 1942 in Mahabad, a small group of middle-class civil servants, merchants and teachers[8] formed the Komala-i-Zhian-i-Kurd, or Komala JK (Komala), a nationalist organisation with an agenda to work for the self-governance of all Kurds and an autonomous region in Iranian Kurdistan. Membership in the Komala was secretive, with members aware only of those in their own cells.[9] At first, the Komala's appeal did not extend to all Kurds; however, it quickly grew in popularity and attracted the attention of the Soviets, who began secret meetings with its members. Furthermore, the Komala maintained ties with the Iraqi Kurds as well, as a representative from HEWA, an Iraqi Kurdish party that worked for a greater Kurdistan,[10] was influential in the founding of the Komala. Although the Komala began taking on a Marxist-Leninist character, this is thought to be due less to the influence of the Soviets than to the contact with Iraqi Kurdish organisations who shared this worldview.[11]

The Komala, which was thriving, soon became a significant force. By 1944 the movement had attracted the tribal chiefs as well, who, in joining the Komala, helped make it less a bastion of educated urban elites and more a proper mass movement. Representatives from the Komala began making trips to Iraqi Kurdistan, as well as to Turkey and Syria. By this time the Komala was

increasingly recognised as the most established and innovative voice of Kurdish nationalist aspirations.[12]

The Komala's structure represented the desire of the party to maintain a non-hierarchical structure, with no dominant leader, and debate occurred concerning whether or not to extend membership to one Qazi Mohammed, a greatly respected citizen of Mahabad and a Sunni religious leader with conservative aspirations. Qazi Mohammed's apparent authoritarian nature made some members of the Komala nervous, but in order to assure the ability of the Komala to conquer tribal-based divisions, the leftists and more radical nationalists in the Komala overcame their worries, and in 1944 Qazi Mohammed became the spiritual leader and voice of the Komala, yet was not elected to the central committee.

As the Kurdish national movement gained strength, it became apparent that there was a desperate need for an organisation that would be able to participate openly in the political process. Thus, in September of 1945, the Komala was disbanded and the Democratic Party of Kurdistan (KDP-I), with Qazi Mohammed at the helm, was created to take its place.[13] The Soviets were instrumental in the creation of the KDP-I, but there is great disagreement in the literature concerning the amount of influence the Soviets actually had, ranging from minor and middling involvement to major involvement.[14]

Two months after its formation, the KDP-I issued a statement calling for the following programme of policies to be initiated:

1. The Kurds to be free and independent in the management of their local affairs and to receive Kurdish independence within the borders of Persia.
2. The Kurds be allowed to study Kurdish and to administer their affairs in the Kurdish language.
3. Government officials definitely to be appointed from among the local population.

4. Members of the Kurdistan Provincial Council to be elected immediately in accordance with the Constitutional laws, to supervise all public and Government works.
5. By the passing of a general law, the grievances existing between the farmer and the landowner to be amended and their future positions defined.
6. The Democratic Party of Kurdistan will make special efforts to create complete unity and brotherhood between the Azerbaijan nation and the people who live in Azerbaijan (Assyrian, Armenians, and so on).
7. The Democratic Party of Kurdistan will fight to take advantage of the boundless natural wealth of Kurdistan and to improve the agriculture, commerce, education and health of Kurdistan in order to secure economic and moral welfare for the Kurds.
8. We wish the nations who live in Persia to be able to work for their freedom and for the welfare and progress of their country.[15]

Unsurprisingly, the Iranian government saw this document as a direct challenge to its authority in the region.[16]

At a meeting attended by the KDP-I leadership, some tribal chiefs, Soviet Red Army officers and Mullah Mostafa Barzani, the tribal leader of the powerful Barzani tribe from Iraq, the KDP-I proclaimed the founding of the Kurdish Republic of Mahabad on 22 January 1946. Qazi Mohammed was elected President of the new republic at this meeting.[17]

The Mahabad Republic, although short-lived, did manage to achieve many of the goals put forward in the KDP-I programme. According to Dr Ghassemlou, the pragmatic and much loved leader of the KDP-I, who was murdered in 1989 in Vienna by Iranian state security forces:

> Kurdish became the official language in the administration and in the schools. Several Kurdish periodicals appeared regularly, notably *Kurdistan*, the KDP organ, *Halala* (The Tulip), a paper

> for women, and *Grougali Mindalan* (The Children's Babil), a children's magazine. The first Kurdish theatre was founded. Kurdish women began to play an active part in social and political life for the first time.[18]

In addition, land was distributed to the Iranian Kurdish peasants as well as the Barzani, and the economy increased due to direct trade with the Soviet Union, as the major commercial enterprise of the republic was the sale of tobacco to the Soviets. Top administration jobs were given to Kurds, and a national army and *peshmerga* force replaced the dissolved Iranian army and police forces in the region.

Although the Mahabad Republic had a 13-member cabinet, a Supreme Court and a Ministry of Justice, there was no parliament or legislative assembly, thus laws were ratified by the decree of the President. Further, there were still questions as to what the nature of the Mahabad Republic would be. It remained undetermined whether it would be a fully independent republic or an autonomous regional government.[19]

The Mahabad Republic was backed in a large way by the Barzani tribe of Iraq. However, the Iranian tribes offered their support irregularly. Some tribal leaders supported Mahabad, as it was the only alternative to the central Iranian government. Others, however, were suspicious of the republic's leadership. These tribal conflicts were a large part of the obstacles in the path of the national unity needed for the republic to achieve a status as a viable political entity. The Mahabad Republic was very dependent on the tribal military force, made up largely of nearly 20,000 Barzani, to fight not only the Iranian forces but also other tribes hostile to its existence. Most of the cabinet members were urban Kurds, and there was underlying hostilities between them and the tribal leadership, who themselves were rife with divisions.

Along with the Barzani fighters, Qazi Mohammed also formed an independent Kurdish national army to break out of tribal concerns, thus its loyalty would be only to the Mahabad

Republic.[20] It received limited support from the Soviets. This army is significant as it later became the *peshmerga*, or people's army of the Kurdish national movement, which is still active to this day. Despite its shortcomings, Mahabad soon became a beacon for Kurdish nationalist aspirations. There was a great sense of wider Kurdish identity in the Mahabad period, and the Kurdish language experienced a period of growth as prominent intellectuals and teachers stressed that the Kurds needed to come together and explore a common language. Kurds were entreated to expand on the Kurdish language, despite the different dialects, and were encouraged to explore these other Kurdish dialects, as opposed to the language of the oppressors (Turkish, Farsi, Arabic), if they could not express themselves in their own language.[21]

The Mahabad Republic further asserted its independence from Iran by signing a 20-year friendship agreement with the newly established government of the other breakaway republic of the time, the Azerbaijani Republic with headquarters in Tabriz. However, this agreement came to nothing, as it became clear that the leaders of the Azerbaijani movement, who were being supported by the Soviets to a greater extent than the Kurds were, expected the Mahabad Republic to be subordinate to their own.

It is evident that major differences existed between the two states. In Mahabad, land reform and workers' demands took a backseat to national unity, while in Azerbaijan they were more at the forefront. Secondly, Kurdish territory had less industrial infrastructure than Azeri territory. Furthermore, the frontiers between the two states were undetermined, and the status of many western cities was disputed. However, in the spring of 1946 these differences were secondary, as the two states recognised the need to put aside differences in the face of aggression from the Tehran regime that was backed by the US and the British, who did not look kindly on Kurdish or Azeri independence. At this time, Iran was viewed by these western powers as a major source of oil, and they thus saw it as being in their best interest to subvert

any political divisions. Furthermore, they wanted to put an end to the growing spectre of Soviet influence.

Tensions between the Kurds and Azeris grew, as the Azeris formulated an agreement with Tehran that the Kurds perceived as selling them out in order to gain legal recognition. Qazi Mohammed attempted negotiations with Tehran to strengthen the Kurdish position. These talks, although lasting for some time, were ultimately fruitless, as the Iranians asserted that Kurdistan was part and parcel of Azerbaijan. Meanwhile, the Iranian government began an extensive undertaking designed to bring order to the country, wipe out both fledgling republics and end Soviet meddling in their territorial integrity. Soon, the Red Army commenced troop withdrawal and the Azerbaijani Republic fell in December 1946. The Iranian army entered Mahabad in the same month, and the leaders of the republic offered little resistance. Qazi Mohammed and several of the leaders of Mahabad were arrested, and after trial, Qazi, along with his brother and cousin, was hanged in Mahabad's central square on 31 March 1947. Mass executions in Iranian Kurdish towns followed suit, and the republic's entire infrastructure was destroyed. The Barzani, for their part, withdrew, and after a long journey that took them through Turkey, Iran and Iraq, finally sought haven in the Soviet Union in June of 1947.

After the fall of Mahabad, the Iranian Kurds entered a period of 'general political depression'.[22] The KDP-I militants and leaders were either arrested or executed. The situation worsened when, after an attempt on the Shah's life in 1949, the government began a systematic brutal crackdown on democratic movements throughout Iran, including Kurdistan. Hundreds of KDP-I members and sympathisers were imprisoned.[23]

MOSSADEGH

The rise of Mohammed Mossadegh and the National Front, a movement based on the ideals of nationhood, self-determination and anti-imperialism, in the early 1950s was supported by the

Kurds of Iran, who for the most part agreed with his democratic ideals. The KDP-I, which had been outlawed by the Shah after the fall of Mahabad, stepped up their political activity, albeit in a clandestine manner. In early 1952 the KDP-I participated in provincial elections and won an impressive percentage of the votes. However, the election was invalidated by the Shah, whose army rolled through Mahabad, leaving their own pro-royalist representatives for Mahabad. Mossadegh, who had been appointed the premiership in 1951, opposed the Shah's actions yet was powerless in this matter, as under the constitution, the Shah, as Commander in Chief, controlled the armed forces. The Kurdish support for Mossadegh angered the Shah, and when Mossadegh's government was overthrown in a CIA-led coup in August 1953, the Kurds found themselves once again on the wrong side of the government.

Sporadic rebellions took place in Kurdistan, but, as they were unable to meet the vast forces of the Iranian army, they were unsuccessful. The return of the Shah ushered in a period of grumbling quiescence in Kurdistan, where no major revolts occurred again until 1978. Throughout this period the KDP-I, who had moved their headquarters to Iraq, were influenced by the Kurdish movement in Iraq. Furthermore, changes were occurring in the internal structure of the KDP-I. In 1964 a contingent of critical KDP-I intellectuals called for armed struggle against the regime, in order to establish a federal government. As a result, a three-year KDP-I organised peasant uprising occurred in Urmiyeh, in which over 50 members of the KDP-I, hailing from a broad cross-section of society including tribesmen, merchants, intellectuals, peasants and mullahs, lost their lives.[24]

By this time, despite having to operate clandestinely, it appears that the KDP-I had become a mass party that enjoyed the active support of most of the Kurdish nation, the vanguard of a politically mature nationalist movement.[25] During this period, the KDP-I changed its direction away from guerrilla action towards building a base among Iranian Kurds living and studying in western nations.

This move was based largely on pragmatic reasoning, as it became obvious to the KDP-I that they simply did not have the ability to achieve victory against the powerful armies and security forces of the Shah. Furthermore, at this time the Barzani and the Iranian government had entered into a disastrous partnership that made it difficult for the KDP-I to act against the Iranian government.

In 1967–68 a split occurred in the KDP-I, which, as previously noted, had moved its headquarters to Iraq. The split was based on whether the KDP-I should return to Iranian territory and resume guerrilla activities. The majority of the KDP-I believed that it would be a bad idea to move back into Iranian territory, as given the alliance between the Barzani and the Shah, the movement had no chance of success. However, a minority of KDP-I members decided to act on their own, and, forming a peasant-based uprising, crossed the border into Iran. They were able to stay active for one year, but, unable to gain the support of the populous, were eventually crushed by the Iranian army.[26]

A wider sense of Kurdish national identity stagnated after the fall of Mahabad, only to experience a renaissance after the Barzani (KDP) came to Tehran and eastern Kurdistan as exiles in the early 1970s. Although they were sent back to Iraq after the 1975 Algiers agreement, an understanding between Iraq and Iran that heavily favoured Iran and led to the suppression of the Kurds, the influx of the Iraqi Kurds revitalised a sense of identity, culture and rights. In a sense it revitalized the movement and brought to it an impetus that had been lacking, as outward displays of Kurdish identity, such as traditional music and dress, which had thus far been regarded as 'provincial', became commonplace on the streets, as well as in the halls of universities and other cultural centres in cities such as Sanandaj.[27]

THE REVOLUTION

In 1979, following a decade of increasing discontent among the Iranian people towards the repressive policies of the Shah, a new

chapter in Iranian history began as the Iranian Revolution, swept along by a united force of disparate social actors, came about. The Kurds supported the Iranian Revolution, and saw the fall of the Shah as an opportunity for autonomy even greater than that which occurred when the Republic of Mahabad was established, as the fact that this was an internal Iranian affair meant that they would not have to deal with the competing influences of external actors. After years of clandestine operations, the KDP-I set up legal headquarters in Mahabad. Due to a power vacuum, there were no police or military forces in the region. Seizing this opportunity, the Kurdish political forces, which were much more organised than they had been in 1946, took control of the region, which became a major base for the revolution against the Shah.

As the revolution gathered strength, the Kurds captured military outposts and seized weapons. A thriving political culture sprang up in the cities and, heartened by the revolutionary government's promises of support for the rights of ethnic groups, the KDP-I and other Kurdish organisations decided to present their case for autonomy to Ayatollah Khomeini, whose Islamist forces consolidated their power in the years following the revolution. It is important to note that the majority of Iranian Kurds fully backed the revolution. The only Kurds that still supported the Shah were some tribal leaders who were benefiting from the Shah's policies.[28] In April of 1979 the KDP-I, emboldened by recent events, presented an eight-point programme for autonomy to Ayatollah Khomeini. It included:

1. The boundaries of Kurdistan would take into account historical, economic and geographical considerations and would be determined by the Kurdish people.
2. Kurdistan would abide by the central government's decisions on matters of defence, foreign affairs and long-term economic planning. The Iranian Central Bank would control the currency.

3. A Kurdish parliament with popularly elected members would be the highest legislative power in the province.
4. All provincial government departments would be run locally.
5. The police and gendarmerie would be abolished and replaced by a national guard, and there would be a people's army.
6. Along with Persian, the Kurdish language would be the official language of the provincial government and would be taught in schools.
7. All ethnic minorities in Kurdistan would enjoy equal rights, the right to speak their own language, and their traditions would be respected.
8. Freedom of speech and the press, trade union activities and rights of association would be guaranteed. The Kurdish people would maintain the right to travel freely and choose their profession.[29]

As is now well known, despite Khomeini's promises, the autonomy desired by the Kurds, as with the hopes and desires of so much of the population of Iran, was to go unheeded. The autonomy programme was ignored, as Khomeini saw the demands of ethnic minorities (along with many other groups that had supported him) as superfluous to an Islamic state.[30] Khomeini rejected the Kurd's autonomy plan, instead accusing them of seeking independence. In fact, the Kurds were asking for autonomy for Kurdistan (meaning control of domestic policies and regional administration) and democracy for wider Iran. As noted, issues of finance, foreign policy and defence would have been left to the central government. Unsurprisingly, fighting soon began between the *peshmerga* and the *pasadran* (the Iranian Revolutionary Guards).

There were three major forces in the fight for the Kurdish cause in 1979, which by this time had reached the stage of a fully mature national movement.[31] These were the KDP-I, the Komala (Revolutionary Organisation of the Toilers of Kurdistan),

and Sheikh Izzeden Husseini, a Sunni cleric. The KDP-I, a 'moderate' nationalist movement with policies related towards conflicts between the Kurds and central governments, maintained strongholds in the northern and north-western regions of Iranian Kurdistan. The Komala, conversely – a more radical, Marxist organisation concerned with class conflict – operated from, and had a strong base of support in the south of Iranian Kurdistan.[32]

The KDP-I had, since 1973, been led by Abdul Rahman Ghassemlou, a former university lecturer with a doctorate in economics. Born in 1930, he left Iran after the fall of Mahabad, yet returned in the 1950s and was arrested and imprisoned for two years for his involvement against the Shah. He left for Prague in 1957, where he obtained a PhD in, and later taught, economics. Elected leader of the KDP-I in 1973, Ghassemlou left the country, yet returned again in 1978 to lead the KDP-I. It is at this time that the KDP-I was transformed from a small underground movement to a mass party with a clear programme for autonomy in Kurdistan. This programme, as stated earlier, was non-revolutionary in nature, with the slogan 'Democracy for Iran, Autonomy for Kurdistan'. The movement at this point received its main support from urban middle-class intellectuals, and was not based on a workers' or peasants' movement. It did not base its ideology on class distinction, viewing Kurdistan as 'a one-class nation'.[33] It was thus a singularly nationalistic Kurdish movement, not subsumed under the wider umbrella of another ideology. Furthermore, the KDP-I maintained a strong military presence in the form of the *pesmerga*, which began as an independent military force in 1946.

Despite many clashes, the leaders of the KDP-I were not overtly hostile to tribal leaders, who often caused difficulties. This was born of a pragmatism inherent to the KDP-I leadership, who realised that, due to the tribal leaders' substantial financial and political influence, they could either support a nationalist movement or hinder it.[34] Thus their policy was focused on

attempting to reduce the influence of the tribal leaders rather than antagonising them.

The tribal leaders, who saw the agenda of the urban leaders as anathema to their authority and economic standing, did not present a united response to the Islamic Revolution. Some, who had enjoyed the patronage of the Shah, as stated earlier, actively opposed the revolution. Others used the general chaos to their advantage, attempting to secure influence for themselves – working with the KDP-I when it suited them; deserting the nationalistic forces at other times. These tribal leaders found themselves on the wrong side of both the KDP-I and the Komala, as they actively pursued a policy of attempting to extract dues or tithes from peasants in the Mahabad region. Some of these chieftains were actively allied with the government, and used military assistance from the central government to fight the nationalist forces. Still other tribal leaders showed their support for the nationalist movement. In some cases, as with Simko's son Tahar Khan, leader of the Shahkak federation**,** tribal forces found it necessary to appeal to the KDP-I *peshmerga* for military support. Cases like this highlighted the viability of the KDP-I, and although some tribal leaders (Tahar Khan included) actively challenged the KDP-I, many younger tribal members preferred the KDP-I to traditional tribal leadership.

The Komala, on the other hand, were founded as an underground radical Marxist organisation in 1969 and became truly active after the revolution. Based in the southern regions of Sanandaj and Merivan, the Komala's ideologies of class conflict won the support of Kurds in this area whose main economic activity was agriculture.[35] The Komala's programme was similar to the KDP-I programme; however, the Komala took a more hard-line, radical approach to agrarian reform policies and workers' rights. Furthermore, the Komala took a much more confrontational approach to the tribal chieftains and landowners. Opposed to the KDP-I's vision, the Komala, at this point in time, viewed the Kurdish issue as fundamentally intertwined with wider class

issues, as they view Kurds as a whole as an oppressed class. In adition, the Komala more actively supported women's rights. The Komala and the KDP-I have had their fair share of differences, but managed to provide a fairly unified front throughout the fighting that took place against the central government after the Islamic Revolution. Finally, Sheikh Izzeden Husseini, a Sunni cleric, more a personality than an organisation, was seen mainly as a unifying force. He was a member of several Kurdish organisations, was outspoken in his criticism against Khomeini, and acted as a staunch defender of democratic values and Kurdish autonomy.[36]

In the spring of 1979, the Iranian Kurds, who were receiving arms and clandestine assistance from Turkey and Iraq (who were supporting the Kurds in order to destabilise the Iranian state), engaged in a large-scale uprising. The Iranian government responded with a brutal crackdown, justified on the basis that the Kurds were attempting to break away from Iran, a charge denied by the Kurds. The cost to the civilian population of Kurdistan was high, with large numbers of civilian casualties resulting from massacres in various villages. *Peshmerga*, students and workers seized supplies and weapons from the Iranian military, and the *peshmerga* engaged in both direct combat at military bases and guerrilla-style warfare in the mountains. In the rural areas, peasants and militarised students, organised primarily by the Komala, seized land from the aghas and sheikhs after the revolution.[37] Thus, by the time the Iran–Iraq war began with Saddam Hussein's invasion in 1980, the countryside of Iran was in a state of conflict.

