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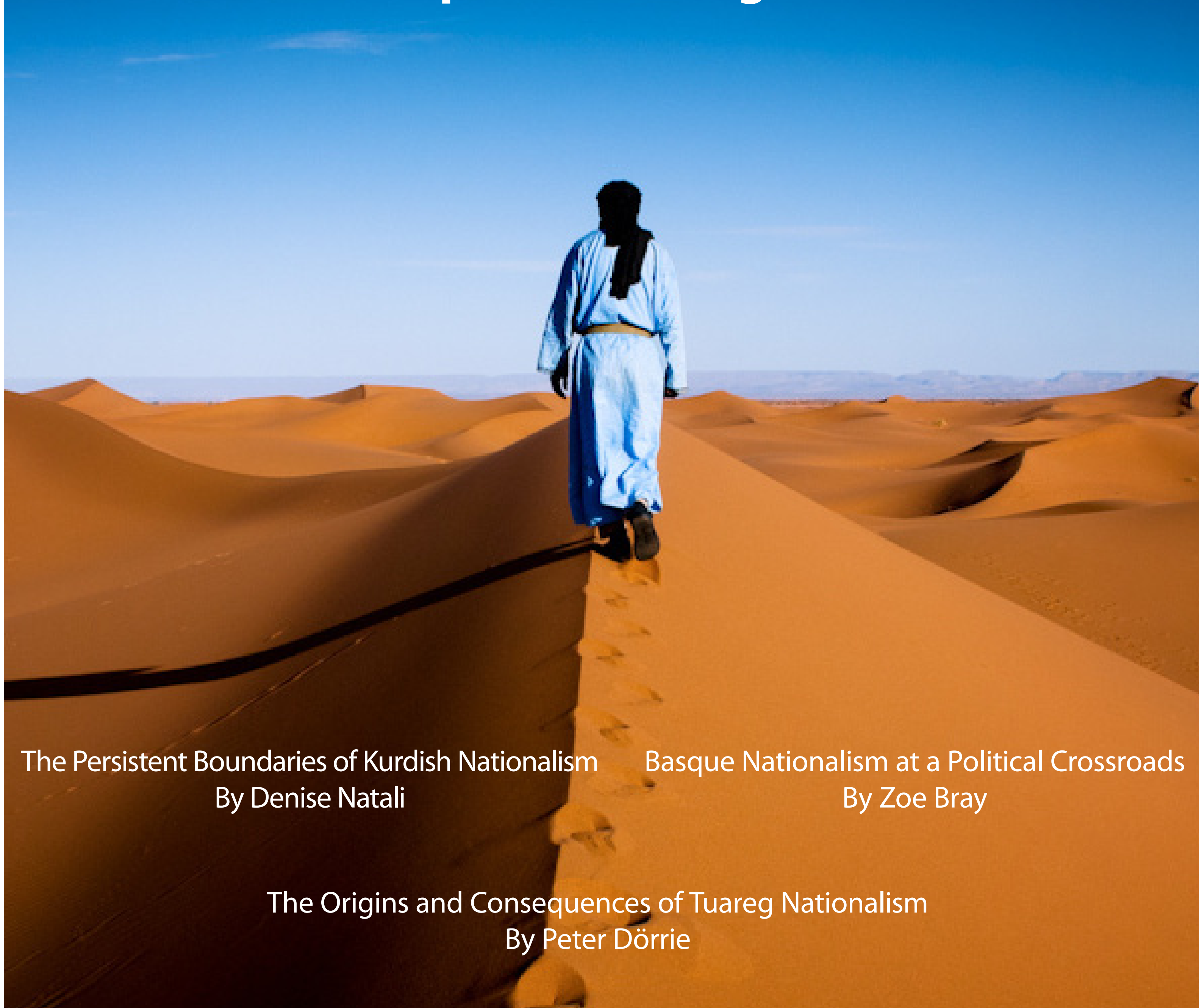

Peoples Without Borders: Kurdish, Basque and Tuareg Nationalism

The Persistent Boundaries of Kurdish Nationalism
By Denise Natali

Basque Nationalism at a Political Crossroads
By Zoe Bray

The Origins and Consequences of Tuareg Nationalism
By Peter Dörrie

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THE PERSISTENT BOUNDARIES OF KURDISH NATIONALISM

BY DENISE NATALI

The opposition and reform movements that have swept through the Middle East over the past year have further propelled Kurdish nationalism across the region's borders. Kurdish groups in Iraq, Turkey, Syria and Iran have taken advantage of regime change, or calls for change, by linking their claims to democracy and minority-rights movements. Many look to Iraqi Kurdistan as their model, seeking some form of autonomy in a decentralized state inclusive of Kurdish rights. Yet, despite these shared goals, Kurdish nationalism remains bounded by the states in which different Kurdish communities live. It also coexists with other regional trends -- including sectarianism, border instability and economic development -- necessitating politically expedient alliances that undermine a unified nationalist movement. This increasingly salient and complex Kurdish problem will continue to challenge governance within states, while serving as a wild card in shifting regional politics.

STATE-BUILDING POLITICAL SPACES

Kurdish nationalism is a function of modern Middle Eastern state-building projects, and not the product of an inherent hatred of or difference with Arabs, Turks and Persians. Although Kurdish communities have a shared sense of culture and identity, they have manifested their claims in different ways based on the political spaces -- that is, states -- in which they have lived. Shaped by different state policies and citizenship regimes, these political spaces have created distinct and changing notions of inclusion and exclusion for Kurds as an ethnic group, but also as a tribal, religious and local community. Variations in political spaces have resulted in different manifestations of Kurdish nationalism, defined by the nature of Kurdish political elites, nationalist organizations, claims and relationships with central governments.

For instance, from the outset of the state-building project in Iraq, the state elites recognized Kurdish ethnicity while co-opting and controlling Kurdish groups. The first Iraqi Constitution in 1925 referred to a binational, Kurdo-Arab state and permitted the Kurdish language in certain areas, while banning Kurdish nationalist organizations and activities. The central government extended its control by militarily attacking Kurdish regions and appeasing tribal sheikhs, of whom some -- if not all -- became supporters of the state.

Even as the Iraqi state became increasingly repressive and ethnicized under successive Arab Baathist regimes, it continued to give the Kurds semi-legitimate status. Iraqi elites recognized an autonomous Kurdistan region, although one controlled by the central government, while meeting with its tribal leaders and providing generous social-welfare benefits to local populations. They also tolerated the Communist Party, which attracted urbanized Kurdish nationalists, until it, too, was banned. What emerged was a highly ethnicized Kurdish nationalism that fragmented between tribal and urban elites (and their quasi-legitimate organizations), and which fluctuated between compromise and violence with the central government.

In contrast, Kurdish nationalism in Turkey evolved in a more clearly restrictive political space that did not recognize the existence of Kurdish ethnicity. From the outset of Kemal Ataturk's state-

building project, citizenship in Turkey meant being Turkish -- that is, committed to the Turkish language, culture and identity. Early Turkish state-building also focused on modernizing and secularizing the state while weakening tribal and Islamic institutions. This draconian break from the Ottoman past led to early violent nationalist revolts tied to Kurdish ethnicity and Islam.

