The Last Mufti of Iranian Kurdistan

Ethnic and Religious Implications in the Greater Middle East

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Islamabad, Pakistan

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To all prisoners of conscience

Preface

Each of Iran's 30 million citizens at the time of its revolution has a worthy tale to tell. Many of them are of triumph and redemption, while countless other narratives have been buried with those who perished on revolutionary and war-torn battlefields or languished and died in Iran's prisons. This book is first and foremost an attempt to shed light on one of those stories.

In the year 1979, a religious scholar and longtime political dissident named Ahmad Moftizadeh would lead a movement for Kurdish and Sunni autonomy in Iran. Today, we could broadly characterize Moftizadeh's movement as an "Islamist" one. But as we will see, many features of Moftizadeh's thinking and the nature of his movement did not fit the standard paradigm for political Islam. This history is uniquely worthy of attention in light of current events. It provides important insight into the religious division and development of Islamist movements and ideas that have come to define politics in the region.

For the reader's convenience, this book has been divided into three distinct parts that are imperatively linked to one another. Part I of this book provides historical context from which the events of the biography develop. Through this brief survey of the twentieth-century Middle East, a framework is proposed with which to understand iterations of political Islam in Kurdistan in the past, present, and future. If the reader navigates Part I patiently, it will supplement her understanding of the region's bigger picture as well as subsequent parts of the manuscript. Part II is the biographical portion of the book, which makes up its largest part. In addition to its independent historical value, the biography is an example of an Islamist movement that had the ability to be expressly nonviolent and highly progressive

in its social values even though it was "orthodox." Lastly, Part III of the book is forward-looking. In applying conclusions from the first two parts of the book, it explains how Kurdistan's political evolution factors into the political currents dominating Middle Eastern society today.

Among the many reflections this manuscript may elicit, it is hoped that the notion of Iran as a country of many nations will present itself in the reader's mind. A failure to understand and the lack of attention vis-à-vis grievances that make up the story of this book equates to a failure in understanding Iran and the region's complexity in full.

One could argue that Kurdistan's modern history is four times as complex as the history of its neighbors. This is because, despite cross-cutting tribal, cultural, and linguistic similarities that exist in all areas where Kurds live, most Kurds are separated along the borders of four distinct "nation-states" with their own complex histories. While most of the analysis in this book will concentrate on the Kurdistan that Ahmad Moftizadeh lived in, mainly Iranian Kurdistan, it is often useful and necessary to make reference to events and features of the broader region for context. Those more familiar with the Middle East will no doubt navigate this book with relative ease, but the hope is that this text is also straightforward enough to those less familiar with the region and its history. In fact, this story is presented with those laypersons especially in mind.

Finally, the word "Kurdistan" is used liberally in this book. This is intended to refer to where Kurds make up a majority of the population. Iranian Kurdistan is the part of Iran where Kurds make up a majority, for example. The use of the word "Kurdistan" does not imply any political opinion. Despite the political connotations (negative for some) associated with the word, Kurdistan is simply the most convenient way to describe those regions.[1]

Islamabad, Pakistan — Ali Ezzatyar

Note

1. Much of Iranian Kurdistan is in Iran's official "*Kordestan*" province, and Iraqi Kurdistan is of course an autonomous region of Iraq today. And while Kurdistan as a whole, and no part of it, is as of yet independent, Kurdistan is not just a demographic reality, but a political one.

Opinions expressed in this book are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of the US government.

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More Praise for *The Last Mufti of Iranian Kurdistan*

"American scholar-diplomat Ali Ezzatyar has given Western readers a fascinating study of the fierce complexities of the Greater Middle East since World War II. It is built around a scrupulous reconstruction of the life and work of Iranian Kurdish Sunni leader Ahmad Moftizadeh (1933–1993). Using personal interviews and rare documentation in Kurdish and Farsi, Ezzatyar shows us the intricate spiritual and political life of Iranian Kurds under the Shahs and the Islamic Republic from the inside and from the ground up, and he argues that their secular nationalism has securely immunized them from political Islamism (even in Moftizadeh's democratic version). He then widens the lens to the region as a whole, arguing passionately for recognition that Kurds have a unique constructive role to play as allies of the West and potential anchors of modern values. A scholarly treat, and food for political thought as well."
—Thomas W. Simons, Jr., former U.S. Ambassador to Pakistan; author of *Islam in a Globalizing World*; and Visiting Scholar, Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies, Harvard University, USA

"In profiling a single individual in the least known region of Kurdish settlement, Ali Ezzatyar manages to illuminate the situation of Kurds not just in Iran, but also in Turkey, Iraq, and Syria. In prodigiously researching the life of Iranian Sunni Kurdish religious and political leader Ahmad Moftizadeh, he traces the rise and fall of one attempt at Kurdish autonomy, prefigures others, and underscores the persistence and importance of these movements. Ezzatyar concludes with some provocative but well-argued implications for American policy in this complex and highly conflicted region."

—James Dobbins, Former Assistant Secretary of State and Senior Fellow and Distinguished Chair in Diplomacy and Security at the RAND Corporation

"In this historically rich yet ever topical and lively read, Ali Ezzatyar reaches back a couple centuries to explain the relative significance of Islam and nationalism in forging today's Kurdish identity. Appealing to the self-interest of regional governments, he makes a pitch for greater respect for Kurdish nationalism as a potentially moderate and constructive political force in the region."
—Michael O'Hanlon, Senior Fellow and Director of Research on Foreign Policy, The Brookings Institution and author of *The Future of Land Warfare*

"This intriguing work illuminates a largely overlooked aspect of two great struggles that have shaken the Middle East: one for Kurdish rights, the other for freedom in Iran. Through the lens of history and biography, it tells an untold story that is as fascinating as it is important."
—Stephen Kinzer, Senior Fellow at the Watson Institute of International Affairs and author of *Reset: Iran, Turkey, and America's Future*

"In this masterful study, Ali Ezzatyar brings to life key events and a key personality of Iranian Kurdistan in the earliest months following the victory of the Islamic Revolution. Those events involved key figures of the new system, including Ayatollahs Khomeini, Taleghani, and Beheshti, and shaped the direction of the nascent Islamic Republic, particularly its attitude toward its important Kurdish minority. Decisions taken then have reverberated over three decades and across borders into today's Turkey, Iraq, and Syria."
—Ambassador John Limbert, Former Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Iran

"This is an important, original, and timely book that makes a major contribution to historiography of the Middle East. Ezzatyar's monograph demonstrates … that neither political Islam nor secular authoritarian ideologies will address the challenges facing Kurds whether in Iran, Iraq, Turkey, or Syria … [and simultaneously] emphasizes … Muslim values embedded in tolerant nationalisms recognizing full and complete rights of minorities. It

is these values that will help to bring about inclusive functioning societies and countries in the Middle East. [The book] makes a significant contribution to studies of the Middle East, Iran, Sunnism, Kurdish history, nationalism, society, and culture. What more can anyone do in one book?"
—Robert Olson, Professor of Middle East History and Politics at the University of Kentucky, USA and author of the *Emergence of Kurdish Nationalism and the Sheikh Said Rebellion: 1880–1925*

"Ali Ezzatyar's study of the career of Ahmad Moftizadeh—a seemingly improbable progressive, non-violent Kurdish-Iranian Islamist—offers compelling insights into how an ethnic nationalism of a Muslim people supplants forms of political Islam. This revealing book also draws on new and original research to paint first-hand character studies of many important historical figures. The author argues persuasively that enabling Kurdish parties can help enhance stability and prosperity at the expense of religious extremism—a potent and timely message indeed."
—Michael M. Gunter, Professor of Political Science at Tennessee Technological University, USA and author of *The Kurds: A Modern History*

"*The Last Mufti of Iranian Kurdistan* is both an engaging biography and a much-needed history of modern Iranian Kurdistan. Although the birthplace of modern Kurdish nationalism, little is written about the Kurds of Iran. Ali Ezzatyar makes up for this deficit in a book that provides insights into Iranian Kurdistan, Sunni Islam in Shiite Iran, and life in outer regions of the Islamic Republic. I strongly recommend this fascinating and clearly written book to anyone interested in the Kurds or modern Iran."
—Ambassador Peter W. Galbraith, author of *The End of Iraq: How American Incompetence Created a War Without End*

PART I

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Introduction

As this book went to press, the region described as the Middle East was engulfed in flames. And the Kurds were in the midst of their now typical once-a-decade prominence in the Western media. In the 1980s, the Kurds temporarily surfaced in the Western mind as victims of genocide at the hands of Saddam Hussein's government. In the 1990s, they surfaced as untimely participants in failed uprisings against the Iraqi and Turkish governments. In 2003, they were known the reliable allies in America's war in Iraq. In each of these cases we learned a bit more about the kurds, but until recently, never a meaningful amount. Now, Kurdish guerrillas are the protagonist in a horror story involving the Islamic State and the potential dissolution of the modern Middle East, with the Syrian and Iraqi nation-states in the throes of war, and virtually all of Kurdistan's neighbors/home countries in precarious circumstances. While the Kurdish *peshmerga* are making the news, actively fighting the Islamic State in cities like Kobane and Sinjar, the Kurds are still a secondary actor in the bigger story. Their struggle and their role in the battle of arms and ideas in the Middle East are ancillary to the larger news items of Islamic extremism and American and Russian military involvement in the region.

Despite the relative lack of importance attributed to it by the press, the Kurdish story has an increasingly essential role in all of these larger items. In Turkey, the Kurds are making some progress toward their struggle for recognition, albeit alongside a polarizing Turkish government that

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is viewed with increased suspicion both at home and abroad. Turkey's ability to forge a peaceful resolution to the so-called Kurdish Question will go a long way in demonstrating whether Turkey is in fact a model for the Muslim world. At the moment, such notions seem remote. Turkey is renewing a battle with elements of its own Kurdish population domestically as well as with Kurds who are staking out autonomy in Syria, at the world's expense in its fight against the Islamic State. In Iraq, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) is fully autonomous, having even secured the crown jewel of Kirkuk without fanfare as the Iraqi army withdrew its forces in the summer of 2014 (and further defending it from attacks by the Islamic State at the beginning of 2015).[1] However, there is still no resolution as to what Kurdistan represents in a united Iraq, and this has the potential to unravel nearly three decades of stability there. In Syria, of course, a coalition of Kurds is one of a number of actors fighting for partial control of a now devastated country. Their organization after military success against the Islamic State (with the help of American airstrikes) looks to some like the beginning of a sort of Syrian KRG.

Meanwhile, with almost no coverage in the press, tensions continue to bubble in Iranian Kurdistan. The ongoing assassination and execution of suspected Kurdish militants and sympathizers has exacerbated tensions in the region, and skirmishes with *peshmerga* forces in Iran (despite the Iranian peshmerga's participation en masse in the wars across the border) may bring tensions to a boil.[2]

While the 40 million or so Kurds are playing a role in virtually all of the region's most watched conflicts, Kurdistan does not figure prominently in America's national interest and foreign policy discourse. It should. Regardless of how one views the question of Kurdish self-determination, it is undeniable that the Kurdish question is one that, while integral to every generation of the region's political development, becomes especially important in this period of turmoil and transition.

The combination of a war-weary American public, the shale oil revolution, and American leadership in the information age that is more focused on domestic political repercussions vis-à-vis foreign policy matters has changed America's role in the region substantially. America is neither interested in, nor capable of, exerting the influence it once did.[3] This means that each of its allies is increasingly indispensable in helping it influence the tide of events to the extent it seeks to do so. Reliable

friends are hard to find, and they have proven to be increasingly difficult to patronize. Iraqi leadership today is arguably closer to Iran than to any other country, despite the considerable American expense and effort there for over a decade. The Egyptian army, one of the largest recipients of US assistance historically, has repeatedly proven itself unswayed by the preferences of Washington. Many other examples of America's waning influence abound. Countries like Saudi Arabia and Qatar outspend and out-influence America when their existence, and not just their interests, is at stake, and America has had trouble competing in the region of recent with notions of prestige or the threat of economic or military force.[4] It is difficult to counter the idea that not only is the "West" a number of steps behind in reacting to important events in the region, but its actions have often had the continued effect of worsening things, despite its intentions.

The notion growing out of some policy circles in Washington, that America's preoccupation with the region will be less pronounced going forward due to its increased energy self-sufficiency, is misguided. While it is true that America's shale oil breakthrough changes fundamental calculations with regard to its energy policy, these advancements by no means immunize it from the region's instability or make the region less relevant. Even minor blips or disruptions in Iraqi or Saudi oil production can cause massive disruptions to financial markets, for starters.

Most importantly, however, where America's focus can ebb to some degree as a result of lower energy dependence, the balance of such focus will have to be applied to non-economic factors in the region. The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant's (ISIL's) rise was delegitimized by the Obama administration and the international press as a fluke event owing to the disunity of Iraq, the weakness of the Iraqi army, and the Syrian civil war. Regardless of where the blame lies for the Islamic State's ascendance, America has failed to recognize the monumental event that its existence represents: For the first time, a non-ethnic Muslim country is born and lives on, with no other clear ideological core than the Islamic fundamentalist extremism that the West has fought so hard to eliminate. So radical that even al-Qaeda has disavowed its messianic ideological construction, this state is attracting young Muslims from the entire world to partake in its project. Erasing ISIL's nebulous borders through military intervention will not change the gravity of this foregone reality. The West is losing an

important war of ideas against Islamic extremism, and its traditional contingency planning in the Middle East is going nowhere.