Throughout 1979, clashes occurred between the Kurds and government forces. In August, the Kurds took the town of Paveh near the Iraqi border, marking the beginning of an especially violent period of clashes, conflict and negotiation between the Kurds and the central government that lasted several years. A great number of Kurds were summarily tried then executed, most trials lasting only a few minutes.[38] Several terrible clashes took place

in most of the major cities, resulting in great loss of life. Vicious fighting continued throughout the post-revolutionary period, a topic that will be explored in further detail in the next chapter.

IRAN–IRAQ WAR

Although at first the Iran–Iraq War was thought to offer opportunities for the Kurds, it soon became clear that it would prove disastrous, as the Iranian Kurds became increasingly isolated from the outside world as well as from Kurds living in neighbouring countries. Towns and villages in Iranian Kurdistan came under massive artillery attack from both fronts, resulting in great loss of life. In 1984 the Iranian government launched a massive offensive against the Kurds, clearing an area of over 2,000 square kilometres of Iranian Kurdistan. Major casualties ensued as over 70 villages and towns came under the control of the Iranian military.[39] Refugees fled the area in the tens of thousands, as the *peshmerga*, grossly outnumbered, continued to fight the Iranian military.

Furthermore, beginning in 1984, the Iraqi military engaged in extensive chemical weapons attacks, targeting not only military outposts but also the towns and villages of the border regions, most of which were Kurdish. More than 30 chemical attacks against Iranian Kurdish residential areas occurred, sometimes affecting 20 or more villages in each attack. Many Kurdish civilians died in these attacks, and thousands more still suffer horribly from the effects of exposure to the chemical agents, which included mustard gas, a particularly persistent chemical agent whose toxic effects last for years.[40]

Despite the havoc wreaked on Kurdistan, throughout the 1980s and the Iran-Iraq war, Ghassemlou refused to modify the KDP-I request for autonomy. However, he did make several attempts to negotiate with the government, despite the heavy casualties suffered by the Kurds. This willingness to work with the authorities led to severe factionalism within the KDP-I,

culminating in the expulsion of 15 prominent members in 1988. Tragically, Ghassemlou was assassinated on 13 July 1989 while in negotiations with the Iranian government. His successor, Sadeq Sharafkandi, met the same fate in 1992. Although Tehran has denied involvement in the murders, it is widely believed that it is responsible. Under both Ghassemlou and Sharafkandi the Iranian Kurds remained relatively separate from the Kurds of Turkey and Iraq, leading some to postulate that perhaps Sharafkandi was murdered by forces other than Tehran's.[41] During this period the Komala were experiencing similar challenges. After the deaths of Ghassemlou and Sharafkandi, the situation of the KDP-I and the Komala worsened, with many members taking refuge in neighbouring countries.[42] However, even there many were not safe, as Iranian forces pursued them across borders, forcing several families to flee to western Europe in very real fear of their lives.[43]

After the war, the Kurds' situation remained stagnant for some years, until the mid-1990s. The Islamic Republic of Iran entered a period of reform and more open government and cautious reconciliation with the West after the election of reform-minded President Sayyed Mohammed Khatami, who was elected in a resounding victory over the conservatives in 1997. This shocked the establishment of conservative technocrats who had been in control of the government since the revolution, and still held on to most of the key positions or power within the government. The Kurds, along with the majority of Iranians who felt deeply unhappy with the hard-line Islamic regime, supported Mohammed Khatami and his reform movement, which promised greater social and political freedom for all Iranians, including ethnic and religious minorities.

While Khatami enjoyed unprecedented support in the Iranian populous, the promised changes of his campaign did not, for the most part, materialise. This is due in large part to the extremely complex nature of the Iranian political system, which will be discussed in further detail in the next chapter. There exists a

severely uneven distribution of power within the Iranian political system, which is divided between institutional political power and religious power. Khatami must answer to the Rahbar, or supreme religious leader, who wields a large amount of power. Ali Khamenei, a notorious hard-liner who had been moving his way up in the religious and institutional political power circles for decades, was appointed Supreme Leader in 1989, a position he will hold for life. While Khatami enjoyed unprecedented public support and was a favourite among the people and within the political arena for decades, he was severely constrained in his actions and was thus unable to implement the vast majority of the reforms he envisioned.

3
Iranian State Policy and the Kurds: Politics and Human Rights

OVERVIEW OF STATE POLICY

Although the 1979 constitution ostensibly grants equal rights for all ethnic minorities (Article 19), practitioners of other schools of Islam (Article 12), as well as the granting of the use of minority languages in the media and schools (Article 15), these rights are not manifested. Furthermore, Persian ethnicity is the defining identity of the state and civil society.[1] Articles 3(14) and 19, which assert that all Iranians are equal and thus all enjoy equal rights, precludes the acknowledgement of difference or privilege based on colour, race or language.[2] Thus Kurds and all other non-Persian ethnic groups living in Iran are not implicitly recognised. While religious minorities are recognised, only Jews, Christians and Zoroastrians are identified, thus the protection of minority rights guaranteed under Article 13 of the constitution does not apply to the large population of Sunni Kurds.

The Iranian government maintains that Kurds enjoy their rights as full members of society, as evidenced by the members in the Iranian parliament and the presence of Kurdish-language TV and radio stations. However, in reality the government maintains a discriminatory policy against the Kurds, denying them high government posts, overlooking Sunni candidates, and denying public school education in Kurdish. Kurdish political organisations are banned, and the Iranian government regularly jails and sometimes executes members of banned Kurdish political organisations, such as the KDP-I and the Komala. In

terms of education, there is a fundamental lack of attention from authorities and economic planners in providing for the growth of educational centres, especially in supplying accommodation for secondary and post-secondary education in Kurdish rural areas. Although there are a number of Kurdish MPs in parliament, they must operate under Iranian state policy that denies difference and does not allow the Kurds an open and democratic platform through which to express their views freely. While some space exists to assert Kurdish cultural identity, there is no space given for them to operate as Kurds politically.

The underdevelopment of the Kurdish regions leads to economic marginalisation which severely inhibits the Kurds from actively participating in Iranian public life. This also leads to a general frustration with the government and fuels demands for autonomy. Many Kurds feel that their region suffers from intentional underdevelopment at the hands of the government. Although it is evident that the government is aware of these shortcomings, they continue to ignore the situation, failing to deliver on promises offered to meet the Kurds' demands for the attainment of the rights guaranteed to them in the constitution, particularly under Article 48, which ensures that each region has access to facilities and capital, through the equal distribution of public revenues and economic activity.[3]

Repeated pronouncements and observations from the various United Nations international treaty bodies that monitor the human rights situation in Iran, such as the Human Rights Committee and the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, offer the conclusions that those persons inhabiting the provinces primarily belonging to ethnic minorities such as the Kurds do not enjoy the same rights as those inhabited by Persians. Finally, the previously mentioned fact that human rights defenders that work with minorities are particularly at risk leads to the even greater marginalisation of an already marginalised population. There is evidence that Kurds and Iranian Kurdistan may be becoming isolated from the general struggle for human rights in Iran, as

rights activists already under extreme pressure from the state seek to distance themselves from the Kurds, an issue that they know will inflame the authorities.[4]

HISTORY OF THE IRANIAN STATE'S TREATMENT OF KURDS

The Iranian ruling powers, in whatever form they may take, have historically demonstrated a less than accommodating stance towards the Kurds that live within their borders. As far back as the early sixteenth century one can see evidence of suppression of Kurdish tribal uprisings, as the Safavids, the Shi'ite Persian Empire that had, since the early 1500s, emerged as a regional power, embarked on a strong state centralisation programme that ran counter to the historical freedom of the Kurds.[5] The Kurds were targeted specifically by Safavid policies, as they were deemed problematic to the powers that be. This led to the formulation of treaties, such as one signed between the Ottomans and Safavids in 1639, which designated the previously semi-sovereign Kurdish principalities to the Ottoman and Persian Empires, in an effort to control the Kurds. It was at this time that the beginnings of the now familiar strategy employed by state powers of pitting Kurdish tribes against each other occurred, as the Safavid administration engaged in a selective system of punishment and rewards that took advantage of tribal hostilities.[6]

These methods continued throughout the next centuries, as a series of empires rose and fell, and the Kurds continued much in the way they had for centuries. In the mid-1800s, Amir Kabir, chief minister to Naser ad-Din, Shah of the Qajar dynasty, attempted to strengthen the centre through a process of modernisation from above. This fell foul of the tribes, Kurdish and otherwise, who found their powers limited. Kabir, for his troubles, ultimately displeased the Shah and was dismissed in 1851, only to be assassinated the following year.[7] Following the failed efforts of Kabir to modernise, the tribes were again left to their own devices through the rest of the Qajar period (approximately 1795–1925), which was a time

marked by increasing greed and corruption on the part of the decadent Qajars. Their growing interaction with the west led to economic and political exploitation, as the Qajars offered up most of Iran's natural resources and fledgling industry at cut-price rates to finance their lavish lifestyles. Unfair trade agreements led to cheap European imports ruining the livelihood of Iranian traders and manufacturers, and the growing number of 'concessions' offered to the west fanned the flames of discontent.

This increasing western impact caused by the concessions led to ever increasing resentment that resonated through all sectors of Iran's citizenry, culminating in enormous protests in 1891 as a result of the infamous tobacco concession, in which Naser ad-Din effectively sold the production, sale and export of the entirety of Iranian tobacco to the British for £15,000. Discontent with the government increased, culminating in the overthrow of Muzzafir al-Din Shah, who came to the throne after Naser ad-Din, by the suavely effective Reza Pahlavi, whose ascension to power ushered in a new cut-throat attitude towards the tribes.

When Reza Pahlavi seized the reigns of power in 1921 through a military coup, he adopted a zero tolerance policy towards Kurdish rebellions and uprisings. A military man, Reza's reasoning was that tribal rebellions needed to be met with an overwhelming display of military force, and it was exactly in this manner that Ismail Agha Simko's uprising was met, with Reza's forces recapturing towns from rebels along the way. As Reza consolidated his hold on power, taking on the title of Reza Shah, he initiated a new repressive period of nation-state building, creating a centralised nationalist state agenda and a uniform national identity based on a created Persian consciousness that emphasised the primacy of 'Persianness' over other ethnic or religious identities. Part and parcel of this centralisation programme was the disarming and sedenterisation of the tribes, and the establishment of central control. Some tribes, whose territory was split between several countries, found themselves deported, with their land occupied by non-Kurds. Others were simply deported and massacred.[8]

Many of Reza Pahlavi's state-building ideas came from his role model Mustafa Kemal 'Atatürk'. Like Reza, a soldier, Atatürk, who would go on to become the founder of the Turkish Republic, placed special emphasis on the vulnerability of the new community that he was attempting to fashion out of the former collectivity. The programme that Atatürk forwarded was one in which Turks, who were identified in a maximalist definition as any person now living within the borders of Turkey, were to devote themselves to the needs of the Turkish nation only, and reject any ties to other identity attachments, be they religious or ethnic in nature. Although this process worked relatively well for some of the citizens, a glaring exception is of course, the Kurds, a full 20 per cent of the population. The republican government successfully repressed any nationalistic Kurdish feeling, with harsh measures taken to suppress expressions of Kurdish identity within a 'Turkification' programme that was all-encompassing. Food, dress, and manner of speaking were all targeted, rendering everything outside of the proscribed 'Turkishness' beyond the pale.

Like Atatürk, Reza Shah, under the aegis of his Society for Public Guidance, attempted to thwart all expressions of non-Persian identity. The Kurds, as with the other non-Persian ethnic groups in Iran,[9] suffered greatly under this enforced 'Persianification'. Textbooks, radio broadcasts and all other forms of printed work in non-Persian were banned. The use of Kurdish in education, public speech or print was forbidden. Kurdish schools were closed down, and government administrative positions in Kurdish regions were given to Azeri and Persian officials. Reza Shah's emulation of Atatürk's policies continued, going so far as to refer to the Kurds as 'Mountain Iranians', coinciding with the use of the term 'Mountain Turks' used to describe the Kurds of Turkey after the establishment of the Turkish Republic. However, unlike his role model, he stopped short of banning the use of the word 'Kurd' entirely.[10]

Economically, Reza Shah deliberately left the Kurdish regions to flounder in underdevelopment, as money poured into improving

infrastructure in other regions. No roads were built, and healthcare remained the worst in all of Iran. Politically, Reza Shah meddled as well, deliberately attempting to fan the flames of existing Kurdish-Azeri tensions by declaring Kurdish inhabited areas part of the province of West Azerbaijan. Furthermore, by not modifying the land ownership situation in the Kurdish regions, as he did in many other areas in Iran, Reza Shah left in place a situation in which the people were exploited by sheikhs and tribal leaders.[11]

As the Second World War broke out, German influence in Iran became increasingly marked, leading to the abdication of Reza Pahlavi under extreme pressure from the allies in September of 1941. After the abdication, the efficacy of the central government's control over tribal areas in Iran was greatly weakened. Mohammed Reza, Reza Shah's young son and successor, was weak and lacking in authority, his actual power diminished greatly by the Soviets and British who had consolidated their control over Iran, and were, as military occupiers, in de facto control of the country. The Kurdish regions fell under the Soviet sphere of influence, and it was with their aid that the Kurds were able to form The Republic of Mahabad in 1946, taking advantage of the weakness of the central government, which was powerless in the face of the commanding Soviets.

As discussed previously, the Republic of Mahabad existed for scarcely a year, and, as political tides changed again, the Soviets and Iranians embarked on a route of diplomacy to improve their relations. As a result the Kurds lost the support of the Soviets, who promised to pull all troops out of Iran in return for oil concessions. The Kurds of Mahabad entered into negotiations with Prime Minister Ahmad Qavam, in hopes of gaining some allowances similar to those achieved by the Azeri delegates, who, despite being in the same situation as the Kurds, had successfully negotiated some form of autonomy. The Kurds' attempts were unproductive, as Qavam declared Kurdistan a part of the breakaway Azeri Republic,[12] and thus the Kurds must negotiate with the Azeris for their autonomy.[13]

Despite promises to the contrary, with the Soviets gone, the Iranian army moved swiftly, ending the existence of the Azerbaijani republic in early December 1946, and Mahabad later that month. Qazi Mohammad, Sadr and Saif Qazi were publicly hanged, and all overt displays of Kurdish nationalism and identity, such as the teaching of Kurdish, were banned. The KDP-I, seen as a threat to the integrity of the Iranian state, was outlawed, effectively becoming an underground organisation.

After the fall of Mahabad, Mohammad Reza continued the sedenterisation programme begun by his father, attempting to reintegrate the non-Persian residents of Iran into the emerging centralised power structure of the state.[14] In general, the Shah's primary goal in the years following the Second World War was the consolidation of power into his own hands. With this in mind, he removed Qavam from power in 1947, and, without consulting the parliament, appointed a potential rival, General Ali Razmara, as Prime Minister in 1950. However, Razmara's tenure as Prime Minister was fleeting, as, plagued by problems on multiple fronts, seen in equal measures as a British puppet and friend to the Soviets, he was assassinated by a member of a Muslim fundamentalist group in March of 1951.[15]

Major political and social events were occurring at this time, most spectacularly centred on oil nationalisation and the meteoric rise in popularity of the soft-spoken yet deeply charismatic Mohammed Mossadegh. The Kurds supported Mossadegh and his liberal democratic ideals, as it was believed he presented a genuine interest in the rights of all Iranians, no matter what their ethnic or religious affiliation. Furthermore, he allowed for representation of these other voices in his cabinet, including a Kurd.[16] Mossadegh's popularity, both within parliament as well as in the general public, compelled the Shah to reluctantly appoint him as Prime Minister in April of 1951. This ushered in a period of hope and regeneration, as the KDP-I, albeit clandestinely, became active again, even running for the provincial elections in 1952, which they easily won. However, the army nullified these elections,

appointing supporters of the Shah instead. Despite Mossadegh's unhappiness with these events, he was powerless to change them, given the distribution of power in Iran.

At this time there was general unrest in Kurdistan, aimed against Kurdish feudal landlords as much as the Shah. This led to the unfortunate collaboration of the Shah with some Kurdish khans, who worked in tandem to stifle the peasant uprisings occurring in Kurdistan. This type of phenomenon was not unique to Iran, and similar situations have occurred in Iraq and Turkey, in the form of the village guard system. Despite these alliances, it is important to note that the vast majority of Kurds supported Mossadegh, a fact that made the Shah understandably nervous, as in 1953 the Iranian Kurds voted overwhelmingly in a referendum to curtail the Shah's powers to that which is stipulated in the constitution: to reign and not rule. However, times changed again as the British and Americans clandestinely descended into Iran, overthrowing Mossadegh in a CIA-sponsored coup.

With his power secured, the Shah continued on his path of domination through the continued co-option of tribal leaders, offering various political and financial rewards for their support. This policy led to heightened tension among the Kurds, as this carrot and stick policy, while benefiting the elites from tribes such as the Jaf and Ardalan, who supported the Shah, left the majority of rank-and-file Kurds in the cold. In terms of official policy, the Shah made Persian the exclusive language of government and politics, and all forms of printed material.

All primary and secondary education was in Persian, and the educational system was grossly overburdened, with many villages having only one teacher for nearly 300 pupils. The Shah enforced his language policy by staffing educational institutions in the Kurdish regions with staff that could not speak Kurdish. However, restricted television and radio broadcasts in Kurdish were allowed, and despite the ban, many books, newspapers and pamphlets in Kurdish were published clandestinely. In Kermanshah, Kurdish radio, albeit unrevolutionary in nature, thrived. It has been stated

by Ghassemlou that the Shah allowed the broadcast of Kurdish radio as a vehicle of propaganda for the Shah's policies, in Iran and in Turkey, whose Kurds received the radio broadcasts as well.[17] The general conscious underdevelopment of the Kurdish regions continued as well, as the standard of living in the Kurdish areas remained among the lowest in Iran.

At this time, the Shah also entered into an understanding with Mostafa Barzani, leader of the powerful Barzani tribe and founder of the KDP in Iraq that proved to be disastrous to the Iranian Kurds. Viewing the rise of the Ba'ath party in 1960s Iraq as a threat to his plans for regional domination, the Shah decided to use the Kurdish revolts that were occurring in Iraq to his advantage, with the goal of making Barzani and his movement entirely dependent on Iranian state aid. With this policy he could meet two goals: destabilising Iraq, while at the same time controlling Barzani to the extent that he could influence him to act against the Iranian Kurds. This unfortunate affiliation deeply affected the relationship between Iranian Kurds (most specifically those associated with the KDP-I) and the Barzani throughout this time period. In aiding Barzani, the Shah managed to cut off the Iranian Kurds' support, leaving them isolated and alone, his policy of divide and rule working successfully.

Discontent with Mohammed Reza Shah and his increasingly repressive and despotic policies was on the rise throughout the 1970s, culminating in the Islamic Revolution of 1979. The revolution led to what the Kurds saw at first as an opportunity for autonomy. At this time, due to a power vacuum, the Kurds had managed to gain control of the entire north-west, which was in a state of de facto autonomy, being administratively under the control of the KDP-I and *peshmerga*. In late March of 1979, a delegation of Kurds went to Qom in order to present their demands, which included autonomy, to Ayatollah Khomeini. The response was less than what was hoped for, as the Islamic regime repeatedly took the line that there was no basis for concepts such as 'autonomy' in the Koran, and thus these demands were

unacceptable.[18] Negotiation between the Kurds and governmental powers in the early months of 1979 was complicated by the lack of clear power centres of both the Islamic government and the Kurds, and the situation was fluid.[19] Although an agreement was reached between Tehran and the Kurds, it soon fell apart, as it was clear that Khomeini was not willing to recognise minority rights, instead demanding calm in Kurdistan.[20] Unsurprisingly the Kurds voted overwhelmingly against the referendum on the Islamic Republic that was held later that month, with a vast majority boycotting the elections completely.