Additionally, whereas the political space for Iraqi Kurds remained undeveloped and increasingly authoritarian, in Turkey it became more complex as part of national trends toward democratization and economic liberalization, while remaining highly ethnicized. Instead of consolidating into one umbrella party, and later two, as they did in Iraq, Kurdish nationalists in Turkey -- many of who had become disfranchised peasants and members of the poor working class -- fragmented across the political spectrum. Some mobilized alongside numerous Turkish leftist parties. Others turned to clandestine, radical Kurdish parties, including the Partiye Karkaren Kurdistane (PKK), which engaged in violence against the state. Still other Kurds who had become part of the capitalist landowning class backed conservative Turkish parties. The Turkish state also co-opted traditional Kurdish groups and poor communities through Islamic enterprises and charitable organizations.

Consequently, in contrast to Iraq, the Kurdish nationalism that emerged in Turkey was more a complex, highly ethnicized and illegal movement led by urban leftist leaders, and consistently hostile to the state. This trajectory started to alter, however, with openings in the political space under Turkish Prime Minister Tayyip Recep Erdogan's government, which has semi-legitimized the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP), a secular Kurdish nationalist organization, and encouraged opportunities for dialogue between Kurdish nationalists and the state, despite ongoing PKK violence.

In Iran, Kurdish nationalism became salient much later than in Turkey and in a less violent manner. This difference is due to a more inclusive political space that initially emphasized shared cultural ties between Kurds and Persians -- more than half of Iranian Kurds are Shiite -- and recognized a Kurdish ethnicity as part of Iranian identity, while repressing Kurdish nationalists and banning their organizations. Even though Shah Reza Pahlavi (1924-1941) looked to Ataturk as a state-building model, his effort to secularize and modernize Iran was more gradual, allowing traditional socio-political structures to maintain their privileged positions, particularly in the countryside.

Like in Iraq and Turkey, Iranian prohibitions against Kurdish nationalists kept their elites and organizations underground or tied to leftist parties, particularly during the democratization movement of the 1950s. Similarly, as the state became increasingly exclusionary and repressive under Shah Mohammed Pahlavi (1941-1979), Kurdish nationalism became ethnicized and turned to violence. Still, the Kurdish movement in Iran was kept weak and ineffective by ongoing authoritarianism under successive post-revolution theocratic governments, the absence of Kurdish nationalist elites (most of whom were assassinated), shared Kurdish-Persian cultural ties, some levels of Kurdish political representation in Tehran and internal fragmentation. By 2012, Iranian Kurdish parties, including Komala Iran and the Kurdistan Democratic Party-Iran, were operating in crossborder camps in Iraqi Kurdistan but remained at odds with one another. PJAK, the PKK sister branch in Iran, continues to mobilize violently, although with limited influence as well.

In Syria, the state engaged in similar policies that sought to control and co-opt the Kurds. It refused citizenship to thousands of Kurds and delegitimized Kurdish organizations and their elites, which dampened the potential of any Kurdish nationalist movement that might have emerged. Similarly, the emergence of Arab Baathist nationalism created a secularized and ethnically exclusionary state that gave rise to Kurdish ethno-nationalism, just as in Baathist Iraq, Kemalist Turkey and Iran under the last shah. Yet, successive Syrian regimes also assimilated certain Kurdish communities into both society and state institutions. These tactics, combined with a smaller Kurdish community that represents only 8 percent of the population and is more geographically dispersed throughout the country, created a quieter and less organized movement fragmented between urban leftists and traditional communities.

These distinct political spaces also prevented uniformity in nationalist movements over time. For instance, when Kurdish nationalists and religious sheikhs were revolting in Turkey from 1925 to 1938, Kurds in Iraq, Iran and Syria were largely silent. When Iranian Kurds established their Republic of Mahabad in 1946 in the political vacuum that followed World War II, most Kurdish nationalists in Turkey were either imprisoned, operating underground or allied with urban Turkish leftists. Although the Mahabad forces in Iran were commanded by Iraqi Kurdish leader Mustafa Barzani, most Iraqi Kurds were still a largely undeveloped and provincial society more loyal to their tribal leaders, mullahs and "qaimaqams" (local officials) than to Kurdish nationalism.

This is not to say that Kurdish groups have not attempted to consolidate their national interests across borders. The Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) in Iraq, currently led by Barzani's son Massoud, has maintained party affiliates in Turkey and Syria, as well as extended tribal-family networks in these regions. The Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), headed by Iraqi President Jalal Talabani, has links with Iranian Kurdish leftist groups that have taken refuge in PUK-controlled territory in Sulaimaniyah. Cultural and family exchanges, shaped by shared dialects and localities, overlap with these cross-border linkages. Syrian Kurds for instance, maintain close relations with fellow Kermanji-speakers in Turkey and comprise about one-third of the PKK. The PKK, in turn, has become the most transnational of all Kurdish parties. With its networks now extending across four states, it calls for universal Kurdish rights and Kurdish autonomy in Turkey, often through violent means.

Still, the presence of territorial boundaries, divide-and-rule policies and intra-Kurdish divisions has kept the nationalist projects distinct. In fact, Kurdish elites in each state have often allied with regional states against each other to protect their own tribal, ideological and politically defined nationalist interests. In part these strategies reflect geographical and economic constraints, especially for the landlocked Kurdistan region of Iraq. Highly dependent upon open borders and external patronage for revenue, Iraqi Kurdish leaders have brokered deals with governments in the region that required compromising their own nationalist goals, as well as those of their ethnic brethren across borders.

For instance, during the 1990s, when Iraqi Kurdistan was placed under a double embargo and 85 percent of its revenues were tied to smuggling activities at the Turkish border, Iraqi Kurdish leaders negotiated security agreements with Ankara targeting the PKK in exchange for an open border. They have since made similar arrangements with Tehran, promising to control Iranian Kurdish dissidents in exchange for an open border and "free trade" opportunities. The two Iraqi Kurdish parties also maintained offices in Damascus for decades with the tacit agreement of the Assad regime and its security apparatus. This support secured Iraqi Kurdish party interests while keeping Syrian Kurdish nationalism in check.

EXTERNAL PATRONAGE NETWORKS

If distinct political spaces have contained Kurdish nationalism, external patronage has helped expand it across borders. Throughout Europe, where most of the 1 million members of the Kurdish diaspora communities live today, institutions such as the Navend center in Bonn and the Institute Kurde in Paris actively promote pan-Kurdish national rights. Open democratic environments in the diaspora, as well as in cyberspace, have enabled Kurdish nationalists to advance their claims through social media, lobbying, publications and social activism. Some of the most active representatives of Kurdish transnationalism are diaspora Kurdish youth, who remain committed to their distinct Kurdish identity alongside their identities as citizens of the various host countries.