Complicating matters intensely is the fact that America is off-balance in its desire to destroy the Islamic State, while at the same time supporting and placating Turkey, an important North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) ally and neighbor to the conflict. With respect to battling the Islamic State, President Obama and other US policymakers have insisted that the bulk of this work needs to be done by Muslims in the region. This is the correct instinct. Besides Shia militias aligned with Iran and ultimately uninterested in battling ISIL in the core of IS territory, the only indigenous group that has shown the willingness and facility to target the Islamic State is the Kurds. Meanwhile, Turkey's main fear is the ascent of those same Kurds and the precedent that this may set for Turkey's own sizeable Kurdish population. So while the USA has developed a close relationship with Kurdish militias, and has encouraged and supported their war effort, the current Turkish government has made the weakening of those same Kurdish militias its primary national security priority.

For Western policymakers, it is not as simple as throwing more weight behind the Kurds to do the world's bidding. Even if the Kurds were to be further empowered, their participation in wars outside of the boundaries of "Kurdistan" could actually aggravate matters. The region's turmoil and the rise of the Islamic State have also reinforced the idea among many Kurds that independence is not only necessary, but increasingly urgent. This adds yet another layer of complexity to supporting them. For America's foreign policy calculation in the region, this is just one of many intricate factors, each with potential for catastrophe.

So as the Iraqi, Syrian, Yemeni, Egyptian, Libyan (and the list goes on) nations undergo turmoil, transition, and change, several key questions arise. Who will they perceive as allies? Is the anti-Americanism in these places irreversible? What will a permanent Islamic State mean for the broader region and its actors, stretching out to China? What will be the legacy of the Islamic State in the minds of marginalized Muslims for the next 100 years in places like Pakistan and Malaysia, even if the Islamic State is destroyed? Where can America salvage some influence and, at the very least, ensure the safety of its citizens? These will be the defining foreign policy questions of the next decades. In this text, we examine why Kurdistan is essential to addressing all of them.

Notes

1. Young, Jeffrey. "Kurdish Peshmerga Force Secures Kirkuk, Its Oil." *VOA*. Accessed December 21, 2014.
2. "Iranian Kurdish Parties Accuse Tehran of Mass Assassinations." *Rudaw*, December 13, 2014. Accessed December 21, 2014. http://rudaw.net/english/middleeast/iran/13122014.
3. See generally: Ezzatyar, Ali. "The Case for Kurdistan." *The National Interest*, 2014.
4. Nordland, Rod. "Saudi Arabia Promises to Aid Egypt's Regime." *The New York Times,* August 21, 2013.

CHAPTER 2

Sunni, Shia, and Kurd: A Brief History of Islamism in Kurdistan

The tumultuous events that gave rise to modern Kurdish identity generate two important questions. Both relate to "Islamism" in Kurdistan, Islamism being a group's reference to Islam for political purposes. First, what type of a relationship has the Kurdish population maintained historically vis-à-vis political Islam in Iranian Kurdistan (and Kurdistan generally), and how does this relate to the sentiment of Kurdish nationalism in that same population? Second, given Islam and Islamism's role in Kurdistan, what type of conclusions can we draw between these sentiments and the development and rise of Islamism in the populations and governments of the sovereign (Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria)?

The history of Islamism in Kurdistan reveals important trends that are valuable in analyzing ongoing events in the broader region today. As we will see, prior to and during the development of pan-Kurdish nationalist ideas and institutions, Islamic identity with a uniquely Kurdish coloring was a vehicle of sorts for unity in Kurdistan. This was primarily a reactive and irredentist process, mostly during the period leading up to and after the collapse of the Ottoman empire. It is on the heels of this environment that our biographical examination takes pace, and thus this warrants further examination.

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Today's typical American timeline on Iran tends to commence at the Islamic revolution in 1979. Given that, it is easy to see Iran as a Shia religious monolith, with most other political currents in the country being

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anti-establishment non-religious ones. Iran is, of course, much more complex politically and religiously. Its religious demography today is the product of much historical change. Zoroastrianism was the first dominant religion of any contiguous "Persian" or "Iranian" region before Iran became primarily Sunni Muslim after the conquest of Islam. Many of Iran's well-known historical poets and scientists, such as Omar Khayyam and Ibn Sina, were Sunni Muslims. It was not until the Safavid dynasty took control of Iran, nearly a thousand years after Islam was born, that a majority of Iran's population became Shia.[1] This was mostly the result of forced conversion, a practice which did not fully succeed in reaching the rebellious and far-off Kurdish populations, who remain mostly Sunni today.

The Kurdish population in Iran has maintained a conflictual relationship with Iran's rulers for centuries. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, Kurdish tribes were forcibly settled and their vestiges of self-government, in the form of semi-autonomous tribal principalities, were undermined by successive "central governments." Kurds, for their part, never missed an opportunity to claw back lands and control from the central government when the central government's rule was weaker, usually under a combination of tribal and religious leadership. The role of Islam in this complex array of cultural and ideological identities is a unique one by regional standards.[2]

Islam in Kurdistan: To What End?

As a result of its lack of proximity to historic Islamic centers of learning, the heavy influence of mystic and *sufi* orders, as well as certain elements of Kurdish culture and tradition, the role of Islam in Kurdistan differs significantly from Islam's role in the rest of the Middle East as well as most of the Muslim world. In Kurdish society today, many Kurds identify as Muslim while at the same time, counterintuitively, disowning any brotherhood or commonalities with their Arab, Persian, or Turkish neighbors. Many seldom attend the mosque and ignore standard instructions on daily life that many other devout Muslims follow or are at least aware of. Given what religion means to many people and many Muslims in particular, it is fair to see this as an inherent contradiction.

The role that Islam has played in Kurdish political movements historically is equally paradoxical and seemingly contradictory. It is defined by both a relative lack of orthodox religiosity among the population and,

incongruously, an essential role for nominally Islamic leadership and symbolism. One commentator has referred to political currents in Kurdistan during the first half of the twentieth century as being "religious-secular"—an anomalous, yet apt method of describing the relationship between these movements and Islam.[3] What does this mean, and how did Kurdistan develop this societal character? A deeper understanding of the unique history of Kurdistan, with an emphasis on the period when nationalism was introduced in the Middle East, demonstrates how this contradiction can exist. It is the product of historical changes in Kurdish society that resulted in the destruction of an all-encompassing, formal tribal structure, coupled with the psychology of a population that has viewed itself as poorly integrated in the non-Kurdish (and dominant) society around it.

The Tribe and the Sheikh: Kurdish National Identity

For much of Kurdish history, and certainly during the last thousand years, regional principalities composed of tribes organized on the basis of descent and kinship were the essential "socio-political … unit" and fabric of Kurdish society.[4] Virtually every historian on Kurdistan has emphasized the important role that the tribe plays in Kurdish life, just as every Kurdish "nationalist" leader has dedicated significant effort to maneuvering the tribal reality around them. Abdul Rahman Ghassemlou, who was both a historian and one of Kurdistan's most well-known nationalist leaders, describes the essential and all-consuming role of the tribe in traditional Kurdistan, noting that it was a strict hierarchy, but one where religious personages enjoyed quasi-leadership functionality.[5] These tribal religious leaders in turn were often linked to *sufi* or mystic orders, and were not formal scholars as they existed in much of the Muslim world.

Theories on how and why the tribe came to be so pre-eminent in Kurdistan beget discussions that go beyond the scope of our examination, but the dominance of the tribe for the vast majority of Kurdistan's modern history is unrefuted. As the Ottoman empire modernized in the late nineteenth century and then went on to collapse, tribal structures in Kurdistan began to deteriorate. Broadly speaking, the tribe in Kurdistan went through three major phases of decay: First, during the consolidation of empire, which weakened the tribe's legitimacy and existence in a vacuum, forcing it to co-opt the sovereign; second, with the strengthening of neighboring non-Kurdish nationalist governments which targeted

Image 1 Map of Kurdish-Inhabited Areas (U), 2007. *Source*: Washington, DC: Central Intelligence Agency, 2002. http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.gmd/g7421e.ct002300 (with addition of Sanandaj)

the tribe and had the greatest negative effect on the core of tribal power and legitimacy; and third, with general modernity and modern Kurdish movements which in turn targeted (and continue to target) the remaining vestiges of tribal power and identity to form a basis for national unity. This degeneration of tribe has continued at varying speeds in various portions of Kurdistan but, in all cases, has persisted.

Much of the dismantling of the tribe's dominance in Kurdistan coincided with the dissolution of the great empires and dynasties of the Middle East (Ottoman in 1922 and Safavid/Qajar in 1925) and the adoption of modern nationalism as central governments began to pursue their own modernization measures. The Iranian government, beginning in earnest with Reza Khan, pursued large-scale policies of tribal settlement for

reasons of political control and taxation.[6] Prior to this time, as nomadic Kurds began to settle into agricultural arrangements, tribal tradition dictated that land was held communally within the tribe. When land reform measures by the central government were instituted in 1926, they resulted not only in the breakup of large estates but, ultimately, in tribal leaders holding remaining land in their own names instead.[7] This translated into a quasi-landowner–peasant relationship, and hence a partial breakdown of traditional tribal structure. Meanwhile, continued land reform broke down the hierarchy and power structure of the tribe still further and opened the door for the predominance of more modern, non-tribal ideas of community in Kurdistan for the first time.[8] When these tribal arrangements that served as the foundation of Kurdish society were dismantled, a power vacuum was left that religious structures, the most pliable pieces of tribal arrangements in many ways, were able to fill.[9] In some cases, even prior to the large-scale attack on the institution of the tribe in Kurdistan, tribal leaders were often hybrid spiritual role models who derived their legitimacy from this spirituality.

Before Kurdish populations began to think of themselves as a single community unified by language and culture, religious leadership in these tribal communities was well-placed to assume a degree of popular control since the various reforms and conflicts around them did not affect their authority to the extent it did the tribal chiefs. The forced settlement of tribes and formal land reform measures did not affect the power of the spiritual leaders in Kurdistan, whose influence was reputational in large part. Their wealth was more predominantly made up of human capital and contributions from followers rather than land. When the fabric of tribal leadership was materially damaged, one could argue that spiritual leaders, many of them known as "*sheikhs*,"[10] were the only individuals left who had the people's loyalty as well as significant resources, without the necessity of tribal legitimacy.[11]

Importantly, however, these *sheikhs* did not overtly disrupt the tribal identity structure that existed. This meant that while tribal leadership was decimated, tribal identity within the group often remained for decades. This led to a unique and often overlooked feature of Kurdish society in the post-Ottoman era: Prior to modern Islamist movements, and for perhaps the first time on a large scale in the Middle East, spiritual leaders ascended to the leadership of "national" movements on mostly ethnic lines, using a combination of Islamic symbolism and the benefit of tribal "group think." The movements were not true Islamic movements, since

they usually consisted only of Kurds, contained an important ideological cornerstone of Kurdish identity, and did not project pan-Islamist ideas that aimed beyond the borders of Kurdistan.

The period surrounding the collapse of the Ottoman empire saw much of this societal change in a rather short period of time. Any "movement" in this era of shifting politics and identity usually meant tribespeople following their increasingly weakened chiefs (*aghas)* and/or *sheikhs.* It has been noted that the *sheikh* in traditional Kurdish society "needed all the abilities of a modern politician. He had to be able to effect compromises, settle disputes, and provide succor in such a way that none of the aggrieved felt shortchanged."[12] In that sense, the religious figure in Kurdistan, far from an arbiter on matters related to Islam alone, played the role of "doctor, lawyer, priest and psychiatrist."[13] A developed sense of nationalism and the notion of collective action were too limited to beget a nationalist movement at the turn of the century, at least in Kurdistan. One commentator notes "Kurdish nationalism, which in most cases meant demands for an independent state, and Kurdish Pan-Islamism, though to some extent contradictory, were closely connected [and confused]."[14] This was because most Kurds at the time "were not capable of comprehending more abstract notions such as a Kurdish nation-state" and uprisings still "bore enormous resemblance to the revolts by the traditional tribal chieftains." For this reason, before the collapse of the Ottoman empire, the Kurdish elite had already taken to ideas of pan-Kurdish nationalism under quasi-religious leadership, as evidenced by Sheikh Ubaydallah's popular uprising of 1880 which employed the rhetoric of a free Kurdistan. Sheikh Ubaydallah's uprising is remarkable due to the fact that, in the mind of many, the Ottoman empire's collapse was not yet inevitable. Still, the dissatisfaction of the Kurdish tribes was producing spiritual leadership and Kurdish nationalist rhetoric even at this rather early juncture.

Even more so in the post-Ottoman period, the *sheikh*, with a pristine sense of destiny and service to God, had an enormous amount of prestige as tribal structures and allegiances were moribund.[15] Examples show that a notable *sheikh* could usually garner followers among many tribes, some of them competing ones. And while it is true that many Kurds were not formal members of tribes, and were simply living on tribal land, identity with the dominant tribe of the region was nonetheless paramount. In the absence of a strong tribal structure that was both able to sustain the tribe economically, and also through the very idea of the tribe's importance, any competing modality had to rise to the occasion on all of these levels. The

local religious orders in Kurdistan, with their integration in the tribal structure and adaptability to Kurdish culture, were ideal.