Throughout the spring and summer of 1979, repeated small and mid-level clashes occurred between Kurds and the Revolutionary Guards or other pro-government forces. The KDP-I and the Komala were gaining strength, rapidly building new party branches and strengthening existing ones. On 17 August, Khomeini launched an all-encompassing offensive against Kurdistan, declaring holy war against the Kurds, denouncing Ghassemlou as an enemy of Iran, and labelling the KDP-I as the 'party of Satan'.[21] This resulted in the violent destruction of towns and villages, as well as loss of hundreds of lives. The KDP-I and Komala forces, no match for the tanks and planes of the Revolutionary Guards, retreated to the mountains, as government forces remained occupiers in the main urban areas. Again, the lack of a clear central power, this time even in the army, as it was divided in its support for Khomeini, gave the Kurds' the advantage, as they were able to reoccupy all the major cities.

The powerful resistance put up by the Kurds as well as other minorities caused the government to rethink its position, which, although against autonomy, was rather ambiguous at this point, offering a type of decentralised administration guaranteeing certain cultural rights including the use of Kurdish, yet stopping short of recognizing the Kurds as a separate nation.[22] This programme, which was in essence a decentralisation project, although granting limited rights, would actually have weakened the position of the KDP-I, who were at this point essentially

running much of the administration of the Kurdish regions, by splitting Kurdistan into more districts, rather than bringing the existing four together as the KDP-I demanded. Given this, the KDP-I rejected the offer. The final draft of the Iranian constitution offered no recognition for Kurdish minority rights.[23]

The spring of 1980 saw the launch of a new offensive against the Kurds on the part of newly elected president Abdulhassan Beni-Sadr. Cities and towns such as Sanandaj, Mahabad, Saqqez and Baneh were repeatedly subjected to multiple land and air strikes. The Iran–Iraq War presented the Iranian Kurds, who were engaged in guerrilla-style warfare with the Iranian armed forces, with the opportunity to regain control of the countryside. After 1982 Kurdistan became a major focus of operations in the war, and the Iranian forces launched a massive offensive against the Kurds in 1983, ultimately leading to the re-establishment of government control over the Kurdish areas. As Khomeini militarised Kurdistan, 250,000 soldiers entered the region.

The fighting increased, and the medical situation became disastrous, as the region had very few doctors. Estimates from before the revolution put the number of doctors at 1 per 5,800 people in Kurdistan, as compared to 1 per 770 people in Tehran.[24] The Kurdish resistance, including the KDP-I and the Komala, which was based in the border areas at this time, controlled a large part of the region until 1983. From 1984, however, the situation deteriorated. The KDP-I and the Komala had set up hospitals to deal with the medical emergency, but there were simply not enough doctors or medical supplies to deal with the amount of casualties coming in, and they called on humanitarian organisations to come to their assistance. In the first part of the 1980s two French medical teams arrived.[25] After the situation changed, the hospitals had to be moved to the Iraqi borders, and at times only one hospital remained, grossly underfunded, and always full. The wounded, most of whom were civilians, would take an average of two to three days to get there, arriving on foot, or by horse or mule. Given the incredible distance some

had to travel, in some cases it could take up to twelve days for the wounded to arrive.[26]

Throughout the Iran–Iraq War Iranian Kurdistan remained a war-zone, subject to attacks from both Iraqi and Iranian forces. The Kurds of Iran became increasingly isolated from the rest of the world, including other Kurds, especially those in Iraq. As the Kurdish region became a cordon sanitaire, the death toll rose to more than 50,000, of whom 45,000 were believed to be civilians.[27] Tens of thousands took flight, some of whom still live as refugees in appalling conditions in camps in Iraq and Turkey. Although understudied, Kurds comprise the large majority of the 100,000 victims who continue to suffer from the multiple chemical weapons attacks that occurred during the Iran–Iraq War. Apart from the more obvious physical effects of mustard gas, which include blistering and long-term health effects on the eyes and respiratory organs (including lung cancer) which are progressive in nature with as yet no effective cure, many victims suffer from psychological effects, including post traumatic stress disorder and a heightened sense of fear and uncertainty, as chemical weapons kill in an often unpredictable and invisible manner.[28]

The end of the war coupled with the death of Khomeini in 1989 ushered in a period in which the government offered a policy of limited accommodation to Kurds while still banning any Kurdish nationalist organisations such as the KDP-I and the Komala, going so far as to bomb KDP-I camps in Iraqi territory by helicopter on several occasions from 1993.[29] As for the Kurds within Iran, despite the official stance of the Iranian government that all Iranians are treated equally in a brotherhood of Muslims, the overwhelming majority of them experienced 'double discrimination' due to their status as an ethnic minority and (for most) as Sunni Muslims, a religious minority. Despite this discrimination, there were Kurds willing to work with the government, asking to live as equal citizens and full partners within the Iranian state. Practically, this desire for full participation has included calls for increased Kurdish representation in the parliament, more access

to national government positions and a greater number of local positions for Kurdish officials in the provinces that make up wider Iranian Kurdistan.

Although in theory the constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran guarantees equal rights to ethnic and recognised religious minorities (not including Sunni Muslims), practically, these rights are not realised. The Islamic government has openly pursued a policy of refusing to hire Iranian Sunnis in mid- and high-level positions. A major part of the government's discriminatory practice towards the Kurds includes the denial of government posts, not only in these mid- and high-level positions, but also local positions in the predominantly Kurdish regions, to Sunni Kurds. Instead, these administrative posts are given to non-Kurdish officials, often coming from the state's security forces.[30]

The state has also attempted to control the trajectory of the Iranian Kurds in far more nefarious ways. On 13 July 1989, as Ghassemlou, head of the KDP-I, was holding negotiations in Vienna with the Iranian state, he and two other Iranian Kurds were murdered. Although the Iranian government denied his assassination, it is widely believed that they were responsible. History repeated itself three years later, as his successor, Sadeq Sharafkandi, along with three other Kurds, was murdered in the Mykonos restaurant in Berlin on 18 September 1992, again while in the process of negotiating with the Iranian government. A trial of the assassins by a German court, which took over three years to deliberate, finally concluded that the Iranian government was responsible for the killings of Ghassemlou and Sharafkandi, in an attempt to silence the Kurds.[31] This suggests that although not official policy, the Iranian state employed a clear strategy of dealing with individuals that they saw as a threat by murdering them.

The Kurds, along with the great majority of Iranians who felt deeply unhappy with the hard-line Islamic regime, supported Mohammed Khatami and his reform movement, which promised greater social and political freedom for all Iranians including ethnic and religious minorities. At first, in the 'honeymoon

period' after Khatami's election, the situation on the ground appeared to be taking a turn for the better. Khatami, after taking office in 1997, appointed Abdollah Ramazanzadeh, a Kurd, as the first Governor General of Iranian Kurdistan. In turn, Ramazanzadeh, himself a Shi'a, appointed many Sunnis to key roles in the government. In his second term of office, Khatami brought Ramazanzadeh to Tehran to serve as cabinet secretary. A non-Kurd was chosen as his successor.[32] Widely seen as responsible for easing tensions in the regions, Ramazanzadeh's exit combined with the Guardian Council's progressive attack on the reformist movement meant progress in Kurdistan slowed to an unacceptable pace, and in 2001, Kurdish representatives resigned en masse from parliament, with five deputies and a legislator from Kurdistan province leaving, accusing Khatami's government of discrimination against Kurds.

The hard-line conservatives managed to thwart the reform movement at almost every step, blocking many reform-minded parliamentarians from the 2001 election. As a result, Khatami lost credibility in the eyes of his supporters when he did not postpone the elections. The situation continued to deteriorate, as over half of the Kurdish MPs in parliament were prevented from participating in the February 2004 parliamentary election. Unsurprisingly, the election was boycotted by over 70 per cent of Kurds, and civil unrest occurred in Kurdish cities in protest at the unfair elections.

The Iranian Kurds expressed overwhelming dissatisfaction with the government, believing that Khatami's reformist platform fell short of the promised improvement in integration and participation and failed to engage the Kurds in a political process with the regime. Currently, the Kurds are frustrated with the years of regional underdevelopment and cultural discrimination. However, it is important to note that change did occur in the Khatami years, infrastructure was improved (roads and electricity) and more (albeit modest) openings and freedoms did

occur, primarily benefiting those Kurds affiliated with the wider reform movement.[33]

The 2005 presidential election, which took place on 17 June 2005 and ended in a run-off, was widely viewed both within Iran and in the international community as being neither fair nor free. Heavily boycotted by the Kurds, the election brought to power hard-liner Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, whom many believed was involved in the murder of KDP-I leader Abdul Rahman Ghassemlou in 1989. It was feared that his ascension would usher in a worrying rollback of the little reform that did occur.

It appears that those fears were not unfounded. Soon after his inauguration, reports surfaced of his 'harshly' turning down requests from Kurdish members of the parliament to include Kurds in his cabinet.[34] Ahmadinejad has made no move to address the discrimination levelled against Kurds by the Islamic government's ban on hiring Sunni Kurdish Iranians as mid- and high-level managers, focusing instead on harshly muzzling any sign of dissent.

After a year in office, Ahmadinejad's intention to roll back the small progress made during the Khatami years on personal freedoms for all those in Iran who question the policies and the structure of the Islamic Republic, such as students, women and ethnic minorities, is clear. One of Ahmadinejad's first moves was to grant police powers to the infamous paramilitary Islamic vigilante *basij*. Along with harassing women and students, the *Basij* have also instituted a systematic practice of annexation of pasture that belongs to peasants and farmers. This annexation can be seen as part of a wider policy of ethnic and religious minority land-confiscation practices carried out by the government across the western borders of Iran, a practice highlighted in a UN report on adequate housing by special rapporteur on adequate housing, Miloon Kothari.[35]

In addition, over the last year, the rise in the number of death sentences has dramatically increased across the country. This disproportionately affects Iran's minorities as they are targeted by

police and often more serious charges are brought against them than their Persian counterparts accused of the same crime, In response to the government crackdowns and revitalisation of anti-Kurd and anti-minority policies, violent protests have broken out in areas inhabited by largely non-Persian Iranian nationals.

THE POWER STRUCTURE OF THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC

It is not only the Kurds who suffer political and human rights violations at the hands of the Iranian state: as serious violations occur across multiple areas of society, the vast majority of the population is negatively affected by the repressive rule of Islamic theocracy. Torture and ill-treatment in detention; unfair trials; arbitrary detention, including indefinite solitary confinement; the ill-treatment and harassment of women and ethnic minorities; the harassment, imprisonment and torture of human rights defenders, civil society activists and students; the silencing of journalists and writers and the regular closure of newspapers are all par for the course in the daily workings of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

At the centre of a number of rights violations sit the judiciary and the Guardian Council, both accountable to the Supreme Leader, as well as 'parallel institutions' which consist of paramilitary groups, plain-clothes intelligence operatives, and the secret illegal prisons and interrogation centres run by intelligence services that hold much of the unofficial power in Iran.[36]

In order to understand the context of the human and political rights situation in which the Kurds of Iran operate, it is important to have insight into the complex power structure of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The Iranian political system is a decentralised power structure made up of loose coalitions influenced by patronage networks. It is fundamentally convoluted, consisting of a vast number of marginally connected yet severely competitive power centres, both formal and informal. The formal power structures are grounded in the constitution and in government

regulations, and take the form of state institutions and offices. The informal power structures include revolutionary foundations, religious-political organisations and paramilitary organisations that maintain their legitimacy through alignment with various factions of Iran's leadership.[37]

Furthermore, a duality of power exists in the formal power structures. For example, the President, although responsible for the day-to-day running of the country, does not determine the guidelines of either domestic or foreign policy. He also has no control over the armed forces or security services. These responsibilities fall to the Supreme Leader, who is by far the strongest centre of power in the Islamic Republic of Iran. This duality of power is not limited to these two actors, and is firmly rooted in the lion's share of the political arena, contributing greatly to political paralysis and inefficiency.

The formal power structure is made up of the major institutions that act as the lifeblood of the regime. These are the Supreme Leader, the President, the Assembly of Experts, the Guardian Council, the Council of Ministers, the judiciary, the Expediency Council, the Parliament, the state-run media, and the commanders of the armed forces, both regular military and Revolutionary Guards. The informal power structure is made up of influential politically motivated clerics who hold positions of power in the formal power structures (particularly the judiciary), other senior non-clerical government actors, members of *bonyads* (charitable foundations), revolutionary organisations, the media, and many other groups positioned between civil society and the ruling powers. All power centres, be they formal or informal, are controlled by an elite leadership of Shi'a clerics and laymen.[38]

The judicial system, which is under control of the Supreme Leader, suffers from structural flaws, especially in regard to its lack of independence, leading to irregular trial procedures.[39] Despite constitutional guarantees to a fair trial, the Revolutionary Courts appear to provide little safeguards to procedure. Trials in these courts, which are responsible for crimes involving political

offences, crimes against God, and other broadly and often arbitrarily defined crimes such as 'sowing corruption on earth' and 'crimes against the Revolution', are often held behind closed doors and without guarantee of legal representation.

Quasi-official organs of repression, known as 'parallel institutions' that have become increasingly open in their brutal assaults against human rights defenders, students, writers and reformists in general, work under the control of the Office of the Supreme Leader. They operate with great impunity, and there are reports that the uniformed police are often afraid to directly confront these plain-clothes agents.

Although Khatami came to the presidency on a campaign that was based heavily on human rights, the political power struggle that existed between the popularly elected reformers, in control of the presidency and parliament, and the hard-liners or clerical conservatives severely curtailed progress on this front. Despite the landslide electoral victories from 1997 to 2002, the reformers were unable to tear down the clerical leadership's repressive policies such as restrictions on freedom of expression, association and political participation.

The unelected Council of Guardians continually blocked bills dealing with women's rights, family law, the prevention of torture and electoral reform bills. The judiciary chipped away at the rule of law through the imprisonment of political activists and the arbitrary closure of periodicals, and agents of parallel institutions generally made life miserable for anyone who did not toe the Islamic line, which is notoriously open to interpretation.

After the election of Khatami in 1997, several new non-governmental organisations were formed, and an Iranian human rights defender, Shirin Ebadi, was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. Nonetheless, continuing waves of politically motivated arrests constituted an attack not only on human rights defenders, but on independent civil society in general. In particular, human rights defenders who work with women, minorities and children are targeted by the Iranian authorities. International human rights

agencies have drawn attention to the plight of some of these human rights defenders, as well as the general widening and deepening onslaught on independent human rights activists.[40] These human right defenders are often accused of working against the regime, facing charges of spreading lies and anti-regime propaganda whenever they speak out. It is suspected that the Iranian government makes a habit of harassing and imprisoning prominent human rights defenders in Iran as a way to silence and intimidate those who seek to draw attention to the situation.

Despite the many frustrations, a human rights discourse is alive and well at the grassroots level in Iran. Indeed, activists in civil society feel it to be the most potent framework for achieving sustainable democratic reforms and political pluralism. However, sectarian strife is an ongoing problem in multiethnic Iran, and is not limited to the Kurdish areas. Sunni parliamentarians have repeatedly complained about the low numbers of Sunnis in high government positions as well as academia, and have criticised the failure of authorities to recognise the rights granted to other practitioners of Islam under Article 12 of the constitution.[41]

HUMAN RIGHTS AND MINORITIES

The situation of religious and ethnic minorities in Iran has been generally poor since before the revolution in 1979, and there exists substantial suspicion in the social, political and economic spheres regarding ethnic and religious minorities. This is based on political uncertainty, excessive centralisation and ideological intolerance of minorities.[42] As with other figures, it is difficult to get an exact understanding on the populations of ethnic and religious minorities, as since 1956 there has not been an official census in Iran that takes into account religious and ethnic minorities. Furthermore, the categories of ethnic and religious minority are not mutually exclusive. Often, if one is a member of an ethnic minority (such as Kurd, Baluchi or Turcomen), one will also be a member of a religious minority (Sunni). As discussed

earlier, the constitution, although granting equal rights in theory, is not upheld, and it is not just the Kurds who suffer under the Iranian state's repressive policies which have been in place since the early 1900s.

As discussed, successive regimes have bolstered national unity based on a national identity that focused on the primacy of Persian ethnicity and Shi'a Islam. As the governments sought to centralise political and cultural life under the overarching Persian identity, any attempt at mobilising minorities outside of the narrowly proscribed state programmes have been resisted by the government as being secessionist in nature. This is described as an implicit policy of assimilation, and Iran has been repeatedly urged by the UN to formulate a national minorities policy that addresses this situation.[43]

All non-Persian ethnic groups in Iran experience at the very least non-recognition.[44] Groups such as Arabs, Azeri, Baluchi and Turcomen all experience repression levelled against them by the regime, most generally as an intolerance of even minor cultural demands, such as the use of minority languages, that manifests itself in the arrest, harassment and torture of those who attempt to assert their cultural identity.

Groups such as the Baluchi, who live in the border regions of south-east Iran and like the Kurds, are predominantly Sunni, have, like the Kurds experienced serious political oppression based on their status as a double minority. Baluchistan, like Kurdistan, remains one of Iran's poorest provinces, and, like the Kurdish regions, it is believed that the government has left it deliberately underdeveloped. Again, like the Kurds, the Baluchis experience cultural, economic, religious and political discrimination. Recently, a number of Sunni Baluchi religious leaders have been imprisoned and killed, and human rights organisations strongly suspect the state to be involved in their deaths.

Religious minorities in Iran also face discrimination and violation of their rights. Despite being Muslim and therefore afforded 'full respect' by Article 12 of the constitution, it is well-

known that Sunnis experience discrimination. A 2002 UN report on the situation of human rights in Iran has noted that underdevelopment appears to coincide with those areas of the country in which Sunnis are the majority.[45] Article 13 of the constitution recognises three religious minorities: Zoroastrians,[46] Christians and Jews, and affords them rights within the limits of the law. These three groups experience severe discrimination despite their constitutionally recognised status, as there exist a number of legal provisions in the civil and penal code that are discriminatory against all non-Muslims.[47] Finally, despite constituting the largest religious minority in Iran, the Bahai's, deemed 'unprotected infidels' by the authorities, are subject to widespread systematic discrimination, and not even granted the theoretical rights to practice their religion. [48]

As discussed earlier, the status of the Kurdish people is as bleak as the rest of the country; some would argue, worse, as they face discrimination due to their status as non-Persians and (for the most part) followers of Sunni Islam. Furthermore, as with the majority of Iranian citizens, they experience violation of their rights of freedom of expression and freedom of association, and lack of equality for women. In general, due to ongoing discriminatory state activities, the Kurds of Iran experience a lack of representation within political and military establishments, the denial of language rights and the underdevelopment of their region leading to economic marginalisation.[49]

HUMAN RIGHTS AND WOMEN

Iranian women suffer from systematic persecution and discrimination rooted in a constitution and laws that refuse to recognise their equality with men. The implementation of a strict doctrinal interpretation of Shari'a law impacts women in nearly every aspect of their lives. Enforced mandatory *hijab* (the scarf covering the hair), the practical accordance of one-half the rights of men in many cases, codified discrimination in the constitution

as well as other laws, and the fact that girls can be married at the age of nine, all contribute to the serious violation of the human rights of all women in Iran.[50] Women in Iran face challenges on two fronts, both in discriminatory laws as well as through patriarchal attitudes in society, which manifest themselves largely in widespread violence against women.[51]

Iran's discriminatory laws are designed to strip women of any real power, relegating them to the private sphere, making entering the workforce difficult. This type of oppression necessarily renders women dependent on men by the state structure as well as community pressure. Women are denied the opportunity to be present in the public sphere, and thus find it difficult to find employment and provide an income for their families, despite having the necessary qualifications. There is a significant lack of access to senior management and professional positions in government. Although female candidates are allowed to run for parliament, the vetting process engaged in by the Guardian Council often disqualifies parliamentary candidates on grounds such as non-belief in the constitution or Islam, and it is not obligated to explain its reasons for disqualification. In January 2004, after the Guardian Council's disqualification of 49 per cent of the parliamentary candidates, nine women managed to be elected. Of these, eight are conservative. During the January elections, women protested the lack of reformist candidates, and many did not vote, as the conservative female legislators who emphasised the traditional role of women in the private sphere did not appeal to those attempting to challenge the status quo.[52]

Despite women's activities to combat the situation, pathways to empowerment remain closed, and women are forced into a situation in which they are dependent on men in a patriarchal society that views the private (home) sphere as women's only rightful space. Iranian women are exposed to high levels of violence, by both domestic and state forces, yet as with so many other areas of Iranian life, there are no statistics available that document the degree of persecution.