Challenges to the sovereignty regime in international politics and changes in the nature of international aid since the early 1990s have further encouraged Kurdish transnationalism. Whether as refugees, internally displaced persons or victims of authoritarian rule, Kurdish communities have accessed external support that has increased their recognition and legitimacy globally. The nascent humanitarian-driven "responsibility to protect" doctrine, in particular, has been beneficial

to Iraqi Kurds. It helped to create an international safe haven in Iraqi Kurdistan after the 1990-1991 Persian Gulf War that provided the impetus for the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), established in 1992. Despite the internal Kurdish civil war (1994-1998) that marked this period, external aid to Iraqi Kurds continued under the auspices of the United Nations. It then expanded with the Anglo-American overthrow of Saddam Hussein in 2003 and the creation of a federal Iraqi state.

The new federalist political space in post-Saddam Iraq has boosted Iraqi Kurdish nationalism and its autonomy project. With American support, the KRG gained legitimacy from a national constitution that weakened the central government, empowered the regions and expanded the KRG's annual budget, which reached nearly $11 billion in 2012. With the abundant revenues provided by Baghdad, Iraqi Kurdish leaders have developed the region's long-neglected infrastructure and energy sector, as well as their own security forces. In doing so, they have nearly assured their region's quasi-state status, defined by de facto internal sovereignty accompanied by dependency on outside actors.

While helping to legitimize Iraqi Kurdish nationalism, external aid has been less accessible for other Kurdish groups. Part of this discrepancy is rooted in regional alliance structures. Whereas Iraqi Kurds became politically expedient allies in regional conflicts against Arab Baathism and Saddam Hussein, Kurds in Turkey were considered "bad" Kurds -- communists, leftists and terrorists. By ideologically and politically challenging a key American ally and NATO member, Kurdish nationalists in Turkey became virtually ineligible for Western aid. International alienation increased as Kurdish nationalism further radicalized under the PKK.

It was only in the past decade, with the emergence of democratization movements, political openings toward Kurds and Ankara's bid for European Union membership, that international indifference toward the Kurdish problem in Turkey gradually shifted. External support was also spurred by diaspora organizations and civil society groups that championed human rights issues. This support, however, did not encourage special protection for Kurds or Kurdish autonomy as it did in Iraq, but rather expanding cultural, linguistic and political rights for Kurds within Turkey's democratic political system.

In striking contrast, Iranian and Syrian Kurdish nationalists have not secured foreign support other than as participants in proxy wars and short-lived opposition movements. The rise and fall of the Mahabad Republic, for instance, was tied to the waxing and waning of Soviet backing at the time. PJAK's mobilizations have also been linked to external aid and outside attempts to undermine the Iranian regime. Nor do Iranian and Syrian Kurds have effective diaspora networks to help mobilize their nationalist movements from afar. The relatively small populations of Iranian Kurds abroad are scattered between Persian communities and weak Kurdish nationalist groups. Syrian Kurds have even weaker organizations that lack sufficient funding and leadership outside the PKK.

In fact, Kurdish diaspora networks remain largely focused on home-country nationalisms. Iraqi Kurdish organizations, for instance, target their compatriots at home even if they are conscious and supportive of Kurdish rights in Turkey, Iran and Syria. Additionally, most cater to particular localities or dialects within Iraqi Kurdistan that differentiate Kermanji- and Sorani-speaking communities, as well as particular regions. Similarly, Kurds in Turkey have their own networks that are subdivided by language, region and religious affiliation, separating Sunni groups from the more secular Alevis.

REFORM AND OPPOSITION: WHAT KIND OF KURDISH NATIONALISM?

The coexistence of a shared Kurdish nationalist identity and distinct nationalist projects has become further complicated as reform movements have unsettled the Middle East over the past year. For the first time in modern Kurdish history, all Kurdish groups are mobilizing on behalf of Kurdish nationalism at the same time. They also have situated their nationalist agendas into the

region's larger democratization processes. Kurds are now demanding new forms of governance, including federalism and democratic autonomy, and insisting on constitutional reforms to protect this autonomy. Further, they are calling for specific Kurdish rights that extend beyond their status as a minority group. The Syrian crisis has been especially useful in this regard. World attention to the authoritarianism of the Assad regime has raised concern for Syrian Kurds, while providing a larger political platform for Kurdish claims in Turkey and Iraq.

Yet, each Kurdish community remains bound to its own political objectives and not to a pan-Kurdish agenda. Iraqi Kurds are entrenched in power struggles with Baghdad over the nature of power in the Iraqi state, control over the country's energy sector, disputed territories and revenue sharing. In Turkey, Kurdish nationalism focuses on constitutional recognition of Kurdish rights and guarantees for some form of political decentralization. Kurds in Syria are seeking Kurdish rights in a de-ethnicized and decentralized Syrian state. Iranian Kurds continue to demand "democracy for Iran and autonomy for Iranian Kurdistan," just as they have for the past several decades.

Regional upheaval has reinforced these distinct agendas and internal fragmentations. The PKK and its local Syrian affiliate, the Democratic Union Party (PYD), have taken advantage of the political vacuum in Syria and deteriorating relations between Damascus and Ankara to support the Assad regime against Turkey once again. They also oppose other Kurdish groups in Syria that are calling for regime change. Additionally, while a few Syrian Kurdish groups participate in the Syrian National Council (SNC), the Istanbul-based opposition group, most have refused to join or have recently left the shaky alliance. Instead, Kurdish nationalists in Syria have created their own Kurdish National Council (KNC) that focuses more specifically on Kurdish rights and opposes a post-Assad regime under Turkish and Muslim Brotherhood influence.

The Kurdish nationalist trend in Syria, however, poses a dilemma for Iraqi Kurdish interests. While supporting the rights of its Syrian Kurdish brethren and calling for regime change in Syria, the KRG cannot fully endorse the KNC and its demands. Just as they were bound to Turkey during the 1990s, Iraqi Kurds remain highly dependent upon Ankara as a regional patron, political ally and business partner today.

In fact, this alliance has become even more critical as the KRG -- and its leaders -- has made significant commercial investments and political alliances in the region. In 2011, for instance, Turkish trade with Iraq was nearly $10 billion, half of which came from the Kurdistan Region. Consequently, Iraqi Kurds have too much to lose by jeopardizing their ties with Turkey and undermining regional stability. The Irbil-Ankara friendship is also valuable because it comes at a time when Kurdish relations with Baghdad are at a low point and when the KRG needs to enhance its political leverage, particularly as it seeks alternative routes to export Kurdish crude. (The KRG does not control the Iraqi export infrastructure.)

Thus, instead of mobilizing alongside the Kurds in Syria or Turkey, the KRG has little option but to nudge its Kurdish brethren across borders to support the SNC, despite Iraqi Kurds' reluctance to see a Muslim Brotherhood-influenced regime emerge in Damascus. In fact, Barzani has become an unofficial envoy for Ankara, actively engaged in controlling the PKK and cross-border Kurdish nationalisms. In his recent meeting with Erdogan in Istanbul in late-April, Barzani even promised to remove the PKK from his territory and seek a cease-fire, although he continued to refuse to engage militarily against the organization.