The double disintegration of tribe and empire undoubtedly also had a societal influence that was fundamentally religious and not just practically religious. This transformative period led to an increased sense among the region's Muslim population, including the Kurdish population in Iran and the rest of Kurdistan, of increased European and Christian dominance in the region.[16] This evoked a sort of Islamist sentiment that undoubtedly played a role in the psyche of Kurdish leadership and common people that had for so long been at the behest of, and within the purview of, the Ottoman empire. In all cases, however, it seems that the nationalist or tribal emphasis of any actual movement led by the *sheikh* in Kurdistan was just as essential, and often more essential, than the spiritual identity brought by the *sheikh*. For example, there were no known movements in Kurdistan that were purely religious and sought the restoration of the caliphate as their primary goal. At a time where the region (and the central governments) where Kurds lived moved in the direction of secular nationalist platforms, the Kurds employed Islamism as an important element of their increasingly irredentist nationalist agendas. This was a comfortable place for Kurdish leaders to find a balance, as the new elite of that leadership had spiritual legitimacy. But most importantly, it was effective because it was in contrast to the ideas of central governments and dominant groups that these leaders opposed.

Across all of the postcolonial Middle East, after the collapse of the Ottoman empire and the abolition of the caliphate, the line between nationalism and Islam was blurred. In a region that did not see large-scale modern nationalism until the First World War, this was perhaps natural. But it led to remarkable alliances and allegiances that make little sense when applied to today's conventional wisdom on nationalism and religiosity in the region. For example, Ataturk, the secular firebrand who presided over the enactment of such policies as the banning of the Arabic script and of religious emblems in public life, began his campaign for unity by making a strong appeal for Muslim solidarity against the infidels who were attacking the "homeland." He was successful in securing some Kurdish tribal loyalty through the use of the precise Islamic symbolism that would ultimately be discarded by him (although it can be said that inter-tribal feuds played a more significant role in Kurds aligning themselves with the Turkish state during this period).[17]

Kurdistan's failure to unify in the post-Ottoman era, despite an invitation to do so by the Allied Powers in the Treaty of Sèvres, has led to the discounting of the significance and nature of Kurdish nationalism in Kurdistan during that period. Much analysis about the birth of Kurdish nationalism concentrates on more controversial, loaded questions such as whether it even existed in any form prior to Turkish nationalism or whether it was developed indigenously in Kurdistan or by elites outside of Kurdistan. As a result, a more nuanced analysis about the early Kurdish movements which did exist is ignored. The hybrid religious and nationalist nature of many of these movements in Kurdistan is also ignored. These movements are an important tool for helping us understand the nature of Kurdish political development leading up to periods of turmoil in the Second World War, the Iranian revolution, and even today. And, as we will see, the rest of the region's gradual rediscovery of Islamist identity may also explain much of Kurdistan's current preference for ultra-nationalist, secular movements.

This book does not explore the early historical development and content of "Kurdish identity" indepth. We know that Kurdish nationalism exists now, among the other "imagined communities" as historian Benedict Anderson would say. This book is more concerned with examining that identity's ultimate boundaries, and for that, one identity analysis is especially useful in Kurdistan: the notion of contrasting the "other." Vamik Volkan, a psychiatrist specializing in the analysis of group behavior, notes that once an enemy is determined through experience, that enemy needs to be "kept at least at a psychological distance … [because] it gives us aid and comfort, enhancing our cohesion and making comparisons with ourselves gratifying."[18] Samuel Huntington, in a book on the makings of American identity, deals with the categorization of the other as well. He states that "identity requires differentiation. Differentiation necessitates comparison, the identification of the ways in which 'our' group differs from 'their' group. Comparison, in turn, generates evaluation … our ways are better than their ways."[19] He further notes that research has shown instances where a group would rather be worse off but better than the "other," as opposed to having their group better off but worse than the "other."[20] There are a number of fundamental weaknesses in the aforementioned theses, but some elements of them are rather intuitive. As we will see, the basic distinctions of the "other" that Kurds had to make throughout their history as a developing nation helps lead us to our chapter's conclusions.

Religious-Nationalist Rebellion in Kurdistan: A First of Its Kind

When examining instances of early Kurdish nationalist movements, it is helpful to understand the nature of Kurdish nationalism prior to the collapse of the Ottoman empire. With the arguable exception of the Shaykh Ubaydallah-led rebellions of around 1880, Kurdish identity in this period was not the primary vehicle of any "rebellion" or "movement" as we would typically define those words. The Shaykh Ubaydallah movement, despite the motivations espoused by its leader, also lacked a fundamental nationalist character that was able to survive without the person of the *sheikh*. It was primarily a tribal movement with religious and Kurdish-nationalist symbolism, but did not include a cross section of the Kurdish population that was motivated on nationalist grounds. While there were many examples of the existence of a strong Kurdish identity and of the belief in Kurdish exceptionalism as early as the mid-eighteenth century, particularly among the educated elite of the surrounding empires, this identity did not become a galvanizing force for a national movement until nationalism itself (in all its forms) became more widespread in the empires.[21] And when Kurdish nationalism began to develop, it took its own unique form.

As noted, the remarkable symbiotic relationship between religious and nationalist identity in Kurdistan was perhaps the first time such a feature appeared in the Muslim world. Unlike subsequent renditions of this relationship, such as the Iranian revolution itself, it never succeeded in producing a nation-state in Kurdistan. But the nature of the Kurdish movements themselves was also unlike the Iranian revolution in the important sense that the religious element of these movements was essentially symbolic and not doctrinal. By examining the notable instances of these movements, which were also the most powerful and successful Kurdish movements of the twentieth century, the evolution of Kurdish nationalism and its relationship with religion comes into view.

The first post-Ottoman example of this feature of Kurdish society occurred in Iran. It was the revolt of Ismail Agha Simko of Shakak, beginning in 1918. A chief in one of Iran's most influential Kurdish tribal confederations, Simko spent most of his life as a tribal leader consolidating his power among other tribes. Through marriage and conquest, he did this remarkably well. The nascent Pahlavi reforms to Kurdistan's tribal way of life had not yet been implemented, and this was a boon to Simko, as he

did not have to be as successful in the war of ideas to command support, relying instead on an ability to align groupings of tribal areas behind him by force. This also proved to be a great weakness of his. Simko, unlike leaders of similarly placed movements, did not have any sort of religious training (and was not a *sheikh*). However, he did exploit the spiritual authority that he believed his status as a chief afforded him through the use of Islamic symbolism.

There are few examples in Simko's life, prior to his revolt, of a preoccupation with Kurdish nationalism; he seemed to be more concerned with the power of himself and his tribe, as evidenced by his frequent change of loyalties and his own subjugation of Kurdish lands.[22] He recognized however that the force of modern notions of nationalism coupled with religious symbolism and identity were powerful together. His rhetoric displayed an enthusiasm for ridding the region of its Christian population (helping him forge cooperation among tribe members), often demonstrating his partiality to Muslim cooperation. Meanwhile, his use of Kurdish nationalist rhetoric was well known, and the most central feature of his public pronouncements. Statements attributed to him in British Consulate records demonstrate this:

> … if this great Kurdish nation does not get its rights from Persia, it will consider death far better than life and whether the Persian government grants it or not we will make Kurdistan autonomous."[23]

Simko was one of the first leaders of a significant Kurdish movement after the dissolution of the Ottoman empire, and he exhibits all of the features we identified for the post-Ottoman Kurdish nationalist arena: A nascent sense of nationalism, resort to religious preference and symbolism, as well as beholdenness to the tribal reality of the day. Due partially to his perfect willingness to make Kurds as much as any other group a target of his quest for power, he never succeeded in mobilizing a large part of Kurdistan with the sort of consistency necessary for a sustained movement. He ultimately suffered from the same lack of loyalty and allegiance among the population of Kurdistan that was the hallmark of a now partially disintegrating tribal order, and he was defeated by central government forces who co-opted other tribes to his detriment.[24] While both nationalism and religious identity ultimately played an inferior role in Simko's success than tribal and personal allegiance, they were both nonetheless notable features of his leadership, apparatus of mobilization, and public relations platform. He went to great lengths to stress both,

particularly his Kurdish nationalism, in his public identity. The Simko rebellion remains one of Iran's most significant ethnic uprisings of the twentieth century.

Much like in Iranian Kurdistan, a similar structure of secular-Islamic leadership was influential in Southeast Turkey. The natural example from "Northern Kurdistan" of how Islam was a secular-political force is the Sheikh Said rebellion of 1925. Sheikh Said was a *sheikh* of the Naqshbandi order, a sect typified by a *sufi* practice of Islam that was somewhat unique to it.[25] Despite his nominal legitimacy coming from the respect accorded him as a *sheikh*, his nationalist agenda for Kurdistan was ultimately his priority.

Sheikh Said was far from a religious scholar who spent his time studying religious texts as a cleric would. His education in orthodox Islam was in fact minimal, but this did not prevent him from being a respected *sheikh* of the Naqshbandi order. He was said to be one of the wealthier men in Kurdistan, having consolidated power and resources through his marriage and the marriages of his children. He was also unique in his readiness to break with other *sheikhs* of his own Naqshbandi order, who he criticized of being too self-interested and unwilling to sacrifice for the cause of Kurdistan.[26]

The most important Kurdish coalition of this post-Ottoman era in Northern Kurdistan was the Azadi (freedom) movement, established by former Ottoman officers of Kurdish origin.[27] When Azadi sought to mobilize support for its platform of Kurdish self-determination in the chaos of the dissolution of the caliphate, it was practically obliged to make respected *sheikhs* the primary figures of the movement. As stated by one historian, "the Kurdish populace would support and believe the sheikhs sooner than [they would] army officers. [For this reason] The sheikhs were to be the 'overt leaders of the revolt.'" Azadi had decided at its first congress that it would be useful to give any rebellion a religious veneer.[28]

Sheikh Said was reported to have a personal relationship with most Kurds of any significant influence in the old empire. With his wealth, and with his ordained stature as a leader, this repute made him an ideal fit in the Azadi leadership, from where he soon rose to lead a rebellion. Although religious and nationalist propaganda were used together and interchangeably by Sheikh Said, as they were in the Sheikh Ubaydallah rebellion, the movement was primarily a nationalist one for Sheikh Said. It had to be, given that its focus was not on liberation of land from the

non-Muslim colonial powers; to the contrary, it sought to forge Kurdish self-determination in Turkey and other Muslim lands.

Even for Sheik Said, much like for Azadi, religion was a tool among others in his arsenal of mobilization. Tribal allegiances having been very strong in this early post-Ottoman era, they were still paramount to considerations of nationalism for your average Kurd. While Said's rebel force was able to garner approximately 15,000 men for active fighting, it was divided on tribal lines (mostly "*Zaza*" dialect speaking tribes). But it did manage to attract a certain segment of Kurdistan's tribal population with appeal to Kurdish and religious symbolism.[29] While Sheikh Said himself was interested in and took great steps to recruit tribes of varied locations and backgrounds, and in fact sought the participation of most of Kurdistan regardless of tribe, the nature of Kurdish society at the time made diverse participation unlikely, and very tribal in nature.[30]

Throughout the course of approximately two years of full-scale rebellion-turned-guerrilla warfare, it is thought that up to 20,000 men died fighting in the rebellion, roughly half of them members of the Turkish military (some of them Kurds), and the other half Kurds fighting for self-determination. Important parts of Kurdistan were brought under Kurdish control at least temporarily. It remains the most significant rebellion in Turkey's history with that of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in the 1990s, having monumental influence on the subsequent sequence of events in Kurdistan as well as among those jockeying for power in Ankara during that period.[31]

Islam played a natural role in the political identity of early Kurdish movements, partially because Islam was what people understood in the shadow of the Ottoman empire, and partially because it offered a counterweight to the secular nationalisms of Ataturk in Turkey (the largest part of Kurdistan) and Reza Khan's Iran (the second largest part of Kurdistan). Given the nature of that Islamic identity in Kurdistan, though, which was dominated by tribal and cultural anomalies, there was a strong likelihood that Islamism did not have staying power among an ethnically distinguishable population oppressed by Muslims; that Islamist identity soon became increasingly dispensable, as we will see.

The period leading up to the Second World War was developmental for the Middle East's various nationalist subsets. Kurdistan was no different, as the tribal structure continued to erode while nationalism developed. As the dominant force unifying a group of Kurds for most of Kurdistan's history went away, the substance of Kurdistan's movements was naturally

formed from the remaining, and sometimes new, prominent features of their lives. What came of the Islamic symbolism that was so prominent in Kurdish movements?

During the Mahabad Republic, the only example in history of an independent Kurdistan, the Islamism of the *sheikhs* appeared misleadingly to have become dispensable as a galvanizing force in Iranian Kurdistan by the middle of the twentieth century. This is a simplistic view of the Mahabad Republic's fabric. The republic does not amount to a remarkable anomaly at all in the sequence of religious-secular Kurdish movements of the twentieth century.