By the late 1970s, women in Iran faced pressure and repression at the hands of the corrupt Pahlavi dynasty and its policy of enforced westernisation, including mandatory western dress for women. For some, a return to Islam and the traditional values offered by Khomeini during the Islamic Revolution was seen as a respectful solution to the enforced Westernization of the monarchy.[53]

The Irainian revolution of 1979, which was a populist movement, gained the support of a large cross-section of Iranian society. Women strongly supported it and were instrumental to its success. They believed the message of the Ayatollah Khomeini and his promises of a return to a time when women were respected and that they would be more valued in the Islamic society that would take the place of the corrupt regime of the Shah.

Apart from politicized women, including intellectuals and feminists, who believed the revolution would signal an end to the western domination of their country and felt let down by the failure of western feminism and enforced secularisation, others supported the revolution for more practical reasons, believing in the promises of cheaper water and electricity, and a more equal distribution of oil profits.[54]

According to the supporters of Khomeini, westernisation, secularisation and modernisation had stripped Iranian women of the rights, respect and dignity afforded to them in Islam. The way to regain their rights, dignity and respect was to support the creation of an Islamic Republic. The way that they could aid the revolution was to show their support by donning the *chador* (*hijab*), as a public display of support for the revolution. Many women embraced this idea, and returned to the veil as a way to assert their rights.

Unfortunately, as with the post-revolution situation of the Kurds, the situation for women soon took a turn for the worse. Almost immediately Khomeini began a series of extremely anti-women activities, in effect codifying their subordination. Shortly after the onset of the revolution, compulsory veiling for women

became the law. The chadored woman that had become the public symbol of the Islamic Revolution was too powerful a symbol to be lost. The concept of choice was gone, and the promised dignity and respect turned into massive human rights violations, including public rapes, beatings and executions for women who did not obey the new laws.

In addition to the mandatory veiling, all female judges were fired, and draconian laws known as the Qassas, that negated women's rights to justice, were implemented.[55] Reprisals for transgressions were harsh, including beatings, imprisonment, or having acid thrown in their faces by bands of roving gangs who were authorised by law to monitor public morality. Needless to say, the women who had embraced the revolution were dismayed by this turn of events, and were the first to stage large-scale protests. Despite threat of serious bodily harm, women took to the streets throughout 1979 to protest the mandatory veiling and Qassas laws, but to no avail.

The election of Mohammed Khatami ushered in some changes for women. However, they were slow to happen, and often blocked by hard-liners. As is the case in situations in which the only source of legitimacy derives from Islam, it is next to impossible to support or attempt to implement any changes that are seen by the status quo powers as being illegitimate, thus any demands for change must be made within a religious, culturally authentic framework. This fact makes any sort of change extremely difficult, as it can be rejected as unauthentic. In a country such as Iran in which the President has to answer to the clerics, even he has to tread carefully, so as not to appear a tool of the West.

KURDISH WOMEN

The oppression that Kurdish women in Iran face is deep and multifaceted. Not only do they have to deal with the previously discussed burden of religious, political, economic and cultural discrimination, they also have to deal with the tremendous pressure

facing all women living under the oppressive state. Furthermore, Kurdish women face patriarchal oppression caused by traditional cultural practices based on a conservative way of viewing women within the Kurdish community. This thought process, known as 'honour thinking' has existed for centuries throughout the greater Middle East and Asia, and is present in a high degree within the Kurdish community.

Intrinsic to this way of thinking is the belief that the value of women exists not only as a result of their position as wife, mother or sister but also as the embodiment of the honour of the community of men around her. The placement of women into such a role results from the lengthy history of their placement as the symbol of culture and tradition throughout the patriarchal Middle East. Based on their reproductive capacities, women, through little choice of their own, are forced to take on the role of keepers and transmitters of traditions and group values. When group identity becomes intensified, such as in times of fundamental uprisings, this phenomenon also intensifies, women become the symbol of community and their roles as wives and mothers become emphasised and glorified.[56] In this way, women take on the symbolic role of wives and mothers not only of their immediate family, but of the entire community or nation.

As the Kurds exist in a political and cultural space in which their group identity is perpetually challenged by outside forces, this 'honour thinking' remains highly present, and Kurdish women take on the burden of embodying the culture and tradition of a nation that is denied a right to autonomy by the policies of the states they live in. Concepts such as autonomy, gender equality and sexual freedom are challenged by those of a traditional mindset, as they are viewed as foreign concepts that are aimed at stripping Kurdish women – and, by proxy, the Kurdish people – of their honour, culture and tradition.

This way of thinking has resulted in both 'honour killings' and suicide. Honour killings can be seen as murders in which women and girls are killed by members of their families as the only way

to rectify a perceived insult to the honour of the family in one way or another. These insults are sometimes the result of women attempting to exercise choice over an aspect of their life, such as education, employment or choice of spouse. In other cases they are the result of incidents such as the rape of a woman by state security forces. In Iran, honour crimes are tolerated as, according to Article 23 of the penal code, a woman's murder is justified if she betrays the family's honour. Although it is widely understood that honour killings remain a major problem in the Kurdish community, as with other issues of violence against women, there is little data available concerning the extent to which honour killing is practised within the Kurdish community, partly as a result of a reluctance to discuss this subject.

The frustration that follows from not being allowed to make their own choices has also resulted in a great loss of life through suicide. Faced with the severe psychological and emotional distress that arises from not having the ability to control even a small amount of the trajectory of their existence, Kurdish girls and women can feel driven to exercise the one act of control of their lives that they can. Again understudied, the suicide rate for Iranian women is high compared to western countries, and within the Kurdish regions, there is a disproportionately high rate of female suicide. Kurdish human rights defenders in the region have recently expressed concern over the self-immolation of Kurdish women in Iranian Kurdistan. In early 2006, the Tehran-based Kurdish Human Rights Organisation, published the name of more than 150 Kurdish women in West Azerbaijan province who committed suicide in a nine-month period between 2005 and 2006, the majority of whom practised self-immolation, or setting fire to oneself. Suicide by self-immolation is also occurring throughout Iranian Kurdistan's other three provinces.

Kurdish human rights organisations in the region as well as in western nations are attempting to mobilise the international community into paying more attention to this issue. While the implementation and enforcement of legal reform that addresses

this problem in Kurdish, and indeed all of Iranian society, must occur, this would be only part of the process necessary to truly address discrimination and violence against Kurdish women, thus ensuring their active participation in social, political and economic life. As discrimination and violence is rooted in the aforementioned traditional way of thinking, the need to examine and challenge this pathology at the causal rather than symptomatic level becomes necessary. This is no easy task, as the recognition and subsequent challenging of shortcomings within one's own society is an unpleasant task.

Despite these challenges, Kurdish women have always been in the vanguard when it comes to the struggle for human rights. In eastern Kurdistan today there exist several female journalists, poets, writers and politicians who seek to fight against these practices and shed light on the situation in general, despite the challenging circumstances they find themselves operating in. However, as the state continues to crack down on those who fight for Kurdish women's rights, some fear that the prevalence of arrest and torture could create a situation of fear among women's rights activists. Women activists who have faced torture and arrest call on women to continue their struggle even in the face of such hardships.[57]

THE CURRENT HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN KURDISTAN

Although it is important to note that the human rights situation has deteriorated rapidly across Iran, especially for ethnic and religious minorities, dissidents and women, conditions for the Kurds have become particularly bleak. The situation in Kurdistan remains incendiary and, at the time of writing, Kurdish protests, which began in force in the summer of 2005, continue in various towns and cities in Kurdistan as well as across Iran in general. There has been a major build-up of military forces in the region. Clashes between Kurds and the military, police, and other security forces continue, and with them, loss of life, under

the guise of keeping order. Furthermore, there is an increase in the arrest and sentencing of those only suspected of allegiance with political parties, as well as a noticeable increase in general arrests and death sentences for non-political crimes such as the consumption of alcohol. Finally, there have been a number of suspicious deaths reported.

Peaceful human rights defenders and journalists; indeed, anyone in civil society who questions the government or even many cultural practices, is considered a target by the regime. For those who have not been arrested, harassment and intimidation, such as phone taps and the infiltration of peaceful, non-political NGOs and charity organisations in the Kurdish regions, is commonplace. Even the suspicion of working against the regime, against Islam, or of spreading separatist propaganda (which often includes peaceful expression of cultural identity) is dealt with harshly and swiftly. Due to the large discretionary mandate of the security forces, this means that anyone can be at risk.

This new period of brutal oppression and pressure will almost certainly have long-lasting repercussions on Iranian Kurdistan, as the Iranian Kurds find their day-to-day life becoming ever more difficult. Many qualified Iranian Kurds may find it necessary to leave Iranian Kurdistan in search of better opportunities and a safer existence in the Kurdish regions of Iraq. The current government is increasingly concerned that the spectre of minority dissent will cause a serious security risk to the integrity of the state. They are particularly concerned with the Kurdish regions, as these areas have historically been a stronghold of resistance, and the Iranian Kurds have contributed much to the wider Kurdish national movement. Although all ethnic and religious minorities in Iran have struggled against state repression, it is the Kurds who have presented the most active sustained resistance over time and thus are the most worrisome to the state.

Furthermore, the current regime is well aware of the strength of the wider Kurdish national movement and the challenges posed by the recent geopolitical changes in the region that have acted

in the Kurds' favour. Thus, currently, it is the Kurds in particular who are viewed as both an internal and external threat to the integrity of the state. It is because of this that the state is making a concerted effort to harshly silence any sign of discontent and making an offensive show of force in the Kurdish regions. As we will see in the following chapters, the Iranian government feels threatened by several external factors, including the Iraqi Federal State of Kurdistan and the US-led invasion of Iraq, and as such they are targeting Iranian Kurdistan as part of a well-thought-out policy designed to bolster national unity.

4
Kurdish Cross-Border Cooperation

A COMPLEX SITUATION

Although the concept of 'United we stand, divided we fall' is neither new nor unique to any particular grouping, it maintains a special resonance among the Kurds, as they generally agree that this divisiveness has contributed greatly to their undoing. There are, of course, multiple reasons for the apparent lack of unity. The Kurds have both created strife among themselves, as various tribes battle for hegemony, or differences of opinion have sprung up between rural chieftains and urban intellectuals, and had strife created for them, through the external meddling of powerful states. Despite the Kurds' shared cultural heritage, it is an unfortunate reality that they are often drawn apart by differences. Variant languages and dialects, lack of a common script, religious diversity, mutual distrust, individual greed, conflict between the tribal and urban ways of life, as well as the historic tendency of some Kurdish groups to attempt to speak on behalf of all Kurds, lends to this lack of dialogue.

The relationship between the Iranian Kurds and their counterparts in neighbouring countries is complex and at times divisive. They often find themselves isolated from other Kurds, and are sometimes deemed aloof, as the combined effect of closer cultural affinity to the Persians, geographic isolation and continued government repression has been to turn the Iranian Kurds 'in on themselves, concentrating on their own affairs'.[1] Some assert that this tradition of aloofness dates to divisions in the Ottoman and Persian Empires.[2]

While this chapter focuses on the nature of the internal relations among the Kurds, it is impossible to look at this concept in a vacuum. The reality of the situation is that external state influence, be it Turkish, Iranian, Syrian or Iraqi, has always played a part in the divisiveness of the Kurds. As will be discussed in detail in the next chapter, it has historically been, and still is, common state policy to use the Kurds against each other. Furthermore, as all Kurds have suffered under the assimilation policies of the various regional nation states, they have found themselves unable to assert their own identity within the nation state they live in, let alone reach out to Kurds of other states. Adding to this, the Kurds have not historically had the aid of a powerful nation state behind them, and have suffered from the active underdevelopment of their regions by the state, again be it Iranian, Turkish, Iraqi or Syrian.

HISTORY OF CONFLICT AND COOPERATION

In examining accord and discord among the Kurds, it is important to note that the presence of nation state geographic borders is not the whole story, as most would argue that these borders have been artificially and unnaturally put upon the Kurds and that cooperation or conflict is just as likely to occur on a personal, family or tribal level as it is between Kurds of one nation state and another. The reality of the situation is that state borders are not the primary marker in Kurdish 'links and loyalties', nor in their divisions.[3] There are differences among and between tribes, as well as the previously discussed tension that exists between so-called tribal Kurds and non-tribal or urban Kurds. This discord is neither a new phenomenon nor unique to Iranian Kurds. Tensions among tribes, as well as between urban and rural Kurds, exist wherever the Kurds do, regardless of what nation state they live in.

However, given the location of Kurdistan, existing as a buffer area between empires for centuries, and the fact that direct rule historically was rarely exercised over the Kurds, with the states

or empires in question usually resorting to an indirect rule through chieftains, this relationship between the Kurds and the well-developed states has had tangible effects on the social and political organisation of Kurdistan and the Kurds.[4] The basic truth of the matter is that 'despite the gradual emergence of a pan-Kurdish culture, nationalist policies remain firmly confined within the national borders of the regional states'.[5] Furthermore, there is a long history of tribal leaders aligning themselves with one or another of the sovereign states in question in order to gain leverage, with the threat of shifting loyalties always a possibility. Concurrently, rival leaders could then ally themselves with the other state in question, thus freeing themselves from dependence on the dominant tribe. It is in this context of conflict and cooperation that Kurdish loyalties and rivalries exist today, with fault lines existing not only between nation states but in the conflicting social bases that exist between the tribal and urban-intellectual Kurds.[6]

Despite allegations of aloofness, the Iranian Kurds have historically formed alliances with neighbouring Kurds in the various uprisings that have occurred in the region, and there exists a history of cooperation among the Iranian Kurds and the Kurds of Turkey and Iraq. Sheikh Ubaydullah, the self-proclaimed King of Kurdistan in the Lake Van area of Turkey, began a movement in 1880 which expanded into Iran. At this time, several Iranian Kurd tribal chiefs joined his revolt.[7] Furthermore, tribal revolutionary Ismail Agha Simko had been 'in contact with Kurdish nationalist personalities in Turkey and Iraq and had learned from their ideas'.[8]

The first large-scale example of cross-border Kurdish cooperation including the Iranian Kurds occurs in the time leading up to and during the existence of the Republic of Mahabad. The Komala (as the precursor to the KDP-I) invested large amounts of time and energy into formalising its relations with non-Iranian Kurdish groups and movements. In 1944, Komala representatives met with Iraqi and Turkish Kurdish delegations at the border area of

Mt Dalanpar, at which time the Pact of the Three Borders was signed. This document, however, was more a symbol of unity than a direct plan for action.[9] Despite, this, it remains an important historical occurrence, as this pact is the first evidence of a formal cross-border Kurdish agreement involving the Iranian Kurds.[10]

The most extensive example of cooperation in this period was that of the Barzani assistance in the formation and rule of Mahabad. The Barzani tribe provided invaluable assistance to the Iranian Kurds, mainly in the form of the impressive force of military fighters that were integral to the protection of the republic. During the time in which the Iraqi Kurds, led by the Barzani, launched their insurrection against the Iraqi state, the Iranian Kurds offered their support, either by crossing the border and acting as *peshmerga*, or through the smuggling of supplies in to Iraq. In fact, until the late 1960s, the KDP-I was the only major source of outside aid for the Barzani *peshmerga*.[11]

As has been discussed in previous chapters, this relationship soon soured, as Mullah Mostafa Barzani was increasingly subjected to the influence of the Shah, he found himself under strong pressure to restrict the activities of the KDP-I. In a move that was to isolate the KDP-I as well as embitter greater Kurdish relations and cooperation for the foreseeable future, Barzani issued his unfortunate 'edict' in which the Kurdish national movement was to freeze out the KDP-I in order to focus solely on the success of the revolution in Iraq. Thus, any activity against the Shah (who was supporting the Iraqi Kurd insurgents) was seen as an attack on the Kurdish revolution. Iranian Kurds who had fled to Iraq were returned by Iraqi Kurds who were in collusion with the Shah. Iranian Kurds felt bitter and alone, betrayed by those they had seen as allies. This sense of aloneness contributed to the perceived aloofness, as the Iranian Kurds felt they had no one to trust.

The relationship between the KDP-I and the Barzani-led Iraqi KDP, formed by a schism in the relationship with the KDP-I,[12] developed a major rift based on the opposing government's support. The KDP-I, as a result of being banned by the Iranian

government, moved headquarters to Iraq, where they received help from the Turkish government, as well as Jalal Talabani and his Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) (despite Talabani also receiving support from the Iranian government), who were involved in a battle with Barzani's KDP.

Although the make-up of the KDP-I is similar to the make-up of the PKK, the Iranian Kurdish organisation did not maintain close contact with the PKK as it was a non-revolutionary, non-separatist organisation with the stated goal of fighting for an autonomous Kurdistan within a democratic Iran.[13] In fact, the KDP-I, like the KDP and the PUK, sometimes found itself at odds with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).[14]

However, unlike its Iraqi counterparts, the KDP-I remained for the most part aloof from foreign entanglements. This did change in the 1990s as the KDP-I came increasingly under the influence of the Iraqi Kurdish organisations, specifically the PUK. However, there is disagreement concerning how much support the PUK actually offered the KDP-I. Whatever the level of support offered, it is fairly evident that distrust between the two parties was rife. Closer to home, the Komala and the KDP-I clashed as well, due to their fundamental difference in ideology, exacerbated by the Komala branding the KDP-I a class enemy.[15]

The entire relationship between the Iranian and Iraqi government and their respective Kurdish populations is very complex, with a long history of pitting Kurds against each other and using the Kurds to destabilise one another. By the time the Iran–Iraq War began, the alliances shifted and changed at a sometimes dizzying rate. The KDP-I found itself increasingly alienated from the KDP, who collaborated with the Iranian government in the 1983 incursions into Iranian Kurdish territory.[16] However, the KDP-I did manage to improve its relations with the PUK, who were able to offer the KDP-I assistance when they were attacked by joint Iranian/KDP forces in 1982 and 1983.[17]

Baghdad, for its part, utilised the KDP-I to influence Jalal Talabani and his PUK to cease anti-government activities. The

extent of the support Baghdad offered the KDP-I during the war is a point of contention, and there is disagreement in the literature concerning how much assistance the KDP-I actually received from Baghdad, with opinion ranging from modest to major.[18] At the very least it is evident that Baghdad assisted the Iranian Kurds through the establishment of supply routes to the *peshmerga*. What is clear is that both sides made a concerted effort to involve the Kurds in the war effort, utilising the war to deal with their own Kurdish problems.[19]

Furthermore, over the years there have been divisions in the various organisations themselves. The KDP-I was divided into warring mutually suspicious factions,[20] as was the Komala. All was not completely bleak, as in this point in the Iran–Iraq War the plethora of uprisings and armed struggles that occurred within Iran, Iraq and Turkey led to a rejuvenation of notions of a wider unity and cause, despite the Kurds' many differences. However, the Iran–Iraq War proved disastrous to the Kurds of both states. For their part, the Iranian military waged a major offensive against them that severely weakened the KDP-I and turned Iranian Kurdistan into a war-zone. The Iranian Kurds were isolated not only from the outside world, but from the Iraqi Kurds as well as the other opposition forces in Iran, a period of time that added to the Iranian Kurds' sense of aloneness, as their major ally was Saddam Hussein who, in the fashion of the leaders of the nations in which the Kurds live, was using the Iranian Kurds to his own advantage.