Yet, as Turkey looks to Barzani to help moderate Kurdish nationalisms, other Kurdish groups will expect the Iraqi Kurdish leader to do just the opposite. As the gap between what Iraqi Kurds have attained and other Kurds have not becomes increasingly apparent, Kurdish claims for equivalent rights will likely increase. Kurdish political expectations also will strengthen as democratization movements in the region continue to mature and the issue of minority-group rights remains on reformist agendas. This dilemma is compounded by demographic trends that have shaped the region since 1992, by which Iraqi Kurdistan has become a safe haven for Kurdish groups from Turkey,

Syria and Iran seeking to mobilize freely, market their own Kurdish nationalisms, access jobs and educate their youth.

As these exchanges continue and Kurdish nationalism becomes regionalized, Iraqi Kurdish leaders will be hard-pressed to make difficult trade-offs between their interests and Kurdish nationalism across borders. These transnational challenges also come at a time when the Kurdistan region of Iraq is itself at a crossroads. Despite the large autonomy they have realized, Iraqi Kurdish populations are becoming increasingly critical of the KRG and its leaders over the uneven distribution of wealth tied to rapid development processes. Iraqi Kurdish elites, therefore, will need to show their commitment to Kurdish nationalism at home and across borders, which includes assuring greater accountability, transparency and equal distribution of oil-based revenues. If not, they risk losing support among their constituency, which could undermine their own nationalist project.

CONCLUSIONS

Given the distinct historical trajectories and opportunity structures of Kurdish transnationalism, it is unrealistic to imagine the emergence of a pan-Kurdish nationalist entity, or a larger Kurdistan. Iraqi Kurds are likely to continue their drive for greater autonomy, aiming to turn their status as a dependent quasi-state in Iraq or economic vassal state of Turkey into their own self-sufficient independent entity. Turkey's Kurds will continue to press for constitutional change that assures Kurdish rights and democratic autonomy, while Syrian Kurds will demand their own rights in a more decentralized political system. Iranian Kurds have the least opportunity to advance their interests due to a more closed political space and underdeveloped nationalist organizations.

Alongside these distinct but crosscutting nationalist projects are regional states seeking to advance their own interests through different Kurdish proxy groups. These alliances may help secure borders, leverage competing political interests, meet states' energy needs and develop shared commercial interests. They may even enhance political relations between Kurds and the states they inhabit in unexpected ways. Yet, until Kurdish nationalism is addressed by the specific state in which it originated and formed, it will remain an integral part of opposition politics and a deep thorn in the side of regional stability. □

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Photo: PKK sentry in the Qandil Mountains, Iraq, December 2008 (James Gordon, licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 2.0 License).

Footnotes for this article are available upon request.

BASQUE NATIONALISM AT A POLITICAL CROSSROADS

BY ZOE BRAY

Political conflict in the Basque Country has entered a new phase. In the past year, a reshuffling of political power in Spain has brought left-wing Basque nationalists to office in some major Basque cities and at the provincial level in Gipuzkoa, while ensconcing their ideological opponents, the conservative Popular Party (PP), in government at the national level in Madrid. Meanwhile, the announcement by the separatist extremist organization ETA in October that it was laying down its arms has raised hopes for an end to decades of secessionist violence.

But tough challenges have yet to be resolved. As long as opposing factions remain entrenched in past antagonisms, the Basque Country will remain stuck at a crossroads. The main political parties must come to grips with thorny outstanding issues and reach a settlement, or else continue a standoff with all the attendant risks of institutional paralysis, social and economic stagnation and, at worst, a possible return to the terrorism that has poisoned life for inhabitants of the region and other parts of Spain and France for more than 50 years.

Achieving a settlement will be difficult, as it requires all sides to step back from their previous uncompromising positions. Political parties must grapple with two central issues: the reintegration into Basque society of several hundred convicted collaborators of ETA now in Spanish and French prisons, as well as of countless others with links to the organization who are in hiding or in forced or voluntary exile; and acknowledgement of and potential compensation for the victims of violence on both sides, including not only those who suffered from the actions of ETA but also those who have been the victims of the Spanish and French states.

Whatever solution emerges will have significant implications, not only for the Basque Country but internationally. At a time when nationalist parties in Scotland and Catalonia are pressing for independence, the next steps in the Basque Country will set a precedent for other stateless nationalist movements in Europe and beyond.

Today's new situation is conditioned politically by two important developments in Spain: a major show of support for an alliance of left-wing Basque nationalist interests, under the name of Bildu, in local and regional elections in May 2011; and the victory of the PP in national parliamentary elections in November 2011, ending seven years of Socialist government. While support for ETA has shrunk dramatically since the late-1990s, when it was estimated at around 7 percent of the Spanish Basque Country's population, support for Basque nationalism has grown, notably among left-wing strands that seek to distance themselves from ETA and are committed to political dialogue. Efforts on the part of left-wing and social democratic Basque nationalist parties to find a way out of the political stalemate have been key to this resurgence.

While both the PP and the Socialist party are adamantly opposed to granting greater autonomy to Spain's Basque Country than the already extensive freedoms it enjoys to oversee such policies as taxation and education, Bildu's rise strengthens the hand of the Basque nationalists. Bildu was able to take part in the regional elections in May 2011 after publicly rejecting ETA's violence. Its

strong showing in Euskadi, where it won 26 percent of the vote, marked a popular affirmation of left-wing Basque nationalism as an alternative to the PNV, the previously dominant conservative and traditionalist Basque nationalist party. It also confirms the normalization of the notion of a Basque nation, while its emergence as a political force challenges Spanish and French authorities to engage with it as a legitimate interlocutor. Bildu took control of the provincial government of Gipuzkoa, previously led by the PNV, and of key towns including San Sebastian and Renteria, hitherto under Socialist administration.

In this new context, the PP is under pressure to open political dialogue with a view to achieving a peace settlement. Some timid steps have been taken, but it is not yet clear where they will lead. In February, the PP and the Socialist party agreed with the PNV and the main Catalan nationalist party (CiU) on a common position for how to bring about the disbandment of ETA. Acknowledging ETA's public renunciation of violence as "the best evidence of the victory of democracy over the terrorist organization," they called for ETA's "final and unconditional" dissolution and urged both the central government and the regional governments of Euskadi and Navarre to seek a peaceful solution. Left-wing Basque nationalist leaders, meanwhile, have supported the momentum for dialogue by calling on Basque "political" prisoners to cooperate with Spanish legal authorities.

In Madrid, the PP is under pressure from its conservative electorate to refrain from making concessions to the "Basque terrorists." Despite the limits thus imposed on its ability to negotiate, however, key figures in the PP central government have rejected calls from conservative hardliners for the left-wing Basque nationalist parties to be outlawed.