The Mahabad Republic

> *We are also human beings. We have a history and a language, we too have customs and traditions in the upkeep of which we are greatly interested. Why are we not allowed to bring up our children to speak Kurdish? Why are we not permitted to manage our own house as we desire? Dear countrymen, it should be pointed out that rights are not given but taken. We must fight for our rights. (Excerpt from the Initial Declaration of the Kurdistan Democratic Party)*

Due allegedly to Reza Khan's support for the Germans in the Second World War, the armies of the Allied Powers entered Iran in 1941 and established "spheres of influence" in the north (Soviet) and the south (British) of the country. With the virtual collapse of the Iranian armies in Kurdistan which now only held partial and loose control Kurdistan unsurprisingly became overcome again with the zeal of self-determination.[32]

By the time of the Allied takeover in Iran, the large tribal arrangements that had dominated Kurdistan for hundreds of years had been dismantled for all practical benefit. Reza Khan had formed an active army and a modern bureaucracy which he used to consolidate his power effectively. His deliberate policy of forced settlement of the tribes as well as his exile and imprisonment of tribal leadership (and swaths of Kurdistan's population) meant a shifting of identity in Kurdistan away from allegiance to the tribe toward the other salient features of Kurdish life, namely culture and religion, albeit still with some tribal identity mixed in. This remaining, loose tribal identity and smaller forms of tribal wealth and dominance that still existed were important to events leading up to and during the Mahabad Republic. But without the existence

of the large tribal conglomerates, and with the splintering of leadership within tribes meaning that each tribe or union had less power proportionally than it used to, tribes were significantly less influential in 1941 than they were even 20 years earlier. There was also more competition and conflict among the tribes who were each vying for a share of the smaller pie.

By the time of the Allied invasion, and as a result of a societal shift toward "modernity," Iranian Kurdistan had also developed a sort of intelligentsia made up of the educated sons of tribal leaders and city notables.[33] Many of these leaders, for the first time, did not have any explicit ties to tribal power and, although they made alliances with and were loosely affiliated with tribal militias, their motivations were nationalist.[34] Qazi Muhammad (who we learn about below) and other leaders from the city of Mahabad made up the vanguard of these ideologues, as other influential cities, such as the city of Sanandaj, never came under the republic's direct control.

The Komalai Jianawai Kurdistan, or the Party for Kurdistan Revival, was established in this environment of world war and tribal decay. The underground precursor to the Kurdistan Democratic Party, it was brought together in the spirit of nationalism but also opportunism in the wake of a weakened central government after the Allied takeover. It was the first truly nationalist political organization that made Kurdish self-determination its primary aim in Iran. The required conditions for entry to the party were to be born to Kurdish parents, to not have previously acted against the interests of the nation, and to not have been a member of another party. Non-Muslims were allowed to be members of the party but did not make up the senior leadership of the party (who all swore on the Quran).

The Party for Kurdistan Revival was the first time a developing Kurdish identity, increasingly solidified decades after the abolition of the region's greater empires, was the basis of a broad-based movement in Iran. The undisputed leader of the Mahabad Republic, Qazi Muhammad, in the limited analysis on his life and activities prior to the republic, was seen as a nationalist intellectual of sorts. As a result, modern Kurdish nationalists who tend to be secular do not note or consider any portion of the republic's life to have any connection to the religious character of the Kurds of that era. Historical texts on the Mahabad Republic have mostly described it as a weak nationalist and secular movement led by a nascent Kurdish elite and Kurdish intelligentsia. This is true in part. Islam and Islamic symbolism played a minimal role in the republic's public life; it did not feature

extensively in pre-republic or Mahabad Republic literature either. It is easy to believe then that this historical event, the founding of the Mahabad Republic, marked the first time that the leadership of a *sheikh*-type figure did not feature prominently in the history of a large Kurdish movement of the twentieth century.

During this period following the Second World War, it is difficult to assess clearly who the Kurdish elite perceived as their opposing force or "other." But all evidence indicates that, at least among the elite about which we are speaking, it was the central government in Tehran and Persian/Iranian nationalism (much more than say, tribalism or other Kurdish factions). So, in line with past examples, unless nationalist ideas had developed so extensively that they could stand alone as a unifier in the face of the central government's insistence on retaining Kurdish land, there should have been a prominent role for religion in Kurdish movements. But as mentioned, with the Party for Kurdistan Revival, we do not see the overt leadership of a *sheikh* or reference to Islamic symbolism to the same extent. Had Kurdistan so turned the page from its previous reliance on spiritual infrastructure and religious leadership in a brief twenty years?

The answer is no. Firstly, while the period leading up to the establishment of the Mahabad Republic and its brief existence is highly valuable in the analysis of Kurdish nationalism and identity, there is also some caution that should be applied to extrapolating from events of that era. Unlike the period of chaos that led to the rebellions of the *sheikhs,* Kurdish rebellions during the Iranian revolution, and even those in Iraq, the Soviet protectorate in Iranian Kurdistan undoubtedly had an integral effect on the nature as well as the successes and failures of that period. The Kurdistan elite who charted the republic's path no doubt knew that any ideology it espoused for a nation-state needed to abide by the preferences of the prevailing Soviet protector. This ultimate recognition of the necessity to stay on the Allies' good side is exhibited in the numerous flattering references to the Allied forces in official texts of Kurdish nationalists at the time. It is now known that Komalai Jianawai Kurdistan's political platform, as it evolved into a national movement, had to be tempered to some degree to satisfy the Soviets.[35] It would also follow that expressions of religion would have also had to be understated in official discourse. From the ivory tower of Mahabad, literature of the Komalai Jianawai Kurdistan advocated a broad ranging social and nationalist project that discounted the importance and strength of traditional power centers of Kurdistan, namely the tribe and religion (whose institutions were also weaker in Mahabad). As

the movement evolved into a political organization tasked with creating a policy for Kurdistan, however, practical realities began to set in.

When the Party for Kurdistan Revival rebranded itself the Democratic Party of Kurdistan (which established the republic), a spiritual leader in form of Qazi Muhammad was the indispensable unifier of much of Kurdistan under the flag of the Mahabad Republic. Despite the fact that Islam did not become an integral part of the republic's official mandate, this movement's anatomy and leadership was not indifferent to the movements of the *sheikhs* some 30 years prior.

A Short But Important Existence

Overt expressions of Kurdish nationalism became widespread in Iranian Kurdistan through the year 1945, and against the backdrop of a new sense of identity that captivated the region, a notable from the city of Mahabad gave a stirring speech in November of that year. In his delivery at the Cultural Center of Mahabad, he announced that the Democratic Party of Kurdistan (KDPI) replaced a dissolved Party for Kurdistan Revival, and that Kurdish self-rule was now the official platform of Kurdistan.[36] In January 1946, after the remaining vestiges of central government bureaucracy were chased out of Mahabad, Qazi Muhammad announced the establishment of the Mahabad Republic.[37] For all intents and purposes, Muhammad had established an independent Kurdish nation-state for the first time in history.

Tellingly, Qazi Muhammad was never actually a member of the Party for Kurdistan Revival and did not become a member of the KDPI. He soon became the republic's undisputed leader, however. So essential and unquestionable was his role in the movement at the time that his membership was not necessary. This bears resemblance to some degree to Sheikh Said's less formal participation in the urban intellectual circles that called him their leader.

Qazi was born into a prominent religious family that held significant land in the Kurdistan region, mostly in the surrounding villages of Mahabad. He had ties to one of the largest tribes in the Kurdish region, the Fayzullah Begi tribe, although he did not pledge allegiance to it. The Muhammad family is a quintessential example in the post-tribal order: Formerly prominent in the tribal structure, members of the tribe were able to keep control of significant resources despite the formal dissolution of that structure. Qazi Muhammad's father was a prominent judge. Qazi

himself was educated in Islam, from where he derived much of his legitimacy as a scholar and wiseman in society. He was the head of Mahabad's main religious endowment, and trusted in this role. While he was known to be devoutly religious, the force of his political convictions was in the form of a Kurdish nationalism that was radical at the time. In many important ways, and although these factors of his life and leadership are often underestimated, parallels can be found with Sheikh Said's prominence and rise to power.

The parallels between the person of Qazi Muhammad, the undisputed champion of what is considered by most the first free Kurdistan, and the reputations and leadership of the *sheikhs* of the post-Ottoman era more generally is an important one. Qazi Muhammad has never been considered a "religious leader." Modern Kurdish movements do not reference him as one. But for purposes of our analysis, it is important to recognize the essential role that his religious background played in his ability to rally his base. While Islamic symbolism was perhaps less essential to the Mahabad Republic as it was to the other rebellions we have covered, having been replaced in part by a Kurdish nationalism that was more prevalent, it was nonetheless a compulsory feature of his leadership. The Islamic credentials of the Komalai Jianawai Kurdistan, and in particular its leadership, were referred to often by its leaders to bolster its legitimacy among traditional segments of the population. In its official publications, it sought to placate fears of leftist, ungodly ideology, with reference to conformity with Islam even in its secular mandate.[38] One notable evolution between the time of Qazi Muhammad and the *sheikhs* is that the Islamic symbolism that played a role in all of these movements was more limited to the person of Qazi Muhammad by the mid-twentieth century and less to the movement as a whole.

In the republic, the presence of Islamic rhetoric and symbolism was prominent in much of the leadership's utterances. Often, it was invoked to warn or disavow the collaboration of Kurds with "outsiders," demonstrating its use with group identification during this period in Kurdistan.[39] It was also cited frequently to legitimize the authority of the republic. As noted by one commentator, the prominence of religion in the discourse of the republic signified the "weakness of the fledgling secular political culture in Kurdish society" and "bolster[ed] the nationalist message for a deeply religious and largely illiterate community, not quite adept with the complexities of a modern ideology with secular notions of political authority … In this sense, [Islam] … should be viewed … as a calculated response

to what may be termed the structural weakness of a nascent nationalist movement … [and] ideological immaturity."[40]

As a more modern example of the unique balancing act that emergent Kurdish nationalism performed with Islamism, the republic was a sort of caricature of the secular-religious approach. Friday prayer leaders, for example, were instructed to preach on issues such as women in society, Kurdish history, and national unity. Despite all of this, much like with the rule of the *sheikhs*, few in the republic or even in the religious clergy were formally trained in orthodox Islamic centers.

On Kurdistan's transition away from Islamism, the Mahabad Republic was certainly a trendsetter. Apart from Qazi Muhammad, almost all of the remainder of the KDPI's leadership was upper-class, (non-Islamically) educated elite. It could be said that Kurdish nationalism had finally arrived by this time as a distinct, and, among the elite of Kurdistan, widespread cornerstone of Kurdish identity. More than using religious symbolism, the trusted spiritual leader in Qazi Muhammad now employed nationalist symbolism more prominently than his predecessors. With a popularity derived significantly from his Islam, though, Qazi Muhammad represented the sentiment of a Kurdistan that was changing in its ideas.

It is somewhat ironic that these individuals, the modern intellectual elite of Kurdistan, were responsible for formulating the ideas of and establishing the Mahabad Republic considering it was still the various fractionalized tribes (now even more divided and in disarray due to the central government's modernization policies) and the Soviets who actually wielded military power.[41] For this reason, the republic's leadership had to be strategic as to the various alliances it forged in the greater Kurdish region. The government in Mahabad never made an important decision without consulting the weakened but still prominent tribal leaders.[42] While writings of the pioneers of the Mahabad Republic demonstrate a mature understanding of the concepts of pluralism, democratic reform, and land reform, their dependence on tribes for their limited military support prevented them from advertising or giving effect to these ideas in the republic's short life. Although Qazi Muhammad warned tribes publicly not to counteract the direction of the republic, his ability to rein them in was limited.[43] The existence of Soviet influence and patronage also surely prevented the Mahabad Republic's leadership from establishing any sort of significant cooperation with influential spiritual leaders as a counterweight to the tribes.

The republic remained geographically limited to one third of Iranian Kurdistan, not encompassing important cities like Sanandaj or Kermanshah. So, as with previous examples, just as important a feature of the Mahabad Republic's establishment and existence is the reality that it was unable to attract a unified and loyal base across the population of Kurdistan. Even within the territory it controlled, the Mahabad Republic's modern ideas of unity based on culture, language, and shared history did not resonate with important segments where tribal identity was still predominant and seeking (ultimately unsuccessfully as well) to maintain its hold on power and resources. These latter tribes, greatly weakened when compared to decades prior, were even willing to cooperate with the central government against other Kurds to salvage their monopoly. One by-product of this condition was Qazi Muhammad's inability to raise an army with loyalty to the republic alone. The official army of the republic was a weak one; it was limited not only by popular support but also by a lack of arms.[44] Tribal forces that were attached to the republic's army greatly outnumbered the army regulars, and deserted Kurdistan when the Soviet army withdrew and the tribal leaders sensed that an Iranian army attack on Kurdistan was imminent. A year after all Iranian bureaucracy had been evacuated from Mahabad, and less than a year after the establishment of the Mahabad Republic, Iranian forces retook areas under the republic's control. Qazi Muhammad and certain other Kurdish leaders were executed, and all indications of the existence of the republic were ordered destroyed.