In the past, particularly in the Abdul Rahman Ghassemlou and Sadeq Sharafkandi time periods (1973–1992), there was a definite distance between the KDP-I and other regional Kurdish political organisations, as they attempted to distance the Iranian Kurds from the attempted hegemony of the Iraqi Kurds and attempted to work with rather than against, the Iranian government.[21] However, the KDP-I changed it's stance under the leadership of Mustafa Hejri, who moved the KDP-I closer to the Iraqi Kurds, setting up multiple Iranian Kurdish bases in the Kurdish

autonomous zone. Furthermore, the Komala experienced a split in 2000, leading to the formation of two parties: the Komalah, retaining the mantle of communism, and the Komala, pursuing a more populist leftist progressive stance. For the most part, the Iranian Kurds have focused overtly on finding a peaceful solution to their problems with the Iranian government, and have spent much time and effort attempting to work with rather than against the Islamic government through the Khatami period.

This has necessarily isolated them from those Kurdish organisations that advocate a more militaristic approach to dealing with the various governments in control of the regions they live in. While there is always the possibility that the swiftly changing nature of the geopolitical realities of the major states in the region with Kurdish populations (greater opportunities in Iraq and possibly Turkey, coupled with bleaker opportunities in Iran following the election of Ahmadinejad) may cause this to change, it appears that for now, the majority of Iranian Kurds, perhaps growing weary of asking for relatively little and having even that denied them while at the same time observing the opportunities available in neighbouring Iraqi Kurdistan, still maintain hope of finding a peaceful solution based on dialogue.

THE CURRENT STATE OF NASCENT ACCORD

Although political and ideological differences will always remain, it appears evident that the Iranian Kurdish parties understand the need for dialogue and cooperation among themselves, and are making concrete steps to set aside their differences and work towards forwarding a united front. This recognition of the importance of dialogue and cooperation is not limited to the Iranian Kurdish parties, as we see a move towards cooperation between and among the individuals and institutions of Iraqi Kurdistan as well.

Thus, despite the historically present low level lack of dialogue, it is evident that the Kurds have seen that they cannot achieve

their goals without having Kurdish unity. Although at present there is not yet a united front when addressing issues with the international community, this too is changing. Although we are in no way suggesting that a cohesive Kurdish unity exists at the moment, we can say that it appears that the Kurds are moving towards this unity, as they realise that despite the challenges facing them – divided by four countries, surrounded by enemies and lacking in experience of international relations – this unity must occur.

5
Iranian Kurds and Regional Geopolitics

THE KURDISH ISSUE

Caught between the competing states of the region, we have already shown how the Kurds of Iran have found themselves subject to the vagaries of politics. Not only have the Kurds been the losers by proxy, they have also been the direct target of persecution, too often becoming the pawns used by the regional state powers that transcribe the borders of Kurdistan.

The importance of the Kurdish issue, be it one of intrastate or domestic containment of Kurdish nationalism (defined in the literature as the 'Kurdish problem'), or inter- or trans-state challenges posed by Kurdish nationalism (the 'Kurdish question') cannot be overstated.[1] Indeed, the combined Kurdish problem and question has been of foremost importance informing the relations and foreign policy of the states in the region, particularly Turkey, Iran and Syria.

The Kurdish question has informed regional dialogue since before most of the modern nation states existed, indeed acting as the 'dominant factor during the imperial phase of Turkish-Iranian relations from 1501–1925'.[2] It also exists as one of the few areas that often belligerent states of the region are able to reach an agreement on, as historically suspicious and uncooperative countries such as Iran, Turkey, Iraq and Syria have been able to overcome their mutual distrust to agree on a common policy of thwarting Kurdish calls for recognition of their rights and identity.[3]

We have already discussed the vigour the Iranian state (as well as the other states in the region) displays for meddling into the internal Kurdish problems of its neighbours in an attempt to

stir up discontent, with the end goal of increasing the internal instability of the state in question. Despite this manipulation of the Kurdish problem, the states in the region have cooperated on ensuring the control of the Kurdish question, agreeing that the Kurdish nationalist movement presents a direct challenge to the states in question.

The type of relationship that exists among the states of the region, particularly Turkey and Iran (as the two major regional powers), is complex. In theoretical terms, the type of relationship that exists among the states of the region with Kurdish populations has been described as omni-balancing, a theory that allows for a focus on internal as well as external threats to a regime.[4] In more general terms, a relationship such as this is one in which leaders of these types of states will cooperate with other sometimes rival states on certain issues in order to focus their resources on threats that they see as more challenging. Thus, leaders of these states, or, moving to the unit level of analysis, the states themselves, will make individual alignment decisions based on whatever threat they view as most salient, be it internal or external. This allows for states such as Iran, Iraq, Syria and Turkey, who have historically been enemies, to form coalitions on certain matters, while still acting as belligerents in others.

The Kurdish issue transcends the boundaries between internal and external, with the 'Kurdish problem' representing an internal threat, and the 'Kurdish question', an external one.[5] As we will show, the Kurdish question, which has historically been important for all the states in the region with a Kurdish population to varying degrees, has informed relationships between these states in a multifaceted manner, aiding cooperation while at the same time causing conflict.

IRAN AND TURKEY

Despite the extremely complex and historically belligerent nature of the relations between Iran, Turkey, Iraq and Syria, cooperation

among the states of the region, particularly Iran and Turkey, has existed since the end of the First World War. This cooperation has been manifested mainly through the formulation of treaties, one of the primary ways in which sovereign nation states voluntarily enter into relationships that potentially compromise their independence.[6] As early as the 1920s, Tehran was so concerned with the uprisings that were occurring within its own borders as well as in neighbouring nations that it forwarded the idea of a joint Turko-Iranian cooperation against the Kurds. This mutual agreement was short-lived: an incident in which Turkish soldiers, who entered Iran in pursuit of Kurds who had fought in the Sheikh Said rebellion, were captured by the Kurds, led to the withdrawal of the Turkish ambassador to Tehran.

The Kurds, for their part, passed freely between Turkey and Iran throughout the 1920s, causing much consternation to the states in question, who were constantly engaged in low-level bickering fuelled by Turkish accusations of alleged support of the Turkish Kurds by the Iranians. In 1927 the tense situation led to the expulsion of the Iranian ambassador from Turkey.[7] The Turks believed the Iranians were tactically trying to play the 'Kurdish card', supporting Turkish Kurds in order to destabilise Turkey, keeping the government busy with internal problems, thus gaining leverage in the territorial disputes the two states were engaged in.

It was at this point, specifically surrounding this issue, known as the Ararat rebellion, that Turkish-Iranian relations reached a watershed, as the Turko-Iran Frontier Treaty was signed in 1932, an agreement, that, with minor adjustments made in 1937, still stands. The major purpose of this treaty was to place the eastern slopes of Mt Ararat under Turkish control, as Kurdish rebels were using this area as a haven against the state in their uprising. In return, Iran was ceded a parcel of land. Two other treaties quickly followed between the two states.

In July of 1937 another major treaty was to follow, as Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Afghanistan entered into a treaty of non-aggression

known as the 'Sadaabad Pact' – an agreement in which, Afghanistan notwithstanding, the issues of the Kurds focused heavily, as four of the ten Articles agreed upon were concerned with the need to control the Kurds.[8] Thus, from the formation of the Turkish Republic in 1923 throughout the decades leading up to the Iranian rebellion, the two states engaged in cooperation against the Kurds, both fearing the results that an independent Kurdish state could have on their own territorial integrity and security.

Turkey and Iran's relationship changed in a fundamental manner as a result of the Iranian Revolution in 1979, as both countries placed foremost interest on the Islamist and Kurdish questions in their relations.[9] Primarily, Turkey was worried that the Islamic currents surrounding the revolution, if too successful, would spill over into its territory. This was an option Turkey could ill afford, as at the time it was in a state of near civil war itself. Since 1973, Turkey had entered a period of disastrously weak coalition governments, and was in an extremely dark time of political paralysis and violence. The inability or unwillingness of the state to contain this violence led to a period of constant public fear which culminated in the 12 September 1980 coup, leading to a severe curtailing of freedom and civil liberties; particularly those of the Kurds and anyone associated even remotely with the left.

Conversely, Ankara was worried that if the revolution failed, Iran would become fragmented, leading to the possible formation of a Kurdish state and thus fanning the flames of the Kurdish national movement in it's own borders. This was a problem Turkey was already worried about, as it was already following events in Iraq in relation to the same issue. The looming spectres of Kurdish and Islamic nationalism caused Turkey to take a cautious stance towards Iran, which was tempered by Turkey's belief that the onset of the Iran–Iraq War brought with it the opportunity for increased trade revenues. These occurrences led to Turkey's pursuit of three major policies in regard to its relations with Iran in this period: (1) to coexist peaceably, (2) to maintain neutrality in the

Iran–Iraq War, and (3) to take advantage of the war for economic gain.[10] Furthermore, there was a tactic understanding that Turkey wanted to revisit the two states' policies on the Kurds.

Iran, on the other hand, deeply mired in war, was interested primarily in the maintenance of relations, be it (1) maintaining Turkey's war-time aid and ensuring Ankara did not tilt favour to Iraq in the war, or (2) maintaining good relations with Turkey to balance its political isolation in the international community as well as to lessen Turkish interest in fanning Azeri nationalist aspirations.[11]

The Kurdish issue influenced relations between the two states in this period, primarily through the issue of Turkey's desire to control the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). The 1980 coup in Turkey had had a profound impact on Kurdish rights activism, and had consolidated the fractured resistance movement of the 1970s, bringing about the rise in influence of the PKK who dominated the Kurdish nationalist movement in the 1980s. The PKK initiated a phase of overt guerrilla warfare against the repressive Turkish state in 1984, which led to harsh reprisals from the Turkish military, ultimately lasting over a decade and claiming the lives of tens of thousands, mainly civilians. Thus, at this period in time, the Turkish government was extremely concerned with the threat of outside support for the PKK, and their foreign policy concerns with Iran reflected this. Multiple issues were at play, with Turkey desperately needing Iran to cease support of the PKK, be it the provision of weapons, territory for bases, or aid in negotiations either with the PUK, the KDP or state actors in the area, such as Syria.[12] Iran, while dealing with less of an internal Kurdish problem than the Turks at this time, was still concerned with keeping its own Kurdish population in check, as evidenced by the brutal crackdown on the Kurds living in Iran during the early years of the war.

After the Iran–Iraq War, areas of mutual concern for Turkey and Iran included: (1) the desire for the sharing in oil and gas revenues (primarily through pipelines); (2) the need to temper

nationalist expansionary aspirations in Central Asia, as the post-Soviet emergent states could easily fall under both states spheres of influence; (3) the need to agree on spheres of influence in northern Iraq. With regard to this final issue, Tehran's main concern was the possibility of Ankara pushing its security perimeter closer to Iran than it already was, as well as the Iranian desire for Turkey to steer well clear of its Azeri population. Ankara's major concern was that Tehran would support the formation of an independent Kurdish state in northern Iraq, as this would encourage the Turkish Kurds, who have historically been and continue to be much more bellicose than the Iranian Kurds, to seek autonomy.[13] Of course, it was never Tehran's intention to support an independent state, but it was in the Iranian state's interest to allow Ankara to perceive this as a possible threat, in order to use it as a bargaining tool.

This need to dampen the nationalistic aspirations of the Kurds was tempered by their shared desire not to see the Kurds become so weak that Saddam Hussein could manipulate them to his own advantage. Furthermore, both states feared an influx of Kurdish refugees. Finally, Iraq had become a neutral ground in which these two states, primarily through meddling with the Iraqi Kurds, could engage in a proxy rivalry, indulging their mutual belligerency without compromising their own territory.[14] This behaviour has unfortunately fuelled intra-Kurdish rivalries, aiding in the destabilisation of the region as well as considerable loss of life.[15]

After the First Gulf War and the creation of the autonomous entity in Iraq, Tehran and Ankara were in even greater agreement about the need to prevent the emergence of an independent Kurdish state. Despite having to accept the formation of the autonomous region, both states carried out military campaigns in the region, and Ankara, in the end, prodded along by US influence, supported the safe haven and 'Operation Provide Comfort' (OPC) more than Tehran, who viewed OPC as another example of western encroachment in the region. Tehran also saw the safe haven as a potential safe zone for any number of anti-

state groups, such as the People's Mojahedin of Iran (PMOI), the KDP-I and the Komala.

From the early 1990s, Iran and Turkey, along with Syria, the other regional state with a sizeable Kurdish population, entered into an agreement of sorts in which a series of security protocols were created with the purpose of preventing the formation of an independent Kurdish state and circumscribing Kurdish national movements in Europe and the greater Middle East. These measures called for tripartite meetings of the respective foreign ministers every six months, as well as more frequent meetings between lower-level officials.

The types of protocols signed were such that no state would permit the existence of an organisation that was deemed 'terrorist' on their soil. These protocols affected the PKK more than any of the Iranian Kurdish organisations, as their implementation led to Iran turning over several PKK members to Turkey. For its part, Ankara moved against the PMOI that were based on Turkish soil. By the autumn of 1994, Ankara and Tehran were moving closer, this new alliance based largely on their common interest in limiting Kurdish aspirations.

Although relations between these three countries were often acrimonious, they did manage to agree on one issue at this time: the necessity of preventing the formation of an independent Kurdish state. Furthermore, Iran and Turkey went on to develop clear spheres of influence in Iraq, the internecine fighting between the PUK and KDP causing them to be drawn respectively to Iran and Turkey.

However, despite the tripartite agreements aimed at solving the Kurdish question, each state continued its clandestine involvement in stirring up its neighbours' Kurdish problem: Syria offered refuge to the fleeing Abdullah Ocalan, leader of the PKK; the Turkish military, for its part, conveniently left arms lying around near KDP-I outposts in Iraq; and Iran, at the very least, ignored PKK activities in its territory while openly supporting their presence in Iraq.

Regardless of these occurrences, the mutual desire to curb Kurdish nationalist aspirations led to greater cooperation between the states, as regular meetings occurred at multiple levels within the states in question. Throughout the early 1990s the relationship experienced major fluctuations, as the two states become mired in their bid for spheres of influence in Iraqi Kurdistan. Although the talks fell apart in the second half of the 1990s, due primarily to accusations levelled at Iran concerning attempts to stir up support for the Islamist movement in Turkey, the states remained in negotiation, and by mid-1997 Turkey and Iran had reached an understanding.

The US-led war on Iraq in 2003 brought about a profound change in the relationship of Iran, Syria and Turkey.[16] To say that the spectre of increased autonomy and possible future independence for the Kurds of Iraq was worrisome would be an understatement. In July 2004, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan travelled to Tehran, at which time Iran declared the then Kongra-Gel (PKK) a terrorist organisation and vowed to crack down on Kongra-Gel/PKK activity in the borderlands. This was a major concession on the part of Tehran, who had been using the PKK as a bargaining tool for decades. United in their intransigence, these three states drew closer together, and continue to do so, as panic causes them to continue in their uneasy alliance. Further changes in the relationship between Iran and Turkey since the 2003 invasion will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

IRAN AND IRAQ

Arab (and by proxy Iraqi) and Iranian relations have been strained since the defeat of the Persians by the Arabs in the seventh century.[17] These tensions continued, heightening at the end of the Ottoman Empire, as the subsequent formation of independent Arab states led to the pan-Arab movement that considered Iran and Iranian nationalism to be a threat to Arab

unity of the region. Furthermore, both states vied for control of the region, each wanting to be the prime mover in Middle Eastern politics and economics. During the 1920s and early 1930s, Iran and Iraq cooperated in putting down ethnic tribal insurgencies in each country and engaged in a troubled coexistence. There was a brief respite to the general hostilities as the period between the independence on Iraq in 1932 and the overthrow of King Faisal II in 1958 became one of ideological congruence between the two states. Both allies of western nations and both led by authoritarian monarchies, the two countries maintained generally good relations. However, the Iraqi coup of 1958 saw the relationship deteriorate as the radical Arab nationalism of the successive Iraqi regimes clashed with the conservative Persian nationalism of Mohammed Reza Shah.[18] The Islamic Revolution of 1979 saw the relationship deteriorate further, culminating in the war between the two countries in 1980–88.

Although the Kurdish question has greatly influenced relations between these two states, the 'Kurdish card' as it is called, was not overtly played by Iran or Iraq against each other until the overthrow of the monarchy in Iraq in 1958. With the ascension to power of a pan-Arab nationalist Ba'ath party, Tehran soon saw the Kurdish issue as a powerful military and political weapon to use against Baghdad.[19] However, the use of the Kurds as a political weapon was not limited to Iran, as Iraq attempted to settle the Kurdish question by courting Barzani.

Despite periodic instances of limited cooperation, the relations between Iran and Iraq have been much more overtly bellicose than those of the other countries in the region, culminating, as discussed, in the Iran–Iraq War, which lasted eight years and nearly destroyed the two countries. The weak understanding between the two nations was upset in the 1970s for a variety of factors, including, but not limited to, Iran's growing relationship with the Soviet Union. Furthermore, Iran's open support for the Kurdish insurgency in Iraq caused increasing tensions, and even

as early as the mid-1970s a direct confrontation between the two states occurred.[20]

Unsurprisingly, the Kurds have often been used as pawns or bargaining chips by the various governments of Iran and Iraq. As discussed, since the 1960s Tehran actively supported the Iraqi Kurds (primarily the Barzani) in order to antagonise the Iraqi state. Just as often, however, Tehran would discontinue its support of the Kurds in order to extract concessions from Iraq, a case in point being the humiliating Algiers agreement in 1975, in which territorial concessions involving the Shatt-al-Arab waterways were wrested from Iraq by Iran. Baghdad sought an end to Iranian support of the Kurds in Iraq through this agreement, paying an extremely high territorial price, while Iran made no practical concessions save the promise to back off from supporting the Barzani.

Iraq's simmering resentment over this agreement, which consisted of Iraq conceding its only access to the Persian Gulf to Iran, which already had plenty of access to the Gulf, is widely recognised as one of the major precursors to the Iran–Iraq War and is one example of the ways in which the Kurdish issue influenced the hostile relationship between Iran and Iraq.

In fact, relations between Iran and Iraq have been greatly informed by the Kurdish question, and events that occurred in Iranian Kurdistan maintained a considerable impact on several decisions made by the Iraqi government, including Saddam Hussein's decision to go to war with Iran. Although he was more than happy to see the 1979 Islamic Revolution occur, as it weakened Iran, he was worried by the Kurdish uprising that took place at this time as well as the apparent inability of the fledgling Islamic regime to contain it. Worried about a spill-over into its territory, Baghdad, unlike Ankara, was inclined to go to war with Iran in order to protect its Kurdish regions, as well as to ensure that the Kurds did not use the revolution as an opportunity to unite. Furthermore, Saddam adopted a policy of supporting the KDP-I as a counterbalance to Iran's support of the Barzani, thus

ensuring the continued division of the Kurds into warring sub-factions.[21] During the heart of the war Saddam's support for the Iranian Kurds allowed them to resist the Iranian military's huge offensive into Iranian Kurdistan. Iran, for its part, launched a major attack in Iraq, aided in no small way by the Iraqi Kurds, who were repaid by Saddam with the horrific Anfal campaigns after the war ended, which included the use of chemical weapons against military and civilian targets, leading to the death of what is believed to be 180,000 people.[22]

Saddam Hussein's use of chemical weapons was not limited to his own borders, and the Iranian state asserts that nearly 100,000 Iranians were victims of the Iraqi chemical attacks that occurred between 1980 and 1988.[23] Among these victims were the Kurdish residents of over 70 towns and villages. After Anfal, a stream of refugees crossed the border into Iran, where they were housed in one of the 94 refugee camps and reception areas that were established. Furthermore, Iran was one of the three states (along with France and Turkey) that pushed for the adoption of a UN Security Council resolution (688) to condemn the actions of the Iraqi government.[24]

AN IRAN–IRAQ RAPPROCHEMENT?