Nonetheless, there are still major question marks over just how easy it will be to advance dialogue. In particular, there is controversy over whether ETA should be obliged to disband as a condition for concessions on the government side. While senior PP officials say this is essential, others suggest that a reformed ETA could play a part in rehabilitating those that have been convicted of violence. This is the view of Brian Currin, a South African lawyer and conflict-resolution expert who leads the International Contact Group, which was set up with the support of key figures, including former United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan, to facilitate political dialogue. Currin has warned publicly of the damage such preconditions can cause when it comes to putting the mechanisms for reconciliation into practice.

Meanwhile, both the Spanish and the French governments have continued to crack down on Basque nationalist activities perceived as having links with ETA. On the French side of the state frontier that divides Europe's Basque region into two unequal halves, more than 100 people convicted or suspected of links with ETA remain in jail. Other members of the left-wing Basque nationalist movement face the threat of possible arrest. French officials have continued to dismiss "the Basque problem" as a Spanish domestic issue, while tasking French security forces to work closely with their Spanish counterparts in tracking down ETA activists.

The roots of Basque nationalism are to be found in the Basque region's historical rights of self-government, which were established during the Middle Ages but lost over subsequent centuries. A sense of grievance among the Basque Country's bourgeois elite was sharpened in the late-19th century as the rapid industrialization of the area around Bilbao brought with it an influx of immigrants from other parts of Spain. The Basque nationalist party, created in 1895, called for a restoration of historical rights based on the affirmation of a Basque identity defined by ethnic criteria. The repressive regime of Gen. Fransico Franco saw the birth of ETA as a liberation movement in 1959. Following Spain's return to democracy in the late-1970s, ETA's continued terror tactics became an oppressive and negative force that has brought enormous pain and polarization to Basque society.

Despite this polarization, understandings of Basque identity vary across the Basque region, which is itself a vaguely defined territory with a heterogeneous society. Spanning the state frontier between France and Spain, the Basque Country in its broadest definition covers seven historical

provinces -- Araba, Bizkaia, Gipuzkoa and Navarre on the Spanish side of the frontier, and Lapurdi, Lower Navarre and Ziberoa on the French side -- known to Basque speakers as Euskal Herria. Within this territory, the Autonomous Basque Community of Euskadi, grouping the provinces of Araba, Bizkaia and Gipuzkoa, enjoys regional autonomy under Spanish administrative statutes put in place from the late-1970s onward. So, too, does the neighboring province of Navarre, reflecting its historically different relationship with the Spanish monarchy.

In France, by contrast, Basque political identity is less developed. Only since the 1990s have the three Basque provinces been recognized as a politico-administrative unit. Beyond that, the Pays Basque, as the area formed by these three territories is commonly known in French, has no institutional status. It forms part of the culturally diverse department of the Pyrénées-Atlantiques, which in turn is part of the larger administrative region of Aquitaine.

Within this patchwork context, continuing political conflict in the Basque Country is sustained by a sense of victimization in the face of continued police repression, as well as by the perceived authoritarianism of Spanish and French state political actors. Perversely, Spanish and French state nationalisms have played a role in strengthening the boundaries of Basqueness. While today's Basque nationalism in Spain is rooted in the oppression suffered under Franco, Basque nationalism on the French side of the frontier remained latent for decades, despite the influx of numerous Spanish Basques seeking refuge in France. It was not until the late-1960s and early 1970s that neo-Marxist ideas of internal colonialism, reinforced by awareness of the situation in the southern Basque provinces under Franco, prompted young militants on the French side to fight against French centralism, which they felt was keeping their region in a state of underdevelopment.

This new militancy led to the creation in 1973 of the armed group Iparretarrak as a "northern" version of ETA that conducted operations on the French side of the state frontier. Its activities were, however, short-lived, as the French Basque Country became the site of murderous operations by the GAL, Spain's undercover paramilitary squad charged with eliminating ETA members taking refuge on French soil. Today, Basque nationalism in the French Basque Country has the support of just a small minority. Only a few village councils are led by Basque nationalists, and the movement has no significant political representation at the regional level.

Reflecting these different arrangements, each side of the broadly defined Basque Country has developed both politically and culturally in very different ways over the years. A 2005 survey on cultural practices and identity in the Basque Country found that while Basque identity in the French Basque Country is defined primarily by birthplace and language, in Euskadi it is defined by the desire to be Basque and to live and work in the region. In Navarre, meanwhile, respondents presented a more ambivalent attitude between these two extremes.

Though these two interpretations of Basque identity follow different logics, they remain intertwined. The first is based on a set of fixed racial and linguistic criteria, the result of an interpretation of historical rights as conceived by the PNV in the late-19th century. The second interpretation's more proactive definition of what it means to be Basque is largely a reflection of a sense of self-confidence, which is itself the result of a positive language policy in favor of Euskara, the Basque language. By learning Euskara, under this conception of Basque identity, one can become Basque, irrespective of one's family background.

Differing definitions of Basque identity and ways of feeling Basque thus reflect the differing institutional, political and social contexts of the three main parts of the Basque Country. In the French Basque Country, where the absence of a regional institutional framework leaves relatively few opportunities to give political expression to the feeling of being Basque, a majority of people have difficulty in seeing Basque identity as active and potentially innovative. By contrast, in the more dynamic environment south of the frontier, particularly in Euskadi where political support for Basque nationalism first originated and is strongest, people have more opportunities to create and assert their own Basque identity in different ways.

The regional government of Euskadi has made Euskara co-official with Spanish and promoted the standardization of the Basque language in all public spheres. As a result, approximately 49 percent of Euskadi's population can speak Basque, with the highest percentage (approximately 75 percent) found among children under the age of 16, many of whom now receive a Basque-language education, something their parents could not do.

By contrast, Navarre, whose political leaders remain close to the Spanish central state establishment, gives only limited recognition to Euskara. Approximately 12 percent of its population are Basque-speaking, of whom 61 percent are concentrated in a mountainous area bordering on Euskadi and the French Basque Country. In the French Basque Country, meanwhile, Euskara has no official status. Today, Euskara is spoken by approximately 30 percent of its population, and the decline in its use has only been halted recently, thanks principally to the promotion of schooling in Basque by a minority group of Basque activists.

Conscious of the French Basque Country's relative weakness in terms of size and economic influence, moderate Basque nationalists in the region focus primarily on obtaining official recognition for Basque culture and language within the institutional framework of the French state. French Basque nationalists and regionalists -- local activists who do not identify themselves as Basque nationalists but sympathize with demands for devolution and grass-roots action, such as the Green party -- have made repeated calls for the creation of a specific administrative unit for the three Basque provinces making up the Pays Basque.