The Soviet-protected Azerbaijan People's Government, also within Iran's borders, had a temporary existence parallel to the Mahabad Republic's. That movement has a separate story, with some interesting overlap with the Mahabad Republic's. One factor to note is that in Iranian Azerbaijan, the Azerbaijan People's Government is not a popular reference. In the view of many historians, the temporary separatist government in Azerbaijan devolved into an authoritarian enterprise that never represented the ideals of Azerbaijani nationalism.[45] Contrary to what happened in this neighboring Soviet-protected ethnic state, Qazi Muhammad's efforts and the Mahabad Republic's legacy remain popular and iconic for Kurds from Tehran to Istanbul. The flag of the Mahabad Republic is the current flag of the KRG in Northern Iraq, and is used as the flag of "Kurdistan" by Kurdish nationalists in Syria. The national anthem of the Mahabad Republic, a gritty one addressed to "the enemy" and announcing that "nobody should profess that the Kurd is dead, the

Kurd is alive!," lives on. It is sung by Kurdish nationalists in remote villages as far as Southeast Turkey. The memory of the short-lived republic is consciously and unconsciously inscribed on the nooks and crannies of every corner of Kurdistan.

Politically, it was clear by the middle of the twentieth century that Kurdish nationalism was an elemental factor in the region and becoming an increasingly important idea for Kurdistan's politicized elite everywhere, including in Sanandaj where a certain Ahmad Moftizadeh was born and raised. Islamic symbolism and leadership, while important in the person of Qazi Muhammad, were now displaced to some degree by nationalism.

It is interesting to note that the central government in Iran never acknowledged a lack of formal control Kurdistan. In fact, it was the official position of Iran that it still held Iranian Kurdistan as part of its sovereign territory and, in some ways, this is a reasonable viewpoint to have carried publicly. This is because the Allied Powers never went so far as to recognize or even encourage an independent Kurdistan despite their presiding over Kurdish self-rule for almost a year from a distance. In reality, the Allied Powers, and in particular the Soviets who were responsible for control in the north of the country, had little interest in an independent Kurdistan. They were interested in the Kurds being a thorn in the side of the Persians, but with its resources and strategic location, the Allies ultimately wanted a stable and friendly Iran. Despite all of this, there is no doubt that the Iranian army did not maintain a controlling presence in Kurdistan during that period, and so it is at least a reasonable assertion that Kurdistan was an independent state for the brief period of the Republic of Mahabad.

As the Mahabad Republic transitioned to being a skeleton in Iran's closet, Iran's complex political fabric went through its own unforeseen changes. The new crown prince turned Pahlavi king, who came to power in the years leading up to the Mahabad Republic, oversaw more land reform and "modernity" measures, only to be evacuated from the country when his power was threatened by a democratically elected premier, ultimately returning after a coup d'etat. For reasons that go beyond the scope of our examination, and those that are still partially inexplicable, Islamism and Islamic politics became a strong force in modern Iranian politics in the post-Second World War era. Ultimately, an Iranian population that showed a great interest for democratic reform would come to align behind an Islamist leader in 1979.

The Sunni–Shia Divide

Over the first half of the twentieth century, Iranian Kurdistan and Kurdistan generally graduated from a largely tribal society to a quasi-nationalist one using Islamist symbolism (but still beholden to the tribe), to a spiritually nationalist one. As Iranian-Kurdistan made an ideological push into a more purely nationalist space during and after the Mahabad Republic, a complex Kurdish-Islamic identity developed alongside its nationalism.

The fundamental difference between Sunni and Shia Islam rests in the interpretation of which historical individuals were qualified to provide binding guidance to Muslims. In Shia doctrine, certain members of the Prophet Muhammad's family were viewed as infallible like the Prophet himself. This meant that the guidance from such individuals was as binding and pristine as that of the Prophet himself and hence incumbent on all Muslims. In the Sunni interpretation of Islam, only the Prophet's guidance (as well as the Quran) was binding. The many historical narratives and doctrinal interpretations that now separate the two sects of Islam stem from this fundamental disagreement.

Interpretations of the dominant Shia sect itself also continue to remain the subject of much disagreement in modern Iran, particularly with respect to its application to public life. But Shia Islam's pre-eminence in the Islamic Republic of Iran is undeniable. Despite the Islamic Republic's namesake, the treatment of Sunnis and Sunni Islam in Iran is in practice not indifferent to those religions considered by Iran's clerical leadership to be outside of the fold of Islam—Judaism and Baha'ism, for example. Sunni Islam (the denomination of a majority of self-professed Muslims), much like those groups and perhaps more even than Judaism, is delegitimized and ostracized, particularly from religious discourse in Iran's holy places and from government. The reason this is the case is far more complex than doctrinal disagreement.

The majority of Iran's Kurds today are of the *Shafi'i,* Sunni religious tradition. Such a distinction holds little value in understanding or describing Kurdish religiosity, however. For the vast majority of Kurds, including those who identify themselves as Muslim, distinctions beyond the very basic ones that define Muslim behavior are probably irrelevant.[46] Understanding the particularly non-doctrinal Islam historically in Iranian Kurdistan, which we explored previously by way of practical examples of Kurds' non-compliance with standard Islamic practices, is an important part of understanding the relationship and compatibility of religion

and nationalism in Kurdistan's history. Even today, the Islam practiced in Kurdistan, particularly by those belonging to a *sufi* order, is unconventional. It is fair to say that many of the devoutly religious Kurds in Iran maintain a form of religious practice that would be considered unorthodox by the rest of the Muslim world. Many devout Sunni Muslims in Iran do not attend Friday prayer since religious authorities in these mosques are thought to be connected to the central government.[47] Many Kurdish families do not abide strictly by *hijab* requirements for women, or separation of the sexes, as is more commonplace outside of Kurdistan. Many examples like this exist.

As alluded to, Sunni Islamic practice in Iran is heavily influenced by an Iranian environment that has been mostly repressive toward non-Shia interpretations of the religion. This has been the case since the time of the Safavid dynasty, when much of Iran's population converted to Shia Islam willingly or forcibly. Practices initiated by the Safavid kings during that period, such as the ritual cursing of Islam's Sunni historical figures and the destruction of Sunni mosques, were precedent to successive centuries of hostility toward Iran's minority Sunni population.[48] The anti-Sunni sentiment that became a common cultural feature in Iran during the Safavid period continues to exist today. Also from the moment that Iran became a majority Shia country, Kurdish tribes have been a target of the central government. We have described Reza Khan's efforts to destroy tribal tradition in Kurdistan, but similar practices (to a smaller degree) were also instituted during the reign of the Safavid dynasty hundreds of years earlier.

Part of this hostility toward the remaining Sunni minority in Iran is due to a genuine difference in the interpretation of Islamic doctrine between the two main branches of Islam, exacerbated by a narrative of intra-Islamic conflict believed fervently by some modern Shia worshipers. For those devout Shia in Iran, certain Sunni Islamic values are viewed as offensive; in a Shia Islamic state, the effects of these different values are obviously felt in government policy as well. Much like with the mistreatment of Shia in majority Sunni countries, Sunni Islam in Iran has an underprivileged existence.

Despite fundamental doctrinal differences, however, the primary reason for the mistreatment of Sunnis in Iran both historically and today is mostly political and non-doctrinal. Historically, Sunnis (almost always associated closely with Kurds) were thought to be a weakness in the Iranian empire, as a potential proxy to the nearby Ottomans.

And today, two related factors are predominant in the continuation of this conflictual relationship between Shia and Sunni Islam in Iran. The first is Iran's conflictual relationship with the Sunni autocracies of the region in the aftermath of the Iranian revolution.[49] The second is the Islamic Republic's turbulent history with its Sunni minority, mostly identified with the Kurds (but also Sunni Arabs and Baluchis), during the formation of an Islamic government early in the republic's history. An underlying current in both of these conflicts is a sense of betrayal carried by Iran's revolutionary leadership. Ayatollah Khomeini hoped that all of Iran's Muslims would rally around his ideas of Islamic government and work with him to forge a consensus on how to govern under the general umbrella of his ideas. He also hoped to export the revolution to the rest of the Muslim world. Neither of these hopes panned out.

The Fire of Revolution That Never Spread

In analyzing the Islamic Republic's uneasiness with its Sunni Muslim population, it is perhaps easiest to start first with Iran's relationship vis-à-vis the rest of the Muslim world in the aftermath of the revolution.[50] Much has been written about Ayatollah Khomeini's belief that his revolution would not be contained to Iran but would spread to the rest of the Muslim world's *Mostazafin*, or oppressed. Khomeini actively pursued the so-called export of the revolution mostly through an invitation to the world's Muslims to rise up against their oppressive leaders. He believed that when the Muslim masses learned of the revolution in Iran and of the support that Iran would have for the Muslim masses (support being left vague), the revolution's export would be inevitable.[51] Implicit in such rhetoric was the lack of legitimacy of the Sunni Arab autocracies that existed the region over. These governments, such as Sadat's Egypt (that had just made peace with Israel) or Saddam Hussein's Iraq (with its own massive Shia population), were naturally alarmed both by the success of the Iranian revolution and the prospect that such events might encourage their own populations to rise up in revolt as well. The less secular of these autocracies such as Saudi Arabia also had a fundamental doctrinal issue with the Shia religious coloring of the Iranian revolution, in addition to its own fears of political instability.

As a result of these factors, a wave of critiques emanated from the Sunni Muslim world seeking to attack the new Islamic regime in Iran as a heretical one at its inception. The anti-Islamic Republic of Iran "cause" was one

that all Sunni world leaders could rally around despite their own political and ideological differences. Muslim scholars provided the religious grounds for rejection of Iranian style revolution of the masses while the region's autocratic leaders and their security apparatuses watched populations closely, smothering any similar dissent.

The fear that emanated from the ranks of the Sunni Arab ruling class was a precursor to Saddam Hussein's invasion of Iran in 1980. With suspicions that his own large Shia population was the most likely of populations to heed the call of revolution from their brothers to the east, and seeing weakness in a disorganized post-revolutionary Iran, Saddam Hussein attacked Iran with the intention of taking over its oil-rich south. In seeking to weaken not only the Islamic revolution's impact in his country but also the unity of the Iranian nation to his practical benefit, he employed the rhetoric of pan-Arabism to announce that the oil-rich provinces of Iran that were partially inhabited by Arabs should be part of the Iraqi-Arab nation. He had the support of all of his Arab neighbors with the exception of Syria.

The effect that the Iran–Iraq war had, and continues to have, on the psyche of all Iranians, as well as Iran's leadership, cannot be discounted. Few Iranian families were left untouched in some meaningful way by the war. Murals of Iran's countless dead line the streets of every Iranian city reminding citizens of the suffering each of them endured. Yet little remorse from the Sunni Arab world exists; apologies never came from Saddam's backers in the region and beyond. With an estimated one million Iranians killed and countless more maimed in those eight years, the sentiment and significance of the war to Iran in terms of numbers dead and treasures lost are equivalent to what the World Wars were to their European participants.

Meanwhile, after the revolution, the Saudi royal family became the only remaining pillar in America's "twin-pillar" policy in the Middle East, and it used its position to fortify that relationship and bolster the world's sentiment that it was imperative to counter an Islamic regime in Iran. With a sizeable Shia population in its oil-rich "Eastern Province," Saudi Arabia saw Iran's new regime as an existential threat. As a result, it was a natural policy position for the Saudi kingdom to promote a weaker Iran. It did so diplomatically and practically throughout the course of the 1980s and 1990s, and continues to do so. The most recent of examples are its active lobbying against the Iran "nuclear deal" with the P5+1, as well as its military intervention to stop the ascendance of the Iranian-backed

Houthi rebels in Yemen. The two Islamic regimes are, one may argue, each other's arch nemeses and primary competitors for influence in the region. As this book went to press, Iran and Saudi Arabia's relations were probably at their worst ever, with the Saudi kingdom recently cutting off all diplomatic ties with the Islamic Republic. Similarly, the other Sunni gulf kingdoms, as well as most other Sunni Arab autocracies in the region were taking a more adversarial diplomatic stance against Iran.

Regarding the Iran–Iraq war, much like Khomeini's inability to rally Iraq's Shias (or the region's wider Muslim population) to revolution, Saddam Hussein was also unable to galvanize Iran's Arab population against the central government. They mostly remained loyal to Iran. These events and general Arab and Sunni malaise with Iran's Islamic revolution nonetheless sewed distrust between Iran and many Sunni Arabs. The resultant widening of the Sunni–Shia divide on these fundamentally political grounds has a number of implications through today in the greater region.[52] And with the nature of geopolitics in the Middle East, which often includes the instigation of minority groups, this had implications for Iran's relationship with its own Sunni population.

A Shia Revolution

After a brief honeymoon period, post-revolutionary Iran's relationship with its own Sunnis also disintegrated. While Khomeini was not a household name in Iran prior to the beginning of the revolution, it is well known that most Iranians had a favorable opinion of him when his teachings began to be widely disseminated and his rise to prominence began. Some of Iran's Sunni and Kurdish populations (although few of its leaders) were also hopeful that his calls for democracy, freedom from oppression, and national unity would result in equality for all Iranians. Relatively speaking, though, his support remained dismal in Kurdistan, to the dismay of Iran's revolutionary leadership. Much more on this facet of the revolution's history will be explored in the coming chapters.