The 2003 invasion of Iraq and subsequent removal of Saddam Hussein from power created a major shift in the geopolitics of the region, and it is generally understood that the Islamic Republic of Iran is exerting major efforts into deepening its hold on the social, political and economic fabric of post-Saddam Iraq, especially in the Shi'ite areas, where it has been cultivating ties for decades.[25] This has far-reaching consequences that necessarily affect Kurds throughout the region.

There are allegations that Iran utilises all instruments available to be a very active player in Iraq, cultivating ties both wide and deep within the Shi'a community, providing assistance to figures such as Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani, as well as to tribes, militias,

interest groups, local notables and secular political parties in a bid to enhance its influence.[26] Iran has invested much time and effort in influencing the new Iraqi government, and there is also evidence that Iran is providing weapons and money to Shi'ite militant groups and running extensive intelligence-gathering operations with the apparent aim of fostering a Shi'ite-run state friendly to Iran.

In the time leading up to the 2003 invasion, up to 46 Iranian infantry and missile brigades moved to fortify the border. Positioned among them were units of the Badr Corps, the Iranian created and funded military arm of Iraq's largest Shi'ite party, the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), that has been in existence since the 1980s. The Badr's mission was to enter during the invasion to seize towns and government offices, filling the vacuum left by the collapse of Saddam's regime. The Badr is now arguably the most powerful party in Iraq, and the current interior minister is the former head of the Badr Corps.[27] For their part, the SCIRI strongly denies claims that Iran is sending 'terrorist' fighters into Iraq, contending that those who allege that Iran is negatively influencing affairs in Iraq simply do not want the two states to have close relations.[28] Leaving aside issues of semantics related to the word 'terrorist', it is evident that in southern Iraq, fundamentalist Shi'ite militias funded and armed by Iran openly impose restrictions on the daily lives of Iraqis, banning alcohol, closing nightclubs and generally constricting the rights of women.[29] Many believe that the Islamic parties hold much of the real power in the south, and that Iran's influence in the region is clearly apparent.[30] Iran has also become a rival to the United States in reconstruction, especially in the Shi'ite south. While US funding has focused heavily on infrastructure, the majority of Iran's assistance has centred on more visible immediate access public services, such as community and health centres.[31]

While the more nefarious meddling is viewed negatively, many non-Kurdish Iraqis see Iranian influence as a way to offset the

overwhelming presence of the United States and Britain since the 2003 invasion. Furthermore, many Iraqis view Iran as a more reliable ally in the long term than the US and feel that, given a confrontation between the US and Iran, the sympathies of Iraqi Shi'ites would lie with Iran despite their mixed feelings. In addition, many in the non-Kurdish south view Iranian influence as part and parcel of daily life, given the close geographic, religious and social ties.[32]

Despite all this, Iran's involvement in Iraq is not monolithic in nature, and is often as divisive as its own political scene, encompassing a wide range of actors with varying objectives in different parts of the country. It is currently unclear what factions within Tehran's security apparatus are behind the different strategies, as well as the extent to which the top leaders have endorsed the more invasive actions. The two countries do have different visions of their future, as most Iraqis, including Grand Ayatollah Sistani, don't believe in the idea of rule by jurisprudence, or *veliyat-e faqi*.[33] Furthermore, important figures such as Aws al-Khafaji, aide to clerical leader Muqtada al-Sadr, have made public entreaties for Iran to cease it's meddling in the affairs of Iraq.[34]

The relationship between the two countries is not being pursued unilaterally by Iran, as Iraq's Shi'ite-led government has also taken steps to tie the two countries closer together. In July 2005, a ten-minister delegation sent to Tehran led by Prime Minister Ibrahim al-Jaafari that concluded a number of agreements to strengthen ties between the two nations, including a plan to construct an export oil pipeline from Basra to the Iranian port of Abadan, a measure that will give Iran a significant control over southern Iraq's most important strategic resource. Previously, an agreement on military cooperation that includes Iranian training of the Iraqi armed forces occurred.[35] During the constitutional deliberations in 2005, Iraq's Shi'ite leaders, opposed by the Kurds, pushed to include Persians as a named minority in Iraq's constitution, a symbolically important recognition of a shift in Iraq's identity.[36] The winning coalition of Shi'ite groups, made up primarily of

the SCIRI and Da'wa parties, maintain extremely close military, political and ideological ties with the regime in Tehran. A primary consequence of this closeness is the inevitable emergence in the Middle East of this new alliance between Tehran and Baghdad.[37] However, not all in Iraq, especially the non-Shi'ite elements, are happy with the situation, as the Sunni-Shi'ite rift is widening and Sunni militant groups such as those belonging to Abu Musab al-Zarqawi have declared war on the Badr Corps.[38]

While it is mainly western forces that have accused the Iranians of interference, many Iraqi government officials, including in 2004 the then President, Ghazi al-Yawir, and Defence Minister Hazim al-Sha'lan al-Khuza'i, as well as King Abdullah of Jordan, have made statements to that effect.[39] Iran, for its part, repeatedly denies having anything to do with any of the violence in Iraq, and has repeatedly stated that it is only attempting to bring stability to the region and dismisses reports of interference as baseless.[40] Iran and Iraq have also been brought closer with regard to the Kurdish issue. They are engaged in ongoing consultations concerning the Kurds, as the Iranian state is uncertain about the development of the Kurdish issue in Iraq and is concerned that the situation in Iraq will influence the Kurds living in Iran to rise up against the state.

IMPLICATIONS FOR REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

The geopolitical shifts have had far-reaching consequences, not only altering the balance of power in the region, thus affecting the Kurds as well as Iran's foreign relations with her immediate neighbours, but also impacting on the relations between Iran and the United States and European Union. It is obvious that Tehran views increased influence in Iraq as presenting many benefits, many related to its relations with the US. For example, if Washington threatens action against Iranian nuclear facilities, Iran could create significant problems in Iraq by mobilising Shi'ite militants to move against the US. Furthermore, it deals a

serious blow to the US strategy of containing Iran, and counters the American presence in the region. It could also could restore security to Iran's western borders, which would allow Tehran to concentrate military and security resources in the south, the area where a US offensive, were it to occur, would most likely be launched.[41] A close alliance with Iraq will benefit Iran in other ways as well, offering a direct land link with its closest regional ally, Syria, as well as a base from which to conduct closer relations with the rest of the Arab world, circumventing the Syrian Ba'ath regime.[42]

An Iran–Iraq rapprochement will have mixed consequences for the relationship between Turkey and Iran. On one hand, Turkey will welcome the increased influence insofar as it strengthens the territorial unity of Iraq as the Iranian support of Iraqi Shi'ites will undermine Kurdish drives for possible independence, as both the Iranian and Turkish state, as discussed previously, are united in their opposition to Kurdish independence.[43] However, this is tempered by Turkey's fear that the new regime in Tehran will destabilise the region by exporting the revolution in earnest, attempting to remake Iraq into its own theocratic image, thus destabilising the region further and perhaps fanning the flames of Islamism in Turkey, a problem ill-afforded at the moment.[44] Despite these fears, the major concern of both states is the possibility of a Kurdish state in the region.

Turko-Iranian relations in general, as discussed earlier, have been marked by co-operation and crisis, as both states contend for political space in the region.[45] Although both states represent mid-level regional powers, Turkey has, for a number of reasons, found itself in a stronger position.[46] For most of the period leading up to the invasion of Iraq, Turkish and Iranian relations focused on the US plans to attack Iraq and how this might change the geopolitical structure of the region. Although Turkey and Iran continued their security and cooperation discussions, centred around the need to check Kurdish aspirations for an independent state, a second major challenge to Iran posed by this event was

the need to limit the possibility of increased Turkish influence in south Kurdistan (northern Iraq) as it did not want Turkey controlling the vast resources or pushing out its security perimeter. In fact, it appears evident that Iran's interest in checking Turkish influence in Iraq was as important as the need to discourage an independent Kurdish state in the region.[47] As Turkey became increasingly 'supportive' of the KDP in northern Iraq, Iran moved to check this influence by increasing its 'support' for the PUK, particularly in the region surrounding Kirkuk.[48] However, Iran made sure it supported several Islamic groups in the region in order to limit the power of the PUK.

Continuing the ongoing agreement between the two states to wage a united struggle against Kurdish nationalist aspirations, Iran and Turkey formalised an agreement at the end of July 2004. The two states signed a security agreement that included the placement of rebels opposed to the two states on each other's terrorist list.[49] Turkey, for its part, is attempting to increase its influence in Iraq in different ways from the Iranians: investing heavily in Iraq, attempting to solve the issue through a massive transfusion of capital, and trying to develop cordial relations with the Kurdish leaders in Iraq along the way. As Turkey moved closer to the US and Israel in the early part of the 2000s, Ankara distanced itself from Tehran and contention outpaced cooperation between the two states. As the Turks became bigger regional players, the Iranians appeared to be struggling to maintain their place in the regional hierarchy.[50] It appears that the uneasy alliance between Turkey and Iran cooled during 2005 due to the increasing closeness of Turkey and the US, as well as Turkey's increasing economic investment into Iraqi Kurdistan.

In 2006, however, the situation took a different turn, as during the summer months Iran and Turkey both sent massive contingents of troops and artillery to their respective frontiers, sealing off the borders, as well as violating the sovereignty of Iraq by carrying out significant cross-border military operations, and shelling the villages and mountains of Iraqi Kurdistan. It is believed that

the Turkish armed forces carried out over 50 operations in Iraqi Kurdistan in the spring and summer of 2006, allegedly targeting PKK bases and assets. The Iranians have themselves conducted eight operations, again directed against the PKK and the Party of Free Life of Kurdistan (PJAK) during the same period. It is also believed that Turkey and Iran have cooperated in at least one joint operation.

Although the Turkish and Iranian governments state that these operations were conducted in order to combat guerrilla forces based in Iraqi Kurdistan, it is suspected that they were simply part and parcel of the larger agenda of these states to prevent further development of Iraqi Kurdistan. These actions, of course, will only add to the instability of the Middle East.

The changing reality of the Kurds in Iraq has made it impossible, as much as they may try, for Iran, Turkey and Syria to ignore the situation, and unfortunately it appears that they are currently taking the worst path, that of a refusal to accept democratic pluralism, making them appear isolated and backward-moving. The emergence of Kurdistan as a viable political entity has occurred and, try as they might, they cannot turn back the clock on this, despite their best efforts at cooperation. A successful democratic solution in the Kurdish regions of Iraq could and should be a model for states such as Iran, Turkey and Syria, for indeed the resolution of the Kurdish issue is intrinsic to the achievement of peace and stability in the region.

The Kurdish issue transcends the borders of the states in question, and is intrinsically related to the stability of the Middle East in general. Until the Kurdish question and issue are resolved the region will be in a state of constant instability, for when a population is denied its rights, it is necessarily a destabilising influence as the population in question will be engaged in fighting state powers in order to gain the rights they deserve. Furthermore, the states in question will seek military solutions that result in a loss of life and resources, both for the states and the population they are fighting.

Finally, there is considerable geostrategic importance to the Kurdish areas, with the Kurds controlling a significant amount of the country's oil and water resources. Until the issue is resolved, anxiety to control the resources will add to the instability.[51] As discussed previously, Iran, Syria and Turkey maintain a common policy towards development of Kurdish autonomy in the region and it is clear that they do not want to see an autonomous Kurdistan within their own borders, nor an independent Kurdistan rising out of the ashes of Iraq. The Kurds, however, are becoming increasingly savvy in their political and economic affairs, and are no longer allowing themselves to be the unwilling pawns of the state powers in the region. They have learned the lessons of the past, and recognise the need to control their own political affairs as well as the significant economic resources of Kurdistan, no matter what pressure is placed upon them by outside forces. The situation continues to change, and although the future remains unknown, it is evident that the Kurds have learned from the past, much to the chagrin of the nation states of the region.

6
Iran's Relations with the West

THE IRANIAN OUTLOOK

Iran experienced a dramatic shift in foreign outlook following the revolution of 1979. During the reign of Mohammed Reza Shah, Iran maintained strong ties with the west and was seen as a client state of powerful western nations, including the United States. As discussed in previous chapters, modernisation was a key concept in the Shah's vision of the future of Iran, and he welcomed the influence of western nations in order to speed this modernisation along. The impact has been noticeable since Qajar times and the unfortunate exploitation of Iranian resources in this period. However, as much as resentment based on the realisation of the relative weakness of Iran in comparison to the west existed, there also remained a desire to emulate some elements of western scientific, economic and technological achievements through the processes of imitation and change.[1]

In contrast, Ayatollah Khomeini and the revolutionary forces were highly suspicious of western influences, viewing the Shah's 'sell-out' of Iran to western forces as the major reason behind nearly all the problems besetting the country. The spectre of 'The West' loomed large in the Islamic movement in Iran, which can be seen as a protest to the enforced westernisation of the state, as well as a wider challenge to western notions of modernity and implied cultural hegemony.

The main thrust of the doctrine forwarded by Khomeini was based on a belief that the practice of kowtowing to western nations inherently led to disorder and the decline of society at the expense of the 'true Islamic way'. This belief was the base for the many Islamic models of development that emerged as

a critique of modernisation both in theory and practice. This near-universal rhetoric was historically present, and is still used in modern discourse by a number of groups and organisations in Muslim nations who are either attempting to or have succeeded in bringing about change in their respective countries.

Given this worldview, it is unsurprising that post-revolutionary Iran's relationship with western nations would be very different from the Shah's accommodatory policy. In general, Khomeini viewed all superpowers with disdain, maintaining a stance of 'neither east nor west' when dealing with both the United States and the former Soviet Union.[2] Although this policy sought to limit the amount of all outside influence in the country, particular rancour was reserved for the United States, especially concerning the American inability to understand the reasons behind the Islamic Revolution, as well as the perceived bullying nature of the dual containment policy forwarded by the Clinton administration in 1993.[3]

However, despite beginning as a nearly complete rejection of the west, with the United States cast in the role of the 'Great Satan', the reality of the post-Khomeini Iranian worldview is more conciliatory, with Iran building relations with several other nations, in particular Russia, North Korea and the European Union (EU). Relations with the US, however, remain virtually non-existent and, after a modest opening in relations with sayyed Mohammed Khatami during his 'dialogue of civilisations' period, have suffered major setbacks, precipitated by the unfortunate sabre-rattling after 9/11, centred most concretely around President Bush's January 2002 State of the Union address in which he placed Iran, along with Iraq and North Korea, on his infamous 'axis of evil'.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE ELECTION OF AHMADINEJAD

Since the surprise election of hard-liner Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in the June 2005 presidential elections, a major change has

occurred in the internal affairs and foreign policy of Iran. Ahmadinejad, whose election cements the control of all aspects of Iran's formal power structure under the hard-line Islamic clerics, has been swiftly moving Iran on a path of increased radicalism, and has vowed to implement the policies of the Supreme Leader to the letter.

He has characterised his election as ushering in a 'new Islamic Revolution' which he hopes will quickly spread through the world. This type of rhetoric appears to be part and parcel of a new period of a heightened bellicosity on the part of the Iranian government. As discussed, apart from the early days of the revolution, the Iranian government, rhetoric notwithstanding, has not actually expended much effort towards the exportation of revolutionary ideals. On the other hand, Ahmadinejad has stated that Islamic Iran is the model for the future of mankind, that 'leadership is the indisputable right of the Iranian nation' and that Iran would create an Islamic pole with the end goal of uniting the world under Islam.[4]

Ahmadinejad has filled his cabinet with hard-liners, most of whom have close ties with the military and security agencies. These hard-liners have displayed extremely aggressive positions on the nuclear issue and human rights, and it is feared that Ahmadinejad's presidency may stir up trouble in the region, especially Iraq, if he attempts to export his new revolution, disrupting an already problematic situation.[5] Part and parcel of Ahmadinejad's power reshuffling has been to place the nuclear programme under the firm control of the military, and Revolutionary Guard commanders have been placed in charge of many other positions, including political and strategic posts.[6] Furthermore, Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei ordered several key changes designed to tighten his grip at the highest levels of the armed forces, as well as in the *basij*, in late September 2005. Some believe that these changes were enacted in preparation for the possibility of a confrontation with western military forces. Finally, many commanders of the *basij* were put in charge of the Supreme National Security

Council, the key decision-making body on defence and security policies.[7] Ahmedinejad's lack of diplomacy has not gone over well in the international community, as his actions surrounding the nuclear issue have alienated important allies. His actions are increasingly scrutinised by observers both in and outside of Iran, and he is routinely criticised by the likes of his former rivals in the presidential race, such as Hashemi Rafsanjani.[8]

Further jeopardising Iran's standing in the international community was the spate of anti-Israel sentiments emanating from Iran in late October 2005 centred around Ahmadinejad's call for Israel to be wiped off the map. Following widespread international condemnation, including a statement from the UN Security Council, other Iranian officials, including Khamenei, rallied to the defence of Ahmadinejad, stating that he was doing nothing more than reiterating the official stance of the Islamic Republic that had been in effect since the Iranian Revolution.

Events over the past years have brought the world's attention to Iran, mainly through the much-hyped pursuance of nuclear capabilities. The Iranian government remains defiant in the face of western criticism, accusing the west of meddling in the internal affairs of the Iranian state. Iran sees the pursuance of nuclear power as its inalienable right as a sovereign state, and denies that it is attempting to build a nuclear weapon. The situation, which has been simmering for years, has been on the boil since the autumn of 2005, when the US, along with Britain, France and Germany (known as the EU-3) demanded that Iran desist in nuclear activities or face having the matter referred to the United Nations Security Council. Iran, for its part, threatened to withdraw from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and not to allow inspectors into its nuclear sites if brought before the Security Council on charges. Iran further refused to comply with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the United Nations nuclear monitoring agency, which had asked Iran to cease its nuclear programme. Iran has continually maintained that the

pursuance of the formation of nuclear fuel for civilian purposes is its right under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

The situation has divided the international community, with Russia and China reluctant to impose sanctions. The summer of 2006 saw a flurry of activity, including informal and formal discussions and the approval of a package of proposals and incentives backed by the five Permanent Members of the UN Security Council as well as Germany. This package contains a wide range of concessions and economic incentives, including the possibility of the lifting of some of the US trade sanctions in place against Iran. Furthermore, on 31 July the UN Security Council approved Resolution 1696, which calls on Iran to suspend its 'enrichment-related and reprocessing activities, including research and development'.[9] This resolution does not automatically impose sanctions on Iran if it refuses to suspend activities, but it does require the Security Council to hold further discussions before it considers sanctions. As usual, Ahmadinejad has rejected the threat of sanctions. It is apparent that the situation will continue into the foreseeable future.

It is not only the international community that is divided. Iran-watchers as well, while agreeing on the need for a united policy towards Iran, propose differing approaches to what the contents of this policy should be. Some analysts advocate Britain beating the drums of war and backing up diplomacy with threats of military force. This stems from a belief that Britain is acting in a manner that is too soft on Iran, turning a blind eye not only to the nuclear issue, but also to Iran's role in promoting unrest in Iraq and the rest of the region.

Others take a less bellicose approach, maintaining that it is imperative that the US and Europe present a more considerate united front if there is a chance of bringing Iran to the negotiating table and persuading it to change course. It is recommended that the US and EU should offer significant benefits if Iran forgoes its nuclear programme, and that the US should maintain its open support for EU negotiations with Iran as well as declare willingness

to discuss other issues, such as increased relations, economic sanctions and Iran's entry into the World Trade Organisation (WTO). If economic sanctions alone are imposed, it is apparent that they will hurt the average Iranian, leading to dissatisfaction with the government. This will predictably make matters worse, as this could lead to popular protests which in turn could become the excuse for a further crack down by the government in order to keep the peace. History has shown that economic sanctions alone are rarely successful at engendering the desired outcome.

The Iranians, for their part, state that they have lost confidence in the EU, and that they need to be re-convinced of the good intentions of the interlocutors. Furthermore, they have expressed typical outrage at the various international community, IAEA and Security Council statements and resolutions. Government officials have called for a reduction in trade with the EU, as well as the necessity of reconsidering economic ties with those countries that do not support Iran's right to nuclear development. Iranian officials have repeatedly stated that Tehran will not give up its right to the pursuance of peaceful nuclear technology.