On the Spanish side, meanwhile, the central government has continued to pursue the hard-line strategy toward ETA developed at the initiative of Baltasar Garzón, a prominent and controversial member of the Spanish judiciary. Since the late-1990s, this strategy has led to a series of actions aimed at rooting out ETA's alleged civil support network made up of cultural, social and financial entities. In 2003, in one of the most notorious actions, the Spanish High Court closed down the Basque-language newspaper Egunkaria, arresting its directors and confiscating its equipment. Amid allegations of torture suffered by its editor and some other directors, massive public demonstrations followed. In 2006, Spanish prosecutors recommended dropping the case for lack of evidence, yet the trial of various employees continued until 2009. Finally, in 2010 the court decided in favor of the newspaper for lack of evidence.

Another notorious instance, the so-called Bateragune case, led to the arrest in 2009 of a number of key left-wing Basque nationalist politicians, including Arnaldo Otegi, a former leader of the outlawed party Batasuna. They were sentenced in September 2011 to a minimum of eight years in jail on charges of working with ETA.

Notwithstanding the ongoing confrontations between opposing political factions, many Basques have seen their lives improve considerably since ETA's announcement of a cease-fire. Extortion has ceased, and individuals previously threatened by ETA can now live without the constant shadow of bodyguards. Inhabitants of the Basque Country can now reflect on and define for themselves what it means to be Basque, without having to consider violence as part of the equation.

Meanwhile, Basque nationalism has been active on the European scene on various fronts. The PNV has always been committed to the European movement. It is currently a member of the European Democratic Party, which groups European centrist parties, while social-democrat and left-wing Basque parties have been active as part of the European Free Alliance, which brings together European regionalists. When Spain became a member of the European Union in 1986, the potential offered by European integration for rethinking and renegotiating boundaries was embraced by Basque nationalists as a possible avenue for realizing their project of Basque reunification. The perception of the EU as a realm of shared and mixed sovereignty had the additional political advantage of allowing Basque nationalists to fend off accusations of insularity and to portray themselves as more cosmopolitan than their adversaries among the state elites.

The regional government of Euskadi has been particularly active in seeking to play a role at the heart of the EU. It has an office in Brussels to lobby and monitor the European Commission and a network of overseas offices to promote trade and Basque culture. In 2005, when Spain held a referendum on the European constitution, the PNV encouraged its electorate to vote "yes." Left-wing Basque nationalists, on the other hand, while proclaiming their European identity, supported a "no" vote, on the grounds that the proposed constitution favored capitalism and state supremacy to the disadvantage of stateless nations and the working class.

Basque politicians on both sides of the state frontier have sought to take advantage of EU support for economic and cultural interchange in order to develop cross-frontier relations. However, French state and regional actors have been slow to join this process, partly reflecting a reluctance to engage too actively with Basque nationalists, but also because of economic domination by the more powerful Spanish regions and a continued lack of common institutional and legal infrastructures to support cooperation at a decentralized level. As a result, although Aquitaine, Navarre and Euskadi have talked grandly about joint ventures such as transregional infrastructure and twinning arrangements between towns, they have been slow to put these ideas into practice.

Looking ahead, how political parties and state institutions deal with the Basque conflict will have repercussions for the rest of Europe in terms of conflict resolution and the accommodation of new national entities. Europe already has to consider the consequences of possible independence for Scotland, where the Scottish National Party, re-elected in 2011 with an overall parliamentary majority, has announced plans for a referendum in 2014. Although British government ministers have assured their Spanish counterparts that the constitutional issues posed by Scotland are quite different from those affecting Spain, Basque nationalists look at the Scottish case with great interest.

The International Contact Group, initiated by Currin, has played a prominent role in facilitating dialogue in the Basque Country. Its announcement in October 2011 of a roadmap for progress toward peace in the Basque Country, dubbed the Aiete Declaration, was followed three days later by ETA's declaration of a permanent ceasefire. The ICG continues to be active, insisting that all political parties should engage in discussions and stressing the need to legalize the left-wing Basque separatist party Sortu, banned in March 2011 by the Spanish Supreme Court for its alleged links with ETA. To achieve effective political dialogue, the ICG insists, all parties must be able to run in upcoming parliamentary elections in Euskadi in 2013.

But to effectively move dialogue forwards, the equal participation of interlocutors and mediators across the civil and political spectrum is crucial. How this dialogue and political engagement eventually translate into action will determine the steps toward final conflict resolution. □

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Photo: Crossed-out ETA graffiti, which reads "Fight is the way," Balmaseda, Basque Country, Spain (Photo by Wikimedia user Javierme).

THE ORIGINS AND CONSEQUENCES OF TUAREG NATIONALISM

BY PETER DÖRRIE

At the beginning of April, after a loose coalition of Tuareg rebel groups forced the Malian army to abandon Timbuktu, one of the armed factions involved in the fighting didn't lose much time in announcing its ultimate objective: "We, the people of Azawad declare irrevocably the independence of the state of Azawad," read the communiqué issued by the National Liberation Movement of Azawad -- known by its French acronym, MNLA -- five days after the ancient city fell.

The bold declaration is of course mostly wishful thinking. No state or international organization has recognized the independence of Azawad, as the Tuareg refer to the border-spanning region they inhabit, and it is unlikely that this will change in the near future. The situation in northern Mali remains chaotic, with various armed groups, criminal networks and terrorist organizations competing for influence, while the Malian government and army still reel from the effects of a coup d'état that shook the capital of Bamako in March.

But the Tuareg bid for independence does not come from out of thin air, nor does it come at a normal time for the countries of the Sahel region and North Africa. Tuareg minorities in Mali and Niger have fought for self-determination for more than 100 years. And following the fall of Moammar Gadhafi in Libya last year, regional political dynamics are evolving rapidly, which may yet prove to be either a boon or bane for those Tuareg rebels interested in independence.

Tuareg nationalism as a political ideology is rooted in the effects of colonization. It was sharpened by decades of marginalization and oppression, and has since become a useful tool in the hands of regional powerbrokers. Yet today, even as the MNLA makes the boldest bid yet for Tuareg self-determination, many Tuareg have actually come to accept the countries they live in as legitimate, making the future of Tuareg nationalism as well as its implications increasingly difficult to discern.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

The concept of a nation-state was unknown in the Tuareg community prior to colonization. The traditional social organization of the Tuareg is oriented along family lines, which can be either matrilineal or patrilineal. Families are grouped into clans, which can enter into federations or even larger confederations, depending on political considerations. Additionally, some clans enjoy the status of nobility, while others have been historically considered "dependents" of these noble clans.

For the Tuareg, who lived as nomads amid the dangerously unpredictable climatic conditions of the Sahara and Sahel region, fixed borders were unthinkable: Shifting rain patterns and droughts can make usually lush grazing grounds turn barren and wells run dry. In these cases, an elaborate system of usage and passage rights ensured that families and clans could move into more-fertile areas when necessary.

That is not to say that the Tuareg were in any way a united people. While they recognized their common heritage and cultural identity, referring to each other as “Kel Tamasheq” (the people who speak Tamasheq), competing clans and federations fought each other frequently.

This changed when the French entered the picture. “Nationalism was imposed upon Africa, and therefore people began to see their destiny in terms of nations, because ‘nation equals self-determination,’” says Andy Morgan, a British freelance writer with intimate knowledge of Tuareg affairs and history.