After the Iranian revolution, not even Ayatollah Khomeini himself knew how his republic would ultimately be arranged. His theory on the "rule of the jurisprudent" was espoused well before the revolution. But how this centrally Shia doctrine would be practically implemented among those Shia (people and scholars alike) who did not share his views on government, and Sunnis, was rudimentary. Early conservative leadership of the revolution, including Ayatollah Khomeini, professed that all Muslims,

including Sunnis, would peacefully comprise a sort of Islamic council to work out the republic's practical kinks. The fundamental gap between the ideas of the leading scholars of these different ideological groups, however, obliged the most powerful of the groups, ultimately Khomeini's, to impose its views.

In the early days of the revolution, the Shah's gendarmerie and police forces did not prioritize the Kurdish region, leaving hastily formed Kurdish councils and unions to take over effective control of Kurdistan. The situation on the ground in Kurdistan was not dissimilar to events leading up to the Mahabad Republic. Due to its sudden autonomy, Kurdistan was thought of by many as an ideal oppositional base for the revolution, and Kurdish groups began to form and espouse nationalist platforms immediately.[53] In February 1979, the new revolutionary government in Tehran gave repeated promises of respect for Iran's ethnic and religious diversity (at least in Islam) and the rights of minority groups. It is no surprise, then, that in the time leading up to the revolution and after the Shah's overthrow, important Sunnis and Kurds alike were part of various coalitions and working groups that were formed by Khomeini (as the more or less undisputed leader of the revolution). Ahmad Moftizadeh's role in this process is well documented in this book. However, many of Iran's other prominent Sunnis and Kurds took part.

The KDPI was probably the single most well-known and popular group in all of Kurdistan. With its reputation of having governed the only independent Kurdistan in modern history, the short-lived Mahabad Republic that we discussed, its well-respected leader (then Dr. Abdul Rahman Ghassemlou) openly negotiated with the revolutionary government in Tehran at certain pivotal times. The KDPI continued to have what can be considered a modern nationalist ethos at this juncture: besides advocating for democracy and rights for all Kurds in Iran, it did not have a particular ideology or partisan nature, as its published program for autonomy demonstrated.

Another main Kurdish organization, the Komala party, was a Marxist organization with a more extreme reform-minded agenda. Its popularity as well as its off and on coalition with the KDPI and other Iranian communist groups meant it had some direct contact with Iran's revolutionary government, such as being part of the Kurdish Council led by Sheikh Izziddin Husseini which sought to negotiate a ceasefire between the government and Kurdish forces in the first year after the revolution.[54]

It is unclear exactly when Komala began its activities, but by the eve of the Iranian revolution, it had a significant presence in Iranian Kurdistan, particularly in the city of Sanandaj.[55] Its popularity in Southeastern Kurdistan is thought to result from the topography and economy of that region, where agriculture and significant land ownership made notions of class struggle and proletarian revolution more popular. Much like other Kurdish parties, however, Komala recognized that the language of Kurdish nationalism was likely the only one that could mobilize large segments of the population. Its Marxist rhetoric was secondary to its Kurdish nationalist rhetoric and was mostly confined to meetings between its leadership. Its ideas were a hybrid of Marxist and Kurdish nationalist ideas, not dissimilar to the Kurdistan Workers' Party of Turkey (or PKK). Also like the PKK, its ideology became decreasingly Marxist over time.[56] Both of these groups' (the KDPI and Komala) roles in Kurdistan during the revolution will be discussed more extensively throughout this manuscript.

Returning to Islamic fault lines in Iran, when the process of consolidation of power by what can be called the "Khomeini ideologues" began to take place, it resulted in the ostracization of competing theories of Islamic rule for political expediency. Other Shia interpretations, for starters, and even those of Khomeini's inner circle, were delegitimized.[57] This included interpretations of religious scholars that were objectively higher in the Shia religious hierarchy than Khomeini himself, such as the disgraced Grand Ayatollah Hossein Ali Montazeri, who went from being Khomeini's professed "fruit of life" to house arrest.

It is not difficult to imagine, then, that Sunni interpretations fared even worse. Ahmad Moftizadeh and other Sunni leaders' desire to enshrine the equality of all Islamic interpretations in the Islamic Republic's constitution ultimately failed. The evolution of Khomeini's view on this point, as evidenced by his pronouncements and various drafts of the constitution, demonstrates that political considerations were more central to a shrewd revolutionary leadership than Islamic doctrine. It also demonstrates that Kurdish nationalism and Sunni Islam were viewed and treated not only similarly, but simultaneously, by Iran's revolutionary government.

Before the summer of 1979, the draft copy of the constitution of the Islamic Republic that became publicly available reflected many concessions to Kurds and other ethnic minorities in Iran. It stated that "all people in the Islamic Republic of Iran … such as … Kurds … will enjoy completely equal rights." It further stated that "the use of local languages in local schools and press is permitted." Additionally, while pronouncing

Shia Islam as the official religion of Iran, it also stated that "… every Muslim acts in accordance with his own school of thought."[58] While this was likely at least partially the result of post-revolutionary optimism on behalf of the government in Tehran, not yet "betrayed" by neighbors and countrymen alike, it was also certainly a reflection of the precarious predicament that the government saw itself in as instability began to increase. By the time the Khomeini ideologues had consolidated power at the end of 1979, references to minority rights were not incorporated in the draft constitution.[59] Rumors and unofficial guarantees to amend the constitution to guarantee the rights of the Sunni minority surfaced in the 1980s but never materialized. These promises also appear to coincide with the more precarious moments of Khomeini's consolidation of power, such as when the American hostage crisis began to attract universal condemnation in early 1980, and soon after Saddam Hussein's attack on Iran in late 1980.[60]

Practically speaking, in the view of the Islamic Republic's leadership, Kurdistan's behavior at the time of the revolution was opportunistic and treacherous. In the view of every major Kurdish party and the vast majority of Kurdistan's citizens, the government's behavior was nothing short of duplicitous and deceitful. These respective wounds have not healed to this day.

Conclusion

The existence of Islam as a feature of Kurdish life is important, but significantly different from the relationship Islam has to many other communities. The significant role of the *sheikh*, the spiritual leader within the tribal order of Kurdistan, put those with an Islamic affiliation in Kurdistan at an advantage to fill the void that the disintegration of formal tribal structures brought. This influence was bolstered by the confusion of the post-Ottoman period, where religion offered a more tangible identity to that of pan-Kurdish nationalism for at least a brief period of time. Nonetheless, the realization by Kurds that their neighbors sought to exercise dominion over their land and resources without offering equivalent access to power or self-determination made it so that Islam, a shared trait, always had its limits as a galvanizing force in Kurdistan. For this reason, religious symbolism was always coupled with nationalist demands for most of Kurdistan's early successful movements, in an era where nationalism was making its first foray in the Middle East. As nationalism developed, and Kurds began

to identify themselves as part of a cohesive ethnic body, Islamic identity, even in its already symbolic form, weakened. Turkish and Persian nationalism, and its consequent treatment of non-compliant minorities, came at the expense of strengthening Kurdish unity, and ultimately paving the way for pan-Kurdish nationalism. This new nationalism, born out of a decayed tribal structure in Kurdistan, easily identified its adversaries. As the Iranian nation reverted to a more Islamist identity, Kurdish nationalism further strengthened while Islamism in Kurdistan weakened.

At this juncture, we can seek to answer the questions we posed earlier in the chapter. Firstly, in Iranian Kurdistan historically (and Kurdistan generally), Islamism has maintained an ***inverse*** relationship with the Islamism and Islamic identity of the dominant opposing force where Kurds reside. In Iran, this means the Islamism of the majority Shia population, and of the regime in Tehran. As secular governments were founded in Turkey and Iran, and in the midst of a still undeveloped sense of nationalism in Kurdistan, Islam as a motivating tool peaked in Kurdistan. Islamism's propensity in Kurdistan would gradually decline as the Iranian revolution approached, but not in a vacuum. Kurdish nationalism, developing consistently but with a lag behind the nationalisms of its sovereign neighbors, also helped weaken Islamism's influence and the likelihood of religious leadership and symbolism in Kurdistan. As a natural result of this reality, Islamism in Kurdistan also has maintained an ***inverse*** relationship with the development and rise of Kurdish nationalist sentiment. The turning point for when Islam ceased to remain an essential ingredient for leadership rhetoric and influence was probably around the time of the Mahabad Republic. During this era, a Kurdish national identity began to become more palpable for the average citizen of Kurdistan, and certainly with the abolition of the republic, and the execution of its leader, Iranian Kurdistan received a shock from the defibrillator of national identity, catapulting it into a society which now more uniformly aspired for nationalist aims.

By the time of the Islamic revolution, nationalism became the primary vehicle by which every Kurdish movement had to mobilize its base. That Kurdish nationalism had come a long way from its role as a garb for tribalism during the Sheikh Ubaydallah, Sheikh Said, and Simko movements, and its inability to pry Kurdish loyalties away from personal wealth and promises of power offered by central governments during the period of the Mahabad Republic. During the revolution, Kurdish parties did not manage to unite in a manner which guaranteed their best chance at securing the autonomy they sought, but they all had similar ideas of

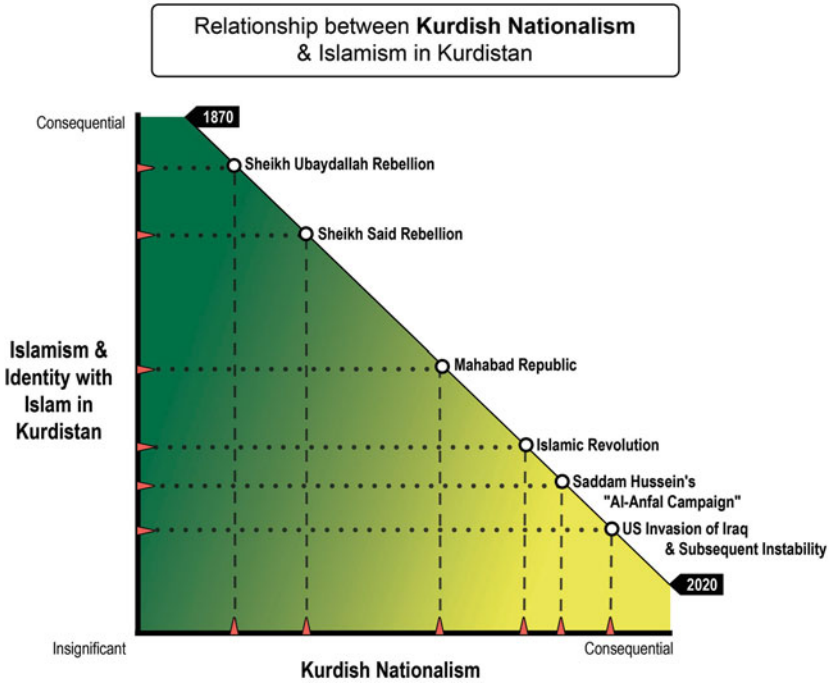

Image 2 Relationship between Kurdish Nationalism and Islamism in Kurdistan

self-determination for Kurdistan that was the core of their various supporting ideas—democracy, Marxism, or Islamism. These movements also did not cooperate en masse with the central government, even while jockeying for power and influence among themselves, because of the distinct polarizing nature of Islam during this period.

The Islamic Republic of Iran's difficult relationship with its Sunni and Kurdish minority is a complex one that is bolstered in part by doctrinal differences between Sunni and Shia interpretations of Islam. The more useful indicators for this relationship are political and historic ones, however. Despite the Islamic Republic's self-proclaimed flag bearing of Islamic purity, its treatment of minorities (including religious ones) has been interest driven, making it practically similar to the policies of predecessor regimes. If there was any early idea or hope that Islamic identity within Iran and beyond would drive a global revolution and domestic

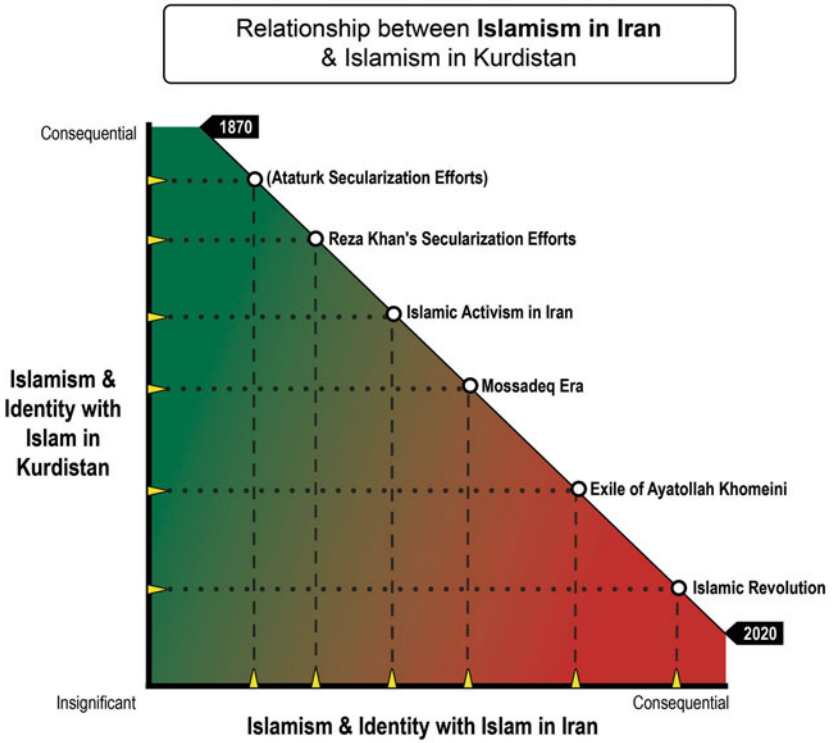

Image 3 Relationship between Islamism in Iran and Islamism in Kurdistan

unity, the Islamic Republic soon abandoned these notions with resolve. As can be seen by its support even for Christian Armenia over Shia Muslim Azerbaijan, it is a rational, interest-driven actor as regards its minorities. Luckily for it, within the confines of Shia Islamic thinking, it is able to promote a policy that allows it to repress its minorities on mostly religious grounds.