IRAN AND THE UNITED STATES

The added US presence in the region, coupled with the possibility of an attack in the future, has increased the already dominant view in Tehran that the United States constitutes a clear threat to Iran's territory, extending from the Persian Gulf to the extensive land border with Iraq. Iran, already the second (after Turkey) major power in the region, would like to expand its influence to become a regional power in Central Asia, north-west Asia and the Gulf. They see US power slowly encircling them, and have little appreciation for US efforts to block pipelines from the central Asian states through Iran. There also exist lingering resentments surrounding US support for Iraq during the Iran–Iraq War. To combat this, Iran has been consistently increasing defence expenditures since 1996. It has received aid in missile-systems development from North

Korea and help with nuclear capabilities from Russia. Finally, Iran deeply resents the general US intervention in an area that it sees as rightly an Iranian sphere of influence.[10] Many Iranians feel that current American policy in the region is an attempt to encircle and isolate Iran, particularly the build-up of US military in central Asia and the invasion of Iraq.[11]

It is understandable that the presence of US forces in the region is cause for concern for Tehran. It is believed that this may have bolstered support for conservative elements, and may have played a part in the election of Ahmadinejad. Furthermore, it may also have been a factor in Iran's desire to develop its nuclear capabilities. Ahmadinejad has forwarded the notion that he has subjects to discuss with Britain, Germany and France and has drawn closer to Russia, North Korea and Venezuela. However, he has snubbed the US, stating that relations with Washington are not the key to the people's problems.[12]

The unexpected difficulties endured in Iraq since the fall of Saddam Hussein in April 2003 have directly led to Tehran taking US pressure with a grain of salt, secure in the knowledge that the US presence in Iraq has been, at times, self-defeating. This situation has boosted Iranian confidence, which has been added to by the government's intractable position with regard to Iran's right to pursue nuclear capabilities. Further adding to Iran's strength is the history of relatively friendly relations between the EU and Iran and the recent wave of EU investments in Iran that help it to circumvent many of the extraterritorial sanctions and laws imposed by the United States.[13] However, in light of the recent troubles surrounding Ahmadinejad's treatment of the nuclear issue, Iran's relations with the EU are quickly souring.

Despite claims to the contrary, Iran clearly is not an 'innocent' who has been grossly mistreated by an evil superpower and has experienced mixed results in its foreign policy. This does not stop Iran from maintaining a long list of grievances against the United States, with meddling in its sovereignty high on the list. Situations as far back as the coup against Mossadegh in 1953

and the subsequent instalment of the unpopular Shah, seen as a puppet of the US, still weigh on the minds of many Iranians who believe that America would yet see Iran as a client state to its interests.

Iranians deeply resent the sanctions imposed on them and the not insubstantial attempts by the US to isolate them from the world. They are particularly upset about the continued refusal of the United States to allow the initiation of negotiations to join the WTO and are using this as a reason to rethink the commitments made in the Paris agreement.[14] They further see the United States as attempting to meddle in Iran's relations with the EU, Russia, China, India, Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states, as well as the many other countries with which Iran has developed diplomatic and other relations since 1979. There is also a pervasive belief that the United States robbed them of wealth and income, not only through sanctions, but through the freezing of Iranian assets. Particular anger is directed towards the US Congress' approval of $20 million in the early 2000s for covert activities with the goal of leadership change, or at the very least an attempt to somehow change the Iranians' worldview, a difficult task indeed. In response, the *majlis* allocated $20 million to fight US activities. Further resentment exists around the US prevention of loans from organisations such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank.[15]

The United States consistently asserts that Iran has interfered in its interests in many parts of the world. The US Department of State has often listed Iran as one of the major sources of state-sponsored terrorism. Furthermore, the January 2002 'axis of evil' analogy is not new. Successive US administrations have painted Iran as a source of 'evil', and in those circles that subscribe to the 'clash of civilisations' mentality there exists wide-ranging fear and distrust of Islam. By and large, the US foreign policy establishment, as well as the mainstream media and, by proxy, the majority of the US public, hold inflexible one-dimensional views about Iran and its scowling mullahs.[16] Currently, it is

unclear what, if anything, the Bush administration has in store for Iran. Although many high-ranking government officials, such as Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, maintain the position that the US is not currently planning an attack on Iran, others, such as Dick Cheney and even George W. Bush himself, have offered comments to the contrary. There appears to be a general consensus among Iran-watchers that despite protestations to the contrary, the current rhetoric is similar to that leading up to the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

Regardless of whether or not an invasion of Iran is being planned, it is clear that the United States should not continue down the same path it has been travelling since the 1970s, that of short-term reactionary policies that compromise an effective, sustainable, thoughtful policy towards Iran.[17] It is evident that a long-term strategy needs to be developed, one that understands the realities of the Iranian situation and does not rely on easy answers or the ascension of a secular regime as panacea.[18]

The United States is heavy in its criticism of Iranian governmental support for terrorism, the suppression of political freedom and the nuclear programme. However, American policy directed towards Iran, mostly in the form of unilateral economic sanctions, has not proven effective at addressing these issues.[19] To date, US policy towards Iran has been mainly focused on ensuring that the Islamic Republic does not acquire a nuclear weapon, due to a pervasive fear that failure in this effort will crucially alter the balance of forces in the region, as well as kill off the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.[20]

It appears that the 'go it alone' policy of unilateral sanctions, as well as the failure of the US and EU to work together on the development of a coherent policy on the nuclear issue, has weakened western strength concerning this issue. Furthermore, the more-than-willing aid emanating from countries such as North Korea and Russia, as well as the perceived US failure in Iraq, has resulted in a stronger Iran. It appears that none of the current policy avenues that the US appears to be considering will

help deal with Iran in a proactive sustainable manner. Although high-level administration officials are known to have argued in favour of military action, it is unclear if this policy is going to be pursued. Along this vein, it has, however, emerged that Bush has given the Defense Department the go-ahead to begin various preliminary actions and develop scenarios for such an attack in a similar fashion to the build-up of the invasion of Iraq.[21]

The Bush administration has also forwarded the possibility of working with 'Iranian democratic opposition forces' in order to topple the current regime. There are clear indications that US government officials have met with opposition forces located outside of Iran, particularly the People's Mojahedin, with the goal of discussing their possible involvement in either commando raids inside Iran or a possible full-scale proxy war, despite their appearance on the State Department's terrorist organisation list.[22] There is no doubt that the formation of a lasting broad and deep support of Iran's democratic movement would benefit the US. Unlike the majority of Middle Eastern Muslim countries, Iran has a viable, indigenous democratic movement that for the most part admires many elements of western politics and culture, and Iranians in general appear open to the US. However, despite this approval, Iran's democratic movement is unwilling to be used as a tool of the US. In order for a lasting dialogue to be created,

> The United States must treat Iran's democracy movement as an independent ally, not a ward. It must respect its autonomy and its political exigencies at home, and most importantly, it must not interfere in the movement by anointing any person, group, or faction. Patronizing the democratic movement by throwing money at it will only serve to strengthen the regime's claims that democrats in Iran are tools of the United States.[23]

There are some in Washington who view the regime in Tehran as incompetent and isolated, on the verge of immediate collapse. This faction advocates a policy of blindly throwing money at the

overseas Iranian media organisations or those whom, with little concrete credentials, make claim to wearing the mantle of the democratic movement in Iran. Furthermore, the United States needs to realise that overt public support of any political faction in Iran will be counter-productive, angering the conservative power centres which would then crack down on the very forces the United States is trying to aid.[24]

Hand in hand with this focus on democracy, some in the Bush administration, such as Condoleezza Rice, have made public comments condemning the human rights record of Iran, signalling the possible move towards justifying an intervention in Iran based on the promotion of human rights. Although the Bush administration has currently turned its eye towards Iran's dismal human rights record, many believe that this is more of an excuse to justify a possible intervention rather than a real concern for the welfare of Iranian citizens.

The State Department routinely condemns Iran for a variety of transgressions, yet in practical terms the US efforts at addressing these violations are purely rhetorical, such as those presented in the November 2005 State Department's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labour (with the Bureau of Public Affairs) fact sheet entitled 'Iran: Voices Struggling to be Heard' in which the political and human rights situation was addressed.[25] In this report, President Bush is quoted as standing with the Iranian people as they stand for their own liberty, while at the same time believing in the rights of the Iranian people to make their own decisions and determine their own future. However, given the implementation of unilateral sanctions, which have not been successful, and the intelligence community's general proclivity towards engagement with groups in the region that may not actually be concerned with promoting human rights and fostering democracy, there exists little evidence of how the United States is standing with the Iranian people as they determine their own future.

As with the previously discussed option of supporting the democratic opposition, an American military intervention,

unless extremely thoughtful and based on the actual promotion of human rights rather than pretence, could justify an excuse for authoritarian elements to crack down on human rights defenders within Iran, as the regime could label them as 'tools of the enemy' – something that appears to be happening already. Furthermore, a military intervention in Iran, and the inevitable chaos and instability that would ensue, could of course potentially hinder human rights rather than aid in its growth.[26] As far as is evident, it appears at the time of writing that the United States does not have a clear plan of action concerning Iran.

IRAN AND THE EUROPEAN UNION

European relations with Iran have been historically stronger than those of the United States, and have been steadily developing since the election of Khatami. The European Union believes they have seen positive action by Iran on a number of points, and, in 1998, began a Comprehensive Dialogue made up of semi-annual tripartite meetings at the level of Under-Secretary of State/Deputy Minister. The dialogue ranges over issues including the Middle East conflict, non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, terrorism, and human rights. The EU is also exploring possible cooperation with Iran in refugees, energy, investment and trade and drugs control.[27]

In general, the EU links negotiations for trade and cooperation on a political dialogue that is related to counter-terrorism and human rights. The European Commission has expended much effort into increasing relations with Iran, and hopes that ties with Iran will develop gradually, subject to continued monitoring of Iranian progress in the fields of political, economic and social reform. Although expectations remain high, as discussed in Chapter 3, the pace of actual reforms in these areas has been modest.

Despite this, the EU is Iran's main trading partner in both imports and exports.[28] Whereas more than 80 per cent of EU

imports from Iran consist of oil products, the exports to Iran are more diversified, with power generation plants, large machinery and electrical and mechanical appliances making up about 45 per cent of the total exports.

EU and especially British relations with Iran, despite recent setbacks, are comparatively strong and, some feel, one-sided. While there are those that believe the EU policy of linking human rights with economic relations is working, others simply accuse the EU (Britain in particular) of kowtowing to Iran. According to a July 2004 interview with Jack Straw, the British Foreign Secretary, the 'quiet diplomacy' approach of engagement with Tehran has proved fruitful over the years, despite the lack of approval for this approach from the US. Although admitting that the relationship is often difficult, particularly regarding the nuclear issue, he maintained that 'it can be frustrating and it certainly is frustrating. Two steps forward and its sometimes two back as well but bit by bit I believe we are making progress.'[29] In 2002 the EU and Iran entered into a 'human rights dialogue' that, although cleverly hyped, offered little lasting benefits. Despite the continuation of these talks once a year, little improvement has been seen, and human rights defenders in Iran, as well as in the west, routinely criticize the process for its lack of efficacy and transparency. For the most part, there has been

> little improvement in human rights and (that) violations remained widespread. Several Iranian human rights defenders criticized the process for its lack of transparency and effectiveness. In a concluding statement, the EU reiterated long-standing human rights concerns including the use of torture, unequal rights for women, the use of the death penalty, religious discrimination and the lack of an independent judiciary. Iran's judiciary rejected these comments, while newspaper interviews given by the deputy head of the judiciary, Mohammad Javad Larijani, expressed contempt for the process and human rights.[30]

The EU has expressed dismay concerning the dialogue, particularly relating to Iran's lack of commitment to ensure that real progress occurs, and in November of 2005 the EU called on Tehran to adhere to its international obligations. While such condemnations are a start, it appears evident that this type of soft-handed approach will do little to compel Tehran to make human rights a priority.

In terms of EU responsibility towards the Kurds specifically, it is an unfortunate reality that unlike Turkey, the EU lacks the 'carrot' needed to persuade the Iranians into better treatment of not only the Kurds but also all ethnic minorities. As long as it remains the case that Europe has little that Iran wants, it will find it hard to push for any substantive change. However, this does not mean that the EU should not take a more aggressive stance on the issues. As long as the international community continues to focus myopically on the nuclear issue, any hope for change cannot be held out.

It is evident that if any real change is to occur, any sanctions relating to the nuclear issue must be connected with concrete discussions of human rights, democracy and respect. The EU member states have significant experience with engendering changes in these areas, and are in a much better position than the United States in this respect, as they already maintain economic contracts with Iran and are more willing than the US to negotiate and to utilize the mandates of international law.

Particularly relating to the Kurds, the Europeans are aware of the impact of 'national minority issues' over the last 50 years, and clearly understand that without tackling issues of national minorities, peace, stability and democracy cannot be achieved. Europe has witnessed first-hand the challenges created by the dissolution of the former Soviet Union, Turkey's desired accession to the European Union and the tragic situation in the Balkans, and has seen how important minority rights issues have been in these areas.

The EU member states thus recognise the importance of securing minority rights if there is to be lasting peace in any given country

or region. It should be clear to policy-makers that without solving the Kurdish issue (or indeed the larger 'minorities issue') through implicit policies and procedures that address minority rights, progress cannot be made. There exist a number of treaties and conventions that deal with the issue of minority rights in these regions that the EU is currently party to. While it is quite clear that repressive states like Iran won't tackle these issues without pressure, and indeed do not generally respond well to pressure of any kind, it is also clear that the EU has significant experience in dealing with this type of situation, and is, therefore in a better position than the US to address the type of changes that must occur.

If desired, the international community, led by the EU, could enforce, and indeed reinforce, the existing treaties, and include a discussion of these issues in the current nuclear standoff. For too long the west and the international community have maintained a 'behind-the-door policy', recognising in private the realities needed for true change and democracy, yet not addressing them publicly. Now, with the international community and Iran engaged in dialogue over the nuclear issue and an incentives package on the table, it is a perfect time to open the doors to real dialogue about the issues that really matter if one wants a lasting peace.

In order for a lasting political solution to occur, the international community must publicly recognise the existence of the Kurds in Iran and should use all their powers from international treaties to push the Iranian government to negotiate directly with the Kurds, bringing them to the table as partners in a dialogue. The key concept in all of this is that of assistance. In order for real change to occur, the international community must offer assistance, not dictate answers from above.

IRAN AND THE UNITED NATIONS

Despite the United Nations General Assembly passing a resolution condemning the human rights situation in Iran in November

of 2004 and 2005, its attention, as well as that of the United States, has been focused on nuclear issues. In fact, the UN has faced severe criticism from international human rights agencies on its treatment of Iran, being accused of ignoring some of the worst violators of human rights, including Iran. The November 2005 General Assembly Resolution expressed 'serious concern' about Iranian human rights violations, and called on Tehran to end violations such as torture and abuses of the human rights of ethnic and religious minorities. However, unlike with the Security Council, resolutions passed by the General Assembly are non-binding, there is little hope that Tehran will pay much attention to what is in essence a suggestion.

The 2005 session of the UN Commission on Human Rights ended in disappointment, as many governments, including the US, EU and Canada, made it clear they would not be introducing resolutions against Iran, despite it's being a major human rights violator. There were increased calls from the human rights community to back Kofi Annan's March 2005 proposal for a reform of the UN human rights system. This reform, which would significantly strengthen the mandate of the UN (indeed, seeking to add the recognition of human rights as the third pillar of the UN), included the replacement of the largely discredited Commission on Human Rights with a standing Human Rights Council that operates all year round. The previous Human Rights Commission had a membership that included some of the worst human rights violators. Not all were united in this goal, as there were a small number of countries deemed 'spoilers' of this process, Iran among them. Although not credited as an unqualified success, the summit did result in positive changes. World leaders agreed to establish a Human Rights Council to replace the discredited Commission on Human Rights. The final UN summit document passed responsibility to the General Assembly to turn the promise of a Human Rights Council into reality during its current session, with the president of the General Assembly charged with conducting negotiations to establish the scope and mandate of the Council.

In a further positive step, world leaders also agreed to fortify the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, doubling its budget within the next five years.

However, changes will not occur overnight, and until reform takes place it appears unfortunate but true that there is little the United Nations can do to assist in changing the current situation in Iran. But, at the very least, a start would be to restore the mandate for a permanent human rights monitor for Iran. Until the international community truly begins to take seriously the human rights situation of women and minorities in Iran, it is evident that the regime will continue on in much the way it always has. It is clear that more attention needs to be paid to the dismal human rights situation, especially of women and minorities, including the Kurds.

Despite widespread international recognition of the Islamic Republic of Iran's continued blatant disregard for the human rights of its citizenry, there has been a high level of recalcitrance in calling Iran to task. This stems partly from Iran's general lack of dialogue with the international community. Iran has not signed or ratified the Committee against Torture (CAT) or Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Although Iran has ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), it did so without ratifying the first or second protocol.[31] Furthermore, of the treaties that Iran is signatory to, it has imposed such a number of reservations and restrictions under the guise of preserving 'Islamic values' that much of the protected human rights are seriously impeded.[32]

ISLAMIC VALUES AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Is there a universal set of principles that exemplifies the rights that are the natural entitlement of every human individual on this planet, regardless of race, sex, nationality, culture, religion, or class, or is this concept of a universal standard simply a thin guise for western imperialism, as some argue? Although outside

of the primary scope of this book, this discussion merits at least a cursory examination here, as the concepts of cultural hegemony and cultural relativism directly inform the Iranian government's stance towards the adoption of international human rights standards.

According to the United Nations, and nearly every member state, the answer to the previous question is, at least in theory, yes. Although some are uneasy with the concept of universal human rights existing in a culturally diverse world, the UN believes that the concept of universal human rights does not equate to the culturally imperialistic imposition of one cultural standard forwarded by a particular region, it is simply a minimum standard of legal protection that represents the consensus of the international community. Since the creation and adoption by the UN of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) there has been a growing focus on issues of human rights by the international community. The UDHR is seen as a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations, universally.

However, there are some, the government of Iran included, who feel that this universalist codification of human rights is a western construct that does not take into account or respect the cultural autonomy of non-western nations, forwarding the concept that a culturally relativistic stance must be taken, with human rights interpreted differently within varying cultural, religious and ethnic traditions.[33] One area in which this debate has manifested itself is in the Muslim world, which has played host to a debate over whether or not 'Islamic human rights' can be reconciled with international concepts of human rights, as laid out in the UDHR and other treaties, such as CEDAW, or if these examples are a culturally relativistic concept, based on distinctly western cultural norms removed from international law and standards, and thus inapplicable to the Muslim world.[34]

The issue of the relationship between the Islamic legal tradition and human rights began surfacing in the public debate in direct relation to Islamic resurgence after the Arab-Israeli War of 1967.[35]

As 'Islamisation' campaigns began occurring in many Middle Eastern nations, the consideration of Islamic models of rights as opposed to the adoption and acceptance of what were viewed as 'western' international human rights norms became apparent. Before this time, it is important to note that all Middle Eastern member states of the UN, with the exception of Saudi Arabia, not only ratified but also were instrumental in the creation of the UDHR.[36] Importantly, the formal position of Muslim states as laid out in the 1972 charter of the Islamic Conference, the international body to which that all Muslim countries belong, expressly endorses international law and fundamental human rights as compatible with Islamic values.[37]

Despite the heavy-handed forwarding of a universal concept of 'Islamic Human Rights', Muslims do not have a common belief on what the Islamic position concerning human rights is, or of the relationship of their cultural tradition to international human rights norms. It is thus important to note that there is, in reality, no paradigm of 'Islamic human rights'. In reality, Muslims have taken a variety of positions on human rights, including the complete endorsement of international human rights standards as fully compatible with their own religion and culture.