The French colonial administration drew borders across the vast expanses of the Sahara and did not look kindly upon those who ignored them in pursuit of their livelihood. Many Tuareg clans resisted bitterly, but military power forced them to submit to French rule.

When France’s African colonies began to advocate for independence in the wake of World War II, a few Tuareg leaders saw the moment as a critical point in their history. Politicians such as Mohamed Mahmoud ould Cheik vigorously lobbied the French government to include Tuareg-dominated areas in a planned autonomous region, the “Organisation Commune des Régions Sahariennes” (OCRS). This region was to consist primarily of areas of the Sahara Desert that would ultimately become part of the future countries of Mauritania, Algeria, Mali, Niger and Chad. The proposal also received substantial backing from influential members of the French business community, who were worried that African independence would deprive them of access to recently discovered mineral and oil deposits in the Sahara.

But this initial crude effort to create a Tuareg “state” proved to be too little, too late. According to Morgan, the French government bowed to pressure from the soon-to-be sovereign governments of the countries involved and abandoned the OCRS project. France found other ways to safeguard its interests in its former colonies, and the demands of the Tuareg were forgotten.

With the independence of many West African states in the 1960s, the history and ambitions of the various Tuareg communities began to diverge. Spread out over five countries -- Algeria, Libya, Mali, Chad and Burkina Faso -- some accommodated themselves to the new political realities, while others ultimately rebelled against what they perceived as a continuing colonization, this time not by Europeans, but by Africans.

MARGINALIZATION, INSTRUMENTALIZATION AND REBELLION

In all of the newly independent states in which they found themselves, the Tuareg were a minority, removed from the centers of power not only geographically, but also culturally. The French had left political power mostly in the hands of political movements dominated by black, settled Africans, who shared little common history and cultural identity with the Berber, nomadic Tuareg.

The new national elites approached the Tuareg very differently depending upon the country. In Algeria, the Tuareg role in the long-fought war of independence instilled among the Arab “Front de Libération Nationale” (FLN) a level of grudging respect for local Tuareg leaders. The FLN leadership was also careful to co-opt important Tuareg leaders into their ranks and buy others off, essentially limiting the potential for rebellion from the outset.

In Mali, things went very differently. First of all, few Tuareg were happy to come under the rule of southern Malians, whom they did not recognize as legitimate leaders. According to Georg Klute, an expert on Tuareg history at the University of Bayreuth, “Especially in the region of Kidal, the emotional, political and social distance from the rest of Mali has been great, from independence until today.”

This animosity was compounded by the attitude of the new Malian political elite. Acutely aware that the state of Mali was in many ways an artificial construct that could not count on any already

developed sense of patriotism from its citizens, the first government under Modibo Keita set out to create a Malian identity. Looking for suitable national myths integral to such a project, they turned to the historical Mali Empire, which dominated Western Africa in the 14th century.

This heritage meant nothing to the Tuareg, whose lack of enthusiasm for the new national identity -- combined with the earlier support of some Tuareg leaders for the OCRS project -- made the Malian government deeply suspicious of the Tuareg community. The Malian government's socialist orientation also meant that it perceived the social organization of the Tuareg as a "feudal" relic that should be abandoned, according to Klute.

Amid this tense situation, the first Tuareg rebellion broke out in 1962. Triggered by an incident in which a Tuareg man attacked and killed several Malian policemen, the insurrection swiftly spiraled out of control.

The government in Bamako reacted harshly. Army operations drove thousands of Tuareg families from their homes and into southern Algeria. The rebellion, which was finally suppressed in 1964, severed what few bonds had existed between the Tuareg and the Malian state.

Following the rebellion, large parts of the Tuareg-inhabited areas of Mali were governed as military districts and ignored when it came to investing in economic development. As a result, Tuareg, especially the youth, continued to migrate to Algeria and Libya in search of jobs. In the 1970s and 1980s, when some of the worst droughts in living memory hit the region, they were joined by significant numbers of Tuareg from Niger.

This series of catastrophic droughts destroyed large parts of the herds that represent the livelihood of the Tuareg nomads. "These droughts were the main reason for the later eruption of nationalist ideology," says Ines Kohl, an anthropologist at the University of Vienna who specializes in the Tuareg of Niger.

In both Mali and Niger, no serious attempt was made by the government to alleviate the situation facing the Tuareg. When their animals died, many Tuareg moved into the cities to find work, for example in the uranium mines near Arlit in Niger. But these jobs were usually given to "black" Africans from the southern parts of the country, who formed the government's main political constituency.

As a result, the only option left for many Tuareg was to migrate to the richer oil-producing countries of Algeria and Libya. In Libya, they were welcomed with open arms by Gadhafi, in power since 1969 and already looking for ways to expand his regional influence.

The relationship between Gadhafi and the Tuareg would prove to be full of contradictions and ironies. On the one hand, he was the most vocal supporter of Tuareg self-determination and trained scores of young Tuareg in military camps in Libya, ostensibly to prepare them for rebellion in their home countries. On the other hand, he preferred to use these fighters in his own conflicts, sending them to fight in Chad, for instance, during his various border wars with that country.

Any analysis of Gadhafi's motives and actions has to take in account his often erratic behavior as well as his hunger for power and dominance over African politics. He was fascinated by nomad culture and life, referring to himself as a nomad and reportedly never traveling without his Bedouin tent and camel mare. The Tuareg especially won his admiration. "Gadhafi really bought into the romantic idea of the Tuareg being the ultimate desert fighters," explains Morgan, "like camels with guns that could go on fighting forever."

But behind this romanticized vision also lay cold political calculation. "Gadhafi essentially instrumentalized the Tuareg for his political goals," says Poussi Sawadogo of the Free University of Burkina Faso. Once trained, Tuareg migrants provided Gadhafi with an elite troop of fighters he

could send to fight his conflicts abroad. Additionally, these fighters represented a political bargaining chip in his dealings with their home countries. And when some of those trained in Libya took part in the Tuareg uprising in the 1990s, Gadhafi efficiently used his connections and rapport with them to present himself as a mediator.

After the great droughts of the 1980s subsided, several factors coincided to lead to a bitter rebellion that engulfed both Mali and Niger. Frustration over economic marginalization and their treatment during the droughts reached a dangerous peak in the Tuareg community. Young Tuareg in the diaspora had undergone a profound intellectual evolution, giving rise to the concept of the Tuareg as one family with shared interests, basically the first distinctly "Tuareg" expression of nationalism. At the same time, several well-regarded and energetic young Tuareg leaders made their way back to their home countries from these diasporas -- among them Mano Dayak and Iyad ag Ghali, who would go on to be two of the most influential figures in the years to come.

For all the rhetoric about "one Tuareg nation," however, it's worth noting that Malian and Nigerien Tuareg pretty much fought their own battles. And although self-determination was the main demand, the rebels stopped short of actually demanding full independence. Instead, they wanted to obtain, by force if necessary, greater economic and political participation for Tuareg communities -- in essence transforming the states they lived in, not breaking them apart.