Part of Khomeini's philosophy, well documented elsewhere, is that the survival of the Islamic Republic is paramount even to certain Islamic edicts. This was a practical interpretation that allowed him the flexibility to implement policies that were contradictory to the main thrust of his puritanical ethos without completely polluting his ideology.[61] Naturally, as a result of this, any Muslim who disagreed with the approach of the supreme jurisprudent and the decisions of the Islamic Republic were branded with

a similar label of transgression as that of non-Muslims. With this form of devaluation of opposition, the Khomeini ideologues were also able to paint the war against the rebelling Kurds as a religious one that implicated the very existence and legitimacy of the revolution itself. It is also for this reason that any Kurds bearing resemblance to favored individuals by the central government in Tehran have been from the Shia-Kurdish region of Kermanshah.[62] Kurdish Nationalism and Sunni identification continued a process of fusion that began in the Safavid era as the revolution consolidated itself.

The discord among Sunni and Shia populations takes a decidedly more ethnic tone in Iran, given that Iran's largest Sunni population is Kurdish, and that its other sizeable Sunni populations are also ethnic minorities. Partially as a result of the state's historical mistreatment, state-sanctioned Sunni practice of Islam (in Kurdistan's mosques for example) has always been viewed with suspicion by Kurdistan's politicized handful, and most recently such sentiments have become commonplace in the entire Kurdistan region. A sentiment that Iran has embarked on an ongoing project to convert its Sunnis to Shiism also exists.[63] But the evidence indicates that nationalist motivations, and not religious ones, are the principal preoccupations of the Islamic Republic vis-à-vis its minorities. Even from the early days of the Iranian Constitutional movement at the turn of the twentieth century, which was the Iranian sovereign's first acknowledgment of the concept of modern citizenship, ethnic minorities in Iran were ignored.[64] Unsurprisingly, there has never been a Sunni mass movement in Iran that did not identify principally with one ethnic group, where nationalist demands of autonomy that outweighed any Islamic demands.

The relationship between Iran's government and its Kurdish population, sometimes superficially taking the form of Shia versus Sunni, is summed up well by Farideh Koohi-Kamali in her analysis of Kurdish nationalism in Iran:

"… despite the argument about the unity of Muslims as one nation … the rejection of Kurdish autonomy is nothing but a rejection of separation from a sovereign nation-state called … Iran. Finally, it is the official nationalism of the Iranian government with its political power called Islam which refuses to recognize the legitimacy of Kurdish autonomy. The fundamental conflict between the universalism of Islam advocated by the Islamic government of Iran and the Kurdish nationalism in Iran is … the conflict between Iranian nationalism and Kurdish nationalism."[65]

In considering the roots and fruits of Ahmad Moftizadeh's movement in the next part of this book, we can see both its strengths and weaknesses on the backdrop of this history. The nature of the *mufti's* role as a religious leader of considerable importance offered the *mufti* a sort of advantage in attracting the support of his followers and of those who he could appeal to on a spiritual level of piety. However, as we will see, his leadership as a religious scholar also hurt him. As Kurdish nationalism evolved after the establishment of the Mahabad Republic, the religious leader became less significant to Kurdish unity. Further, without the inherent tribal influence and material wealth that came along with the mantle of the *sheikh,* and despite having more Islamic doctrinal legitimacy, Ahmad Moftizadeh ultimately faced significant competition for influence.

Notes

1. Algar, Hamid. "Shiʿism in Iran Since the Safavids." *Encyclopedia Iranica*: Ix (2.3). 1974.
2. There is another inquiry to keep in mind which is relevant to this chapter and more fully explored in later chapters of this book. It relates to the timing of Ahmad Moftizadeh's movement in the 1970s and his religious nationalism (which can be included in our broad definition of Islamism in Kurdistan). As we will learn, Ahmad Moftizadeh's leading of a movement in Iranian Kurdistan is somewhat natural, given his standing in Iran's *mufti* family. There is indeed a precedent of Islamism and religious leadership in Kurdish movements. But given the conclusions that we will draw on political Islam's evolution in Kurdistan, and despite its seeming relevance to the nature of revolutionary furor in Tehran in 1978–1979, was Moftizadeh's movement actually anachronistic in the context of Iranian Kurdistan in that era?
3. See Jwaideh, Wadie. *The Kurdish National Movement: Its Origins and Development*. Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2006.
4. Van Bruinessen, Martin. *Agha, Shaikh, and State: The Social and Political Structures of Kurdistan*. London: Zed Books, 1992. 51.
5. Ghassemlou, Abdul Rahman. *Kurdistan and the Kurds*. Prague: Pub. House of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences, 1965.
6. Kamali, F (P. 57).
7. Cottam, Richard W. *Nationalism in Iran*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1964. 98-100.
8. It is interesting to note the visible remnants of successive Persian/Iranian governments' attempts at destroying tribal loyalties in the Kurdish region.

For example, large exiled populations of Kurds still exist today in areas far from Kurdistan, like *Khorasan* in the west of Iran.

9. This text does not deal significantly with Iraqi Kurdistan's history, and it is useful at this juncture to note that Iraqi Kurdistan had a significantly different history from Iranian Kurdistan and Turkish Kurdistan for a number of reasons. One of the main reasons for this difference is the reality that the same modernization measures (i.e., forced settlement and land reform) did not take place on the same scale in Iraqi Kurdistan. Iraqi Kurdistan was able to maintain more autonomy after the fall of the Ottoman empire and less interference from the Iraqi central government. As a result, the dominant tribal structures and families actually continue to exist today in Iraq to an extent that they do not in Turkey and Iran. However, the predominance of the Sheikhs was a feature of Iraqi Kurdistan as well, as is evidenced by the rise and fall of Sheikh Mahmoud, one of his era's more prominent rebels in Iraqi Kurdistan.
10. For a small overview of the potential etymology of the use of the word *sheikh* in Kurdistan, see the beginning of Chap. 3.
11. Kamali, F. (P. 69).
12. Olson, Robert W. *The Emergence of Kurdish Nationalism and the Sheikh Said Rebellion, 1880-1925*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1989. 3.
13. Ibid.
14. Kamali, F. (P. 72).
15. Ozoglu, Hakan. *Kurdish Notables and the Ottoman State*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004. 77. The *agha* as well, as we will see in our first example below of Simko, often defined himself similarly.
16. Olson, R (P. 71)
17. Ibid at 34.
18. Volkan, Vamık. "The Need to Have Enemies and Allies: A Developmental Approach." Political Psychology, 2:219-247 (1985)
19. Huntington, Samuel P. *Who Are We?: The Challenges to America's National Identity*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004. 26.
20. Ibid at 25.
21. See Generally Ozoglu, Hakan. *Kurdish Notables and the Ottoman State*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004.
22. Kamali, F (P. 83).
23. Great Britain Public Record Office: FO/371/7808, August 1922
24. While it is noted that Pahlavi reforms targeting Kurdistan's tribes had not yet been implemented, precedent armies commanded from Tehran had already waged war on Kurdistan's tribes to a lesser degree, and other modernity measures had begun to tear at the seams of the fabric of Kurdish tribalism by the time of Simko's movement.

25. This is a practice that often times falls out of the fold of normative Islam in the interpretation of many religious scholars. This is useful to note, since it demonstrates that Islam in Kurdistan, when practiced in this era, was practiced in coordination with more predominant cultural exigencies. This reality applies to much of Kurdistan today as well, as will be discussed throughout this book.
26. Olson, R (P. 101).
27. While Azadi was perhaps formed prior to the time that most historians consider the Ottoman empire to have dissolved, it is characterized here as a post-Ottoman movement due to the nature of the group's ideas and activities during its existence.
28. Olson, R (P. 100).
29. Ibid at 107. Such limited support from rival tribes would have been very unlikely only a few decades earlier during the Ottoman era, but by the time Sheikh Said led his rebellion, pan-Kurdish nationalism was in a nebulous stage.
30. Ibid at 98.
31. The significance of the Sheikh Said rebellion as well as the considerable amount of resources expended by Turkey in containing it strengthened the hand of hard-line conservatives in Turkey who sought full-scale integration of the Kurdish minority and secularization of Turkish society. Ibid at 123. Ozoglu, Hakan. *Kurdish Notables and the Ottoman State*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004. 3.
32. The word "again" is used here to suggest that the Mahabad Republic was really the legacy in many fundamental ways to the rebellions of the *sheikhs,* as this chapter argues.
33. Kamali, F (P. 90).
34. Ibid.
35. Vali, Abbas. *Kurds and the State in Iran, The Making of Kurdish Identity*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2011. 29.
36. See Vali, Abbas. *Kurds and the State in Iran, The Making of Kurdish Identity*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2011. 25. There is an interesting (although ultimately inconclusive and for this book, inconsequential) discussion here as well on what led to the transition to KDPI, notably, the possibility that it was bred by a moving away from certain more radical political ideas.
37. William Eagleton, The Kurdish Republic, p. 56.
38. Vali, Abbas. *Kurds and the State in Iran, The Making of Kurdish Identity*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2011. 21.
39. Ibid at 106-108.
40. Ibid.
41. Ibid at 71. See generally, Kamali, F.
42. Kamali, F (P. 109).

43. Announcements in one of the republic's official publications, *Kurdistan*, reflect this somewhat schizophrenic relationship. References to traitors among the tribes and ominous warnings to them are common. In reality, the most loyal tribal force to the republic was probably the Barzani contingent that had escaped from Iraq and set up bases in Mahabad to defend the new republic, ostensibly on nationalist grounds. This reflects the complexity of balancing popular nationalist ideas with even a weakly reconstituted (due to central government collapse) tribal militarily influence in Iranian Kurdistan.
44. This was the first time that a Kurdish fighting force was called the *peshmerga*. It is a name that stuck, being used in every part of Kurdistan to refer to Kurdish rebels fighting for the rights of Kurds today.
45. Historical accounts from this period demonstrate a dissatisfaction among the native population in Azerbaijan and support for Iran's reconquering armies by common people.
46. One could argue that this applies to all Muslims and even all religions to some degree, but the decidedly lack of overt religiosity has been often attributed to Kurdish Muslim populations. Mansfield, Stephen. "Religious Neutrality In 94% Muslim Iraqi Kurdistan." The Huffington Post. June 18, 2012. Accessed December 23, 2014. This has no bearing on the role of Islamic identity in Kurdish nationalist movements, which has been central to many of them. See Olson, R (P. Xvii).
47. There is a notion, whether real or imagined, that any tolerated form of Sunni Islam in Iran must be co-opted by the government.
48. Brown, Daniel W. *A New Introduction to Islam*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2004, 191.
49. This is not dissimilar to part of the reason the Safavid dynasty was hostile to Sunni Islam: its competition with the Ottoman empire.
50. It is useful to note here that most of the world's Muslims—probably around 80 % of them—are nominally of the Sunni persuasion.
51. See, for example, "Khomeini Urges Export Of Iranian Revolution." The New York Times. October 14, 1981. Accessed December 25, 2014. http://www.nytimes.com/1981/10/15/world/around-the-world-khomeini-urges-export-of-iranian-revolution.html.
52. See Nasr, Seyyed Vali Reza. *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts within Islam Will Shape the Future*. New York: Norton, 2006.
53. Kamali, F. (P. 173).
54. Ibid. at 188.
55. We do know that Komala or a predecessor party likely existed in some form as early as the late 1960s. Abdullah Mohtadi, the current Secretary General of the party, claims that the first meeting of its founding members (of which he was one) took place in 1969.

56. Kamali, F (P. 181–182).
57. See Moin, Baqer (20 December 2009). "Grand Ayatollah Hossein Ali Montazeri". *The Guardian*.
58. MacDonald, C.G., 'The Kurdish Question in the 1980s,' in Milton Esman and Itaman Robinovich, "Ethnicity, Pluralism, and State in the Middle East". New York: Cornell University Press, 1988. 244.
59. Ibid. The Constitution of the Islamic Republic was approved by the Expediency Council in November 1979.
60. Kamali, F (P. 189).
61. One of many examples of Khomeini's statements confirming this idea is his proposition that "Our government… has priority over all other requirements of Islam… even over prayer." See Wright, Robin B. *In the Name of God: The Khomeini Decade*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989. 173.
62. Kamali, F (P. 157).
63. This view was encountered remarkably frequently during the research of this book, both among the religious and non-religious.
64. Vali, Abbas. *Kurds and the State in Iran, The Making of Kurdish Identity*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2011. 8.
65. Kamali, F (P. 196).