In opposing international human rights schemes, treaties and conventions, the argument generally follows that Islam has already laid out a far superior human rights scheme that is more in keeping with Islamic culture. Hence, any attempts to impose UN human rights standards are by nature denying Muslims their own culturally and morally superior rights schemes and are all just one more attempt at imperialisation.

However, a survey of some of these Islamic human rights schemes shows that in each case, questionable Islamic criteria have been used primarily as a tool to cut back the freedoms guaranteed in human rights law.[38] Furthermore, despite purporting to speak for the people, there is growing discontent across the Muslim world with these so called 'Islamic human rights' schemas that have little to do with Islam and all to do with power.

It is important to note that simply because those appealing to an Islamic human rights scheme in an attempt to leave themselves invulnerable to questions about human rights abuses claim that they are using traditional sources, this does not mean that these schemes are true to Islam. They are not representative of pre-modern juristic traditions or Islamic philosophy as a whole. Instead, they can be seen as 'part of a broader phenomenon of attempts by elites – the beneficiaries of undemocratic and hierarchical systems – to legitimize their opposition to human rights by appealing to supposedly distinctive cultural traditions'.[39] There is no doubt that there can be distinctly Islamic human rights interpretations that offer real protection to the people. However, work still needs to be done in better expressing and exploring the concept of Islamic human rights.

It is important that western nations and international institutions stand firm in the belief that human rights are indeed universal, and do not allow such obscuring rhetoric to allow an easy escape route from dealing with the violation of human rights, thus effectively ignoring the many activists in Islamic nations, including Iran, that are struggling to be heard.

7
Possibilities for the Future

RENAISSANCE OF POLITICAL AND SOCIAL THOUGHT

The Iranian Kurds have experienced a renaissance of political and social thought helped along by the wider Iranian reform movement during the Khatami presidency. The Kurdish national movement became revitalised in the 1990s, spontaneously rising from the people, as artists, writers, political activists, intellectuals and linguists contributed to the articulation of Kurdish identity. Rather than being limited to a political movement, the Kurdish national movement in Iran is influenced by a growing civil society which for the most part keeps a low profile, operating under the radar of the authorities despite increasing difficulties over the past year.

The expression of Kurdish identity, and how politicised it is, is influenced by many factors within Iran. Generalised state oppression as well as the prohibition of alternate political parties necessarily constrains the extent to which Kurdish identity and claims can be expressed. Furthermore, concepts of Kurdishness change in accordance with the different regions in Iran, as traditional boundaries such as differences in language, tribal affiliation, religion, gender and class all play a part.

Nonetheless, recent events in Iraq and Turkey have had a strong impact on the Iranian Kurds, as they saw the chance for change and hoped for a positive effect into their own region. Although the Iranian government has allowed acknowledgement of its cultural, social and ethnic diversity to a degree, with Kurdish-language education allowed (although not often implemented), the presence of Kurdish radio, and even a university named 'Kurdistan', the current situation is becoming dire for the Iranian

Kurds, who find themselves facing the greatest level of repression seen since the period after the revolution.

In terms of real change in the situation of the Iranian Kurds, many feel the best hope for change is based on a cautious dialogue and rapprochement with the west, (primarily Europe) through which 'European organizations, parliaments, political parties, and institutions, could assist Kurdish schools, scientific and cultural projects to improve the daily life of ordinary people, either through direct relations with specific groups who run projects or joint programs covering several regions or areas'.[1] Unfortunately, the recent bellicosity of Ahmadinejad towards the west appears to problematise this from becoming an option in the immediate future, as the storm clouds continue to gather. Secondly, as already discussed in these pages, it appears that the western nations are not truly committed to providing the kind of real assistance that would allow for this type of situation to occur.

Although Ahmadinejad ran on a platform of recognising the needs of the people, particularly the financially disadvantaged, it has been clear from the beginning that this extended only to the Persian majority, as recent events make it apparent that he is unconcerned with recognising the needs of the ethnic and religious minorities in Iran, including the Kurds. Many feel that for the most part, the current role of the Iranian Kurds is to bide their time, remain quiet, protect their identity and support the Kurds in Iraqi Kurdistan.[2] However, as the situation becomes increasingly untenable for the Iranian Kurds, whose nationalist movement is in the ascendant, the need for a lasting political solution becomes ever more apparent.

As discussed throughout this book, as long as the Kurds remain an unintegrated 'minority' in the state they are living in, the situation will remain unstable, and the Kurds will necessarily remain an opposition force as they are denied the means to be anything else. Until the Iranian regime allows the Kurds access to a political space, the situation will not resolve itself, and the

Kurdish nationalist movement will continue to grow, as the Kurds seek access to the political space denied them.

THE IRANIAN KURDISH NATIONAL MOVEMENT

The Kurdish national movement in Iranian Kurdistan is growing from a spontaneous grassroots youth and civil society-led movement rather than as a result of direct, traditional, political party influence. The Kurds, as with other oppressed groups in Iran, are making use of the space that is available to them, fuelled by technology and the rise of information sharing. There is much creativity involved, as necessity causes invention, and it is a creativity born out of pressure. The arts are flourishing, and there are several Kurdish poets, filmmakers and artists. Women contribute to the movement, and, in contrast to their role in the traditional Kurdish political arena, are integral rather than peripheral. Activists within Iranian civil society are providing the impetus for the movement, producing innovative materials that address their issues and situation through the debate, application and analysis of theories such as feminism, capitalism and globalisation in a thoughtful and rigorous manner, then disseminating this information to the wider Kurdish and protest movements outside of Iran, in a clandestine manner, as required.[3] Iranian, and indeed non-Iranian Kurds and Kurdish political parties, offer much support to these activists within Iran, and provide a platform for the wider dissemination of the information provided by those operating within the country, as well as contributing their own part to the national movement.

In terms of the agenda forwarded by these groups and individuals operating in Iran, there is no doubt that Iranian Kurdish groups have become more diverse in their political views in recent years. Although the KDP-I remains the most recognised party articulating the interests of the Iranian Kurds, there are many other groups that are challenging the KDP-I for the allegiance of Iran's Kurds.[4] The Komala have experienced a renaissance in

recent years, and are currently a dynamic and innovative party, with a growing membership base and progressive leadership. Currently the situation in Iranian Kurdistan is in flux, as the traditional political organisations such as the KDP-I and the Komala, who have rejected armed struggle against the state, are being challenged by groups whose ideology, methodology and political realities have roots outside of Iranian Kurdistan. These groups, such as PJAK, an organisation believed to be connected to the PKK, began an armed struggle in 2004 and are attempting to influence the Iranian Kurds to rise up against the state. Although receiving much media attention, it is unclear how much support PJAK maintains on the ground in Iranian Kurdistan.

The traditional political parties profess to be unselfconsciously challenging standard notions of the purpose and placement of the political party in Kurdish society, and recognising the need to engage civil society actors as partners in the political process, listening to and supporting this grassroots activity, rather than dictating solutions to the problems facing Kurdish society from an elite position removed from the realities of daily life.[5]

At present, it is a difficult time for the established Kurdish political parties, as they find themselves removed from the very arena they need to be allowed to operate in. Thus the Iranian Kurdish political parties are currently mired in the dilemma of how to regain a presence on the ground in Iranian Kurdistan. While attempting to negotiate with the current regime leaves them in the position of being seen as selling out, or pursuing a dead end, the only hope of actually being able to play a part in a real lasting change is possible only if they are allowed to operate openly in Iranian Kurdistan, without fear of death. This means they must be decriminalised.

Both the KDP-I and the Komala have stated that the time for armed struggle is over and believe that the revolution, or to put it a better way, evolution, won't come from the mountains, it will come from the cities. The parties know that if they are to be part of this evolutionary change, they must build a presence on the

ground in the cities and towns, and must assist in reviving a sense of Kurdish identity. Despite their recent lack of efficacy, the parties have years of experience and as they seek to be an evolutionary rather than revolutionary force, the political parties have the potential to use their legacy in a positive, engaged manner.

In early 2006, the Kurdish United Front, a movement that is not an official party or a non-governmental organisation, was formed in Iranian Kurdistan by Bahaeddin Adab, a former Kurdish Member of parliament, who was banned along with thousands of reform-minded candidates from running in the 2004 parliamentary elections. The Front plans to help Kurdish representatives gain seats in city councils and in the national parliament, as well as to raise Kurds' awareness of their rights, and to demand the implementation of the equal rights and democracy promised to them by law in Iranian Kurdistan. While Adab believes the Front will be able to achieve results working within the current framework of the regime, some Kurdish activists in Iran express doubt, claiming that it is impossible to achieve such results as long as the current regime remains in power, as it is the regime that is the major problem.

The majority of the groups and organisations operating in Iranian Kurdistan maintain a broader agenda than those that focus only on the Kurds, and often couch Kurdish demands in the context of general democratic rights for all Iranians. Several human rights organisations, and periodicals such as *Sirwan Weekly*, the Kurdish-language magazine with the largest circulation in Iran, all have appeal that reaches beyond the Kurdish regions, and attempt to develop linkages with the wider rights movement, promoting dialogue rather than divisiveness. Unfortunately, in the growing climate of repression, the Iranian authorities closed down *Sirwan*, along with other periodicals, in the spring of 2006.

In this period of greater oppression, the various ethnic minority opposition forces are realising that it is in their best interest to try to overcome their geographic isolation and work together in their often common purposes, as the state would have a far

more difficult time employing overpowering force against the minorities if they presented a united front. The Kurds have been at the forefront of this drive for unity, with the political parties coming together to create a united front in Kurdistan, as well as actively participating in a broad democratic coalition of Iranian opposition groups. This drive for unity is not limited to political parties, and non-politically-oriented grassroots activists from the various ethnic minority groups are forming alliances as well.

In general, Iranian Kurds and Kurdish organisations possess a holistic view of the Kurdish nationalist question and see Kurdistan as divided by many interests, recognising that regime change from the outside, although perhaps becoming an increasingly necessary option, is not a panacea. For the most part, the view coming out of Iranian Kurdistan today, even from the mouths of some party leaders themselves, is that a solution needs to come from the grassroots. The people need to be involved in deciding and implementing their own future, whether or not that involves regime change. This leads to a lively debate concerning the nature of the political and practical realities that would allow this future to become reality, with the political parties, as discussed earlier, re-evaluating their role in this process, recognising that a dynamic decision-making process cannot be limited to political party ideologues who dictate change and implement it in a top-down manner, but that it must also be open to debate by the people, regardless of their political affiliation.

Although sentiments that all Kurds should be united in an independent Kurdish nation do exist, for the most part the Kurds of Iran take a pragmatic approach, and while viewing Iranian Kurdistan as the birthplace and homeland of the Kurds, do not necessarily see it as a homeland for all Kurds. The divide that exists between what is known as 'Iranian Kurds' (those who believe in Kurdish rights and autonomy within the framework of an Iranian state) and 'Eastern Kurds' (those who believe in a wider independent Kurdistan and territorial nationalism) is at its heart a question of the nature of Kurdish identity, and is thus

outside the scope of this offering. As Iran is viewed as the Kurdish homeland, this sentiment is often used by the dominant Persian majority to forward a concept of a homogeneous identity, in order to deny difference. This is unfortunate, as this concept of a common homeland could be used to forward a dialogue that strengthens the relationship of the Persians and Kurds in a way that is based on similarities, not sameness. To utilise this common heritage as a way to deny difference (and thus the existence of the other) is a particularly subversive form of oppression.[6]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE AND RESPONSIBILITY

During the Khatami years, the government guardedly allowed the renaissance of civil society to occur. However, Kurdish organisations are monitored closely, and human rights defenders as well as other members of civil society are arrested on a regular basis. As discussed, this has changed with the coming of Ahmadinejad.

Furthermore, the Iranian government keeps a close eye on the Kurdish national movement, as it appears to believe that the Iranian Kurds are attempting to influence the United States to attack Iran, in an attempt to gain power and an autonomy not unlike that experienced by the Iraqi Kurds. Newspaper reports forward the argument that unnamed Iranian Kurdish forces have apparently offered the Americans tens of thousands of troops to assist in 'liberating' Iran.[7] It is impossible at this point to substantiate these claims, and while rumours on the subject abound, it is unwise to speculate. At any rate, it appears that the US has had more discussions with the PMOI than Kurdish groups, and, further, the actual level of support for the types of Kurdish organisations that would be in a position to assist in the overthrow of the government is unknown.

Despite the promises to the contrary, not much has been done by the government on behalf of the Kurds. This is unfortunate, as a conscious attempt to solve the problems facing the Kurds and Kurdish regions and engage them more in the governmental

process in order to promote a lasting political solution would benefit both the Kurds and the central government, and indeed is no more than what the Iranian Kurds have been asking for historically. Although Kurdish-language courses have been promised at the aforementioned Kurdistan University, they have yet to materialise. Further, as discussed earlier, there is still a large amount of suppression on any outward display of Kurdish identity, and the major Kurdish political parties remain outlawed.

There are a few positive signs, however. The infrastructure in Iranian Kurdistan was helped along in the Khatami period. Although it remains underdeveloped, there are roads and electricity in Iranian Kurdistan, and a greater degree of freedom of thought and expression, and indeed freedom for women, than is experienced in some other parts of Iran. Despite the recent troubles, there remain Kurds who do not actively seek conflict between Kurds and the central government. Unfortunately, with the blanket government crackdown, this sentiment is changing as the hope for a lasting solution through engagement with the central government remains elusive.

Prior to the election of Ahmadinejad and the ensuing escalation of hostilities, many felt that the best hope was for a thoughtful practical reconciliation between the Kurds and the existing regime, with more services, facilities and opportunities needed for Kurdistan, especially a recognition of the suffering caused by the chemical weapons attacks during the Iran–Iraq War. As is the situation universally, if the quality of life improves – but it has yet to happen – there will be less unrest. This is all that the Kurds have been asking for, and are still asking for. Whether or not this will happen, of course remains to be seen, and as stated, given the deterioration of the situation in the region, it appears that the current regime, unless pressured in the right way, will be unwilling to change from its current position of blanket repression and disproportionate force in the name of national security.

IMPLICATIONS OF CHANGES IN REGIONAL GEOPOLITICS

Without a doubt, the regional geopolitical changes have affected the region on multiple levels. In regards to the Kurds specifically, it is evident that they have benefited in the short term, as there now exists a de facto Kurdish state in Iraq which has the potential to become independent if the situation in Iraq is not stabilised in the future. However, while the potential for long-term benefit remains, it is unclear how the situation will play out, as some feel that the Kurds have exchanged the dictatorship of Saddam Hussein for that of the PUK and KDP.

Although there has been an increase in the popularity of paramilitary organisations such as PJAK based in Iraqi Kurdistan fanning separatist sentiment across the border in Iranian Kurdistan, as discussed earlier, a large-scale exportation of the Kurdish nationalist movement based on armed conflict is, at this point in time, not the way forward. Posturing and rhetoric notwithstanding, the Iraqi Kurdish political powers are pragmatic, and it is evident that they understand the current benefits of autonomous standing in a (potentially) strong state, and the perils of standing alone in a (potentially) weak one. While Iraqi Kurdistan could potentially play the part of either a magnet of the national movement or an exporter of the movement, it appears that it will currently remain a magnet, and even this is leading to potential unrest, as Turkey and Iran continue their cross-border incursions under the guise of rooting out the PKK and PJAK. It is evident the powers that be in Iraqi Kurdistan understand the necessity of the support of the international community. They have benefited greatly from their allegiance with the US, and as relations improve with the other states in the region with Kurdish populations (Syria notwithstanding), it appears that they will not, at this time, upset the balance by promoting the exportation of a separatist nationalist movement. At the same time, the Iraqi Kurdish leaders stress that they stand with all

Kurds, and would not turn on the Kurds of other nations under any circumstances.

Prospects and possibilities aside, it is clear that due to the current geopolitical changes in the region, the Kurdish issue will grow in each state, with Iran no exception. However, it must be remembered that the realities of the Kurdish situation are different in each state and thus the solutions will be different as well. Although the dream of a united Kurdistan is not dead, it is clear that the realities of the Iranian Kurds are different from those of the Iraqi, Turkish and Syrian Kurds, and this must be respected and understood. Increasingly, the call for status as citizens of a federal and democratic Iran appears to be rising from Iranian Kurdistan.

CONCLUSIONS

The Kurds have learned the painful lessons of the past and are therefore not as open to the interventions and assistance of outside forces, as these have always ended badly. At this point in time, the best assistance the Kurds can hope for is not the cloak and dagger clandestine assistance that leaves them open to risk, but the aforementioned 'open door' policy of clearly tying in the minorities issue to any negotiations between the international community and Iran. This way, everyone is aware of the agenda and a clear dialogue can be presented.

Unfortunately, there are many challenges to this route, as the trend not only among Kurds (which as discussed is changing), but also within Iran itself, and between Iran and the international community, is of divisiveness rather than discussion. In Iran, we are still dealing with a situation in which the ruling powers are not open to negotiations with the Kurds or the international community unless it is on their terms. The Kurds themselves recognise this and, as discussed earlier, are engaged in presenting a united front, both among the Kurds themselves as well as across minority groups within Iran, in an attempt to strengthen their

position and bring themselves to the table in some semblance of being 'equal partners' with the Persians. Thus the best help that the international community can offer at this point is to offer its support in this attempt towards unification and dialogue.

Despite how hopeless it may appear, it is, at present, the only option available. It must be understood that the Kurds are not the same people they were in the past; they have developed, have become sophisticated, pragmatic and experienced. Through the painful lessons of the past they have learned how to administer themselves, and have also learned the price of the 'help' provided by outside forces forwarding their own agenda. For example, the recent Bush administration allocation of $85 million to finance satellite television broadcasting to Iran directly from Washington DC could be a very dangerous move, ultimately causing more harm than good. Rather than helping the Kurds to build their networks, this type of shortcut could incite the people to rise up, without a clear plan for what happens next, leading to civilian massacre. As we have stated in these pages, ill-thought-out actions such as this hinder rather than help democracy and human rights. As this book has shown, the Iranian Kurds are canny and savvy, and able to decide for themselves what type of assistance is needed, as well as what their vision of the future is.

It is high time that the international community realises that the Kurds are capable of determining what their own needs are and how to solve their own problems. What remains now is to listen to them, to take them seriously and to offer support where needed, rather than to dictate to them what they need. Then, and only then, will we see a lasting political solution to the problems in the region, for, as we have clearly shown, the resolution of the Kurdish issue will affect not only the Kurds but the entire region.

Notes

1 THE KURDS IN IRAN: AN OVERVIEW

1. K. Yildiz, *The Kurds in Iraq: The Past, Present and Future* (London: Pluto Press, 2004), p. 8.
2. For more information on this subject see *The Kurds in Iraq*, *The Kurds in Turkey* (London: Pluto Press, 2005), and *The Kurds in Syria* (London: Pluto Press, 2005), by K. Yildiz.
3. This book will complete the series of books mentioned in note 2.
4. J. Ciment, *The Kurds: State and Minority in Turkey, Iraq and Iran* (New York: Facts on File, Inc., 1996), p. 63.
5. Yildiz, *The Kurds in Iraq*, p. 4.
6. N. Entessar, *Kurdish Ethno-Nationalism* (Boulder: Lynne Reiner, 1992), p. 23.
7. F. Koohi-Kamali, *The Political Development of the Kurds in Iran* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), pp. 26–7.
8. Ibid. p. 32.
9. Ibid. p. 33.
10. A.R. Ghassemlou, 'Kurdistan in Iran', in G. Chaliand (ed.) *A People Without a Country: The Kurds and Kurdistan* (London: Zed Books, 1993), pp. 103–4.
11. Koohi-Kamali, *The Political Development of the Kurds in Iran*, p. 33.
12. Farideh Koohi-Kamali, 'The Development of Nationalism in Iranian Kurdistan', in P.G. Kreyenbroek and S. Sperl (eds) *The Kurds: A Contemporary Overview* (New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 179.
13. Entessar, *Kurdish Ethno-Nationalism*, p. 160.
14. Ibid. p. 48.
15. Ciment, *The Kurds*, p. 1.
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