The Tuareg rebellion of 1990-1995 started without much external support or encouragement. While Gadhafi made a show of supporting Tuareg aspirations, those who returned to their home countries after serving him loyally for years actually had to raid local police stations to get their hands on their first weapons. And it was probably Gadhafi more than anyone who doomed the rebellion to failure in the end.

In a textbook example of political maneuvering, Gadhafi contributed to ending the insurgencies by buying off many of the armed groups' leaders and fighters, offering Tuareg commanders refuge and high-ranking posts in the Libyan army and inviting rank-and-file fighters to Libya or compensating them with cold hard cash for their "services." Meanwhile, the Malian and Nigerien governments promised to invest in development projects for the Saharan parts of their countries.

Not much changed as a result of these "settlements," except that Gadhafi -- and to a lesser degree Algeria, which also acted as a negotiator -- found their political clout in the region strengthened. Some cosmetic changes to administration and distribution of funds were made in both Mali and Niger, but the general dissatisfaction among Tuareg did not go away.

As a result, tensions flared up again in 2005, when a series of Tuareg attacks shook the Kidal region in northern Mali. Rebel groups in Niger joined this renewed uprising in 2007, although again there was little coordination between rebel groups hailing from the two different countries. The demands remained largely the same: economic and political reform and more possibilities for advancement for Tuareg recruits in the national army. Again, national independence was not mentioned.

The outcome of this rebellion basically followed the same pattern as the settlements in 1995: Algeria and Libya acted as negotiators and financial backers of the deals, in which the governments of Niger and Mali made some concessions. In Niger, these would prove to be quite successful in addressing the core problems. Recent developments have shown their futility in Mali.

In Niger, the government actually implemented most of its promises after the last rebellion. Areva, the French government-owned nuclear energy behemoth, recently opened a second uranium mine in Arlit, with many of the resulting jobs earmarked for Tuareg. According to Kohl, efforts were also made to include rebel leaders in the national government.

In contrast, Mali followed familiar, if already discredited, strategies: Rebel leaders and fighters

were not integrated, but "exported" to other countries willing to accept them, in the futile hope that this time they would not return to cause trouble. Meanwhile, a development program for the North was promised, but many Tuareg claimed that this never materialized.

This helps to explain why the civil war in Libya and Gadhafi's subsequent fall resulted in renewed rebellion in Mali, while Niger has stayed calm so far, said Kohl.

For the rebels in Mali, Gadhafi's fall could not have come at a better time. Elements aligned with the veteran rebel leader Ibrahim ag Bahanga had plotted a renewed rebellion for some time. When the defeat of Gadhafi was imminent, ag Bahanga convinced some of the Tuareg commanders in Libya to raid Libyan arms depots and return to Mali, where they set up bases in remote desert areas.

The returning Tuareg fighters and those awaiting them in Mali founded the MNLA, a rebel group that differs, according to Klute, in one important aspect from those that came before: It actually makes no demands of the Malian state. Instead, it wants to break up Mali by carving out a "Tuareg nation" in its North.

This development may be partly driven by the confidence provided by the extensive weaponry looted from Libyan stockpiles. Additionally, the rebels know that this time around, Gadhafi cannot stop the rebellion dead in its tracks at a critical moment. "After the fall of Gadhafi, Libya plays no role whatsoever in the conflict," says Klute.

But resentment over the Malian government's history of broken promises also plays a role. The veterans of earlier rebellions, as well as the young intellectuals coming from the diaspora, have simply lost all faith that the state of Mali will ever respect their grievances and demands. The only solution that remains, then, is independence.

This account of the history of Tuareg nationalism glosses over an important point: The exact measure of self-determination sought by the Tuareg was always fiercely contested within the Tuareg community itself and discussed on very different terms among groups in the various host countries.

Tuareg in Algeria, Libya and Burkina Faso, for instance, abandoned the discourse of self-determination and independence almost completely for a variety of reasons. In Niger, nationalist ideology found the greatest support in the 1990s in the context of the first major Tuareg rebellion. But even at that time, complete independence was an option only supported by an extremist fringe of Tuareg activists. Most Tuareg always accepted that ethnic diversity in Tuareg-inhabited areas in Niger was too great to ever allow the creation of a Tuareg nation. Instead, demands were made for regional autonomy as well as guarantees of political hegemony in local politics for Tuareg leaders.

This has also been the long-standing position of Tuareg activists in Mali, and the MNLA's recent declaration of independence is by no means based on a consensus, even among Malian Tuareg. The emergence of competing Tuareg rebel groups that don't share the MNLA's nationalist agenda, such as Ansar Dine, underlines the fact that Tuareg support for independence is far from unanimous.

CONCLUSION AND PROSPECTS

Nationalism is not an ideology that springs up spontaneously, just as the feeling of belonging to a nation of people is not instilled by nature, but rather created by socio-political processes. The history of nationalism among the Tuareg shows this very clearly.

The quest for self-determination among the Tuareg has been conditioned and formed by colonial domination, marginalization and outright instrumentalization by foreign and domestic powers. Of course, the Tuareg were no mere puppets in this game. They shaped regional and national politics

considerably through their decisions, whether to protest, rebel and take action against their governments, or to accommodate them.

But history also demonstrates that intelligent politics can avert nationalist uprisings and instead foster sustainable and mutually beneficial long-term integration of minority groups into nation-states.

While most countries with Tuareg minorities seem to have managed to choose this path, much uncertainty remains. Little can be said, for example, about what the chaotic situation in Libya will mean for the Tuareg remaining there. And while Mali currently faces the most extreme expression of nationalist rebellion -- the declaration of an independent state -- support for an independent Azawad is hardly unanimous, and its success is quite unlikely.

Indeed, the political climate in West Africa is highly unfavorable for the creation of new nation-states. Too many countries in the region -- chief among them Algeria, which holds considerable sway over Malian affairs -- are wary of the encouragement an independent Azawad would offer minorities on their own territories. According to Klute, no state in the region will recognize an independent Azawad.

Additionally, an independent Tuareg state would inherit many of the problems of its predecessor, including the presence of minorities -- this time non-Tuareg -- who would feel disenfranchised and encouraged to take up arms. As Sawadogo put it, “An independent Azawad would lead to the Somalia-ization of West Africa.” It is difficult to imagine a long-term solution developing in this direction.

If there is hope for a stable resolution to the region’s current upheaval, it probably lies in those Tuareg who are tired of war and rebellion. Most Tuareg are agnostic when it comes to questions of citizenship. What they want is a perspective offering economic and political participation, as well as a measure of protection for their cultural identity. If these demands are realized and addressed in the halls of power in Bamako, Niamey and other capitals, Tuareg nationalism in all likelihood would no longer be a recurring cause of bloodshed and displacement. □

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Photo: Tuareg man in Algeria, December 2004 (photo by Florence Devouard, licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported license).

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