PART II

CHAPTER 3

The Muftis of Iranian Kurdistan and the Dawning of an Activist

The city of Sanandaj,[1] where Ahmad Moftizadeh was born, has always viewed itself as a sort of cultural capital for not only Kurds in Iran but also the greater Kurdish *Sorani*-speaking population which stretched well into Northern Iraq. As the administrative capital of Iran's *Kordestan* province, Sanandaj benefitted more from cultural and commercial exchange with the rest of the country than other cities in the Kurdish region.[2] When speaking to Sanandaj's citizens, this perceived centrality exudes a tenor of arrogance vis-à-vis the rest of Kurdistan. At the same time, Sanandaj was very much a secondary city in Iran's twentieth-century catapult toward modernity, in a very much secondary region. Manifestly inconsequential to much of Iran's social and political history until the revolution, there is no doubt that Sanandaj, like the Kurdistan in which it saw itself a flag-bearer, suffered from an identity crisis.[3]

Unlike the Shia Azeri population in Iran, which historically counts a number of Iranian society's "elite" among its ranks, there is no tradition or precedent of Kurds within such an Iranian upper class.[4] There are many reasons why this may be the case. One of these reasons is undoubtedly historical. Kurds, with what can be called a modern tradition of opposition to central government, have always been poorly integrated in Iran's power structure. In the journals and chronicles of Iranian leaders, from the Qajar era to the modern one, a sense of mistrust is often observed concerning the loyalty of the Kurdish populations on the periphery of the empire. Not surprisingly, in Iranian popular perception, while the Turks

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are stereotyped as foolish, the Arabs as backward, and the Rashdis as a pejorative sort of easygoing, the Kurds are stereotyped as stubborn and violent.

The principal reason for the lack of Kurdish participation in Iranian thought and political leadership today, however, results from a central government policy that disfavors the Kurdish, and by extension, Sunni minority. In the previous chapter, we discussed the policy imperatives that colored Tehran's posture in Kurdistan to some degree. For the people of Sanandaj, this institutional misgiving results in another durable layer of resentment for a proud citizenry which likens itself to one of Kurdistan's trendsetters in music and poetry, and one that views itself as more culturally pure than the favored "Kermanshah" region of Kurdistan that is primarily Shia. Unlike the ancient Persian cities of Shiraz and Isfahan, the capital Tehran, or even cities in Iranian Azerbaijan, there is a popular perception that Sanandaj and Sunni Kurdistan benefitted significantly less from the Pahlavi dynasty and its ambitious development plans, and continues to be neglected by Tehran.[5]

Partially, in relation to this perpetually conflictual relationship with Iran, all leaders in Iranian Kurdistan have faced a difficult dilemma when weighing if or how to cooperate with the central government. We discussed briefly the role that various Kurdish factions played in Iran's revolution, and will do so in more depth going forward. But in embarking on the analysis of one of Iran's Moftis'[6] eventual opposition to the central government, it is most useful to start with the basic question of how the *mufti* institution was founded in Iran and Kurdistan and who the Moftis are.

In our discussion of the nature of early Kurdish nationalist movements, the institution of the *sheikh* and its integral role in Kurdish society surfaced regularly. The word *sheikh* in much of the Muslim world has a scholarly connotation. In Islamic society, generally speaking, the *sheikh* is a respected religious "elder" who usually has some form of basic religious training. In Kurdish society, however, where spiritual influence tended to be less traditional and more of a *sufi* or non-doctrinal order, the *sheikh* was a more complex political character. In that sense, the word *sheikh* as used to describe these Kurdish leaders is actually a misnomer of sorts.[7]

We explored how the *sheikh* derived some of his legitimacy from his spirituality but further discovered that his influence and power resulted from an ability to bridge gaps in Kurdish society and unify individuals often on non-tribal lines. This ultimately led to the Kurdish *sheikh's* substantial independent wealth and ability to control events. In this sense,

any doctrinal religiosity and religious legitimacy of the *sheikh* was secondary to his political power. While a *sheikh* was not required to be a formal scholar on Islam, zero study in Islamic jurisprudence would have been and continues to be abnormal for a *sheikh* in much of the Muslim world. But in many cases, the *sheikh* in Kurdistan did not have any formal, traditional Islamic training or scholarship at all, even when his political power was enabled by the veneer of religious legitimacy. Who, then, is this different character, the *mufti*? In traditional Sunni Islamic society, it was the *mufti* who was the highest religious authority in the *ulama's* (religious scholarly community's) standard bureaucracy, and he presided over his society vis-à-vis religious questions of the day, outranking individuals like the *sheikh*.[8]

The Mufti Institution

> The duckling is born and it floats on the water without having to be taught. And the Moftis are similarly born as poets.
>
> —A saying from Sanandaj, Iran

While the role of the *mufti* has evolved over the years, the institution of the *mufti* has existed in Sunni Islamic history for centuries. Early *muftis* were Islamic scholars of influence that were known by their peers for being of particularly high jurisprudential and moral standing. The *mufti* was considered to be an integral and leading part of the community of religious scholars, and was expected to confer with other persons in the *ulama* which can be considered of lower rank, such as the *faqih* (scholar), *qadi* (judge), or *sheikh* (respected religious elder). A person became a *mufti* when a community consensus was formed so that such an individual was approached for his jurisprudential view and interpretation of *sharia,* or divine law, relating to a particular question. This process is better known as delivering *fiqh,* or the human understanding of that divine *sharia* law. This *mufti* would have been someone who was considered trustworthy and capable to a plurality of the community, ultimately constituting the top of the *ulama's* hierarchy. A lay Muslim who had a jurisprudential question, or sought to find a course of action that was in accordance with Islam, would go to this person in the community who he respected and knew to be sufficiently learned and pious. The form of the *mufti's* opinion was delivered in a non-binding *fatwa,* or decree, which explained what the interpretation of divine law was on a particular subject. Often, a *fatwa*

in Sunni jurisprudence did not address a particular behavior as right or wrong, but rather gave a higher level, semi-tailored legal interpretation on a particular area of life, such as "prayer" or "divorce."[9] The *mufti* could be seen, in a Western construct, as a sort of appellate court of interpretation. In traditional Islamic society, the *sheikh,* for example, did not have the authority to issue *fatwas.* Early *muftis* were not appointed by authorities, but by the consensus of the *ummah,* or community. They did not always undergo formal training in Islam's principal learning centers, but this was preferred.[10]

The formal "anointment" of *mufti* authority by government, and not by the consensus of the *ummah*, was a process that became commonplace during the Ottoman period.[11] In the context of governmental or royal appointment, the *mufti* was ordained the highest person responsible for interpretation of religion among the *ulama* in that society by the ruling establishment. In some cases, one sovereign area may have had multiple appointed *muftis* that were regional in their authority. One can imagine that being appointed a *mufti* was not only simple recognition of religious competence by the Ottoman Sultan, who was also concerned by questions of loyalty and compatibility with the sovereign's view of the world. But officially, the role of the *mufti* is such that in many societies (including today's Saudi Arabia), the *mufti's* decree would be seen as valid in the eyes of the law even when it contradicted it.[12] While it has not always been the case that there is government acceptance and formalization of the *mufti* distinction where it exists, appointment or at least ratification by government is almost always how *muftis* have been legitimized in modern times.

Against this backdrop, the institution of the *mufti* was a unique one in the context of Iranian Kurdistan and Iran more broadly. Confined within the borders of a new, modern state that was majority Shia Muslim, Sunni Islamic institutions sputtered in early twentieth-century Iran. There has generally been a lack of *mufti* influence and presence in Kurdish society, besides the obvious subject matter of this manuscript. There was another person who was known as a *mufti* in Mahabad at the turn of the twentieth century, but whose unofficial mandate and influence was limited to parts of Mahabad; the limitation of this *mufti's* influence is articulated by Kurdistan's inhabitants through the assertion that his offspring did not bear the *mufti* legacy. Similarly, on the other side of Iran's borders, *mufti* distinctions were seldom used in Kurdistan. In Sulaymaniyah, Iraq, the *mufti* presence seems to have been predominantly respected by Arabs.

Since few Kurds were integrated in broader Iranian and regional society, and few underwent significant Islamic training, the lack of a *mufti* presence in Kurdistan is not necessarily a surprise. Formal training and bestowal of the *mufti* title signifies a level of orthodoxy in Islam that was rare in Kurdistan. Such orthodoxy also necessarily would have been dependent on resources and access to a type of education that was not a priority in tribal Kurdistan. While *muftis* across the Sunni Muslim Middle East played an important role in institutionalizing the interpretation of Islamic law for populations that were far from the Sunni learning centers of Baghdad, the Hejaz, and Cairo, such characters rarely lived in Kurdistan. As we will see, the Moftis of Iranian Kurdistan were required to travel a certain distance to access the necessary resources for their "professions."

During the Qajar dynasty (1794–1925), tribal feuds in the Kurdish region led to the sovereign instituting a rather practical governing arrangement there. The bureaucratic "normalcy" that prevailed in the rest of the empire, which began to resemble modern national bureaucracy, did not exist in most of Kurdistan. The city of Sanandaj was not so much governed by the Qajar dynasty as it was under the general influence of the dynasty, with certain ruling tribes "appointed" by the sovereign as primary power brokers. Under such an arrangement, rivaling Kurdish tribes from outside of Sanandaj, notably from the Horaman (Hawraman) region of Kurdistan, are reported to have entered the city throughout the nineteenth century, sometimes taking control of areas within the city for prolonged periods of looting and pillaging.[13] Suffice it to say that until the twentieth century, there was not a consistent government in Sanandaj or much of Kurdistan as we know it today.[14] The story of the origins of the Mofti family starts here.

Qajar Era and the First Moftis of Kurdistan

The dominant power in the Sanandaj region during the late Qajar era was the Asef tribal confederation. Qajar influence was implemented through the Asef tribe, which intermarried into dynasty favor and professed allegiance to it.[15] The "Asef Mansion," one of Sanandaj's popular historical landmarks, bears witness to the wealth and influence of the group at a time where Sanandaj was mostly a conglomerate of villages under the sphere of Qajar influence.[16] One of the villages on the outskirts of what is now Sanandaj was Naran. Naran's prominent family was the Khaledi tribal unit, led by the principal family head of Mahmoud Khaledi.[17] Khaledi purport-

edly resented the instability resulting from the looting of the tribes of Horaman.[18] In his view, the looting did not affect the dynasty or its patron tribe, but the smaller tribes like his who were left to fend for themselves at the drop of a hat in the face of impending chaos. He became preoccupied with the idea of gaining more control of the greater Sanandaj region himself, for reasons of security. Naturally, this put him at odds with the dominant power of the region (Asef), and by extension, the Qajar dynasty. While significantly smaller and less influential than other tribes in the area, Khaledi was said to have had a cordial relationship with the Naqshbandi sufi orders of the Kurdistan region, who held significant influence, and perhaps unrivaled prominence, although they did not count among one of the tribes formally aligned with the ruling dynasty. As we will see, this relationship with the *sheikhs* of the Naqshbandi order would be an important one for the Khaledi family's ultimate fortune.

Around the turn of the twentieth century, probably around 1880, there was said to be a power struggle between Khaledi families (still in Naran) and the Asef militias, which resulted in a rather easy defeat of the former and their exile to a region of Horaman itself, in a village named Disha.[19] It is thought that approximately 40 people of the Khaledi family unit left Naran permanently and settled in Disha. With the limited wealth and belongings they brought with them from Naran to the hitherto totally rural Horaman, they acquired land in short order, and forged themselves as the most prominent family there.[20]

Mahmoud Khaledi had a son who he named Abdullah (known sometime later as Abdullah Dishi).[21] Abdullah was reputed to have had an exceptionally sharp intellect and penchant for learning, although given the predicament of his family's exile from Sanandaj and lack of access to education, he was illiterate for most of his adolescence.[22] Abdullah Dishi ascended to a sort of leadership role in his family at the mere age of 10–12, when his father Mahmoud died. Taking on significant responsibility at that age was not necessarily atypical during that period, but the Khaledi/Dishi family was a land owning one with some limited influence; this tends to confirm the oft-heard assertion that Abdullah was thought of as a competent young man.[23]

Sometime after the death of his father, Abdullah Dishi, who had maintained contact with the influential Naqshbandi sufis mentioned prior, was said to have been sponsored to begin religious study by the most prominent of the Naqshbandi sufi leaders, Sheikh Sirajeddine Omar.[24] Sheikh Omar, as he was affectionately known, took a liking to Abdullah

Dishi from a young age, despite their limited contact. It was reported that Sheikh Omar sensed him to be of superior intellect and ability. As a result, Abdullah Dishi was sent to the closest major Sunni centers of learning in Erbil and Baghdad to learn under some of the region's most prominent Sunni scholars at the time.[25] Abdullah Dishi's remarkable intellect is said to have earned him prominence in scholarship; by the time he was 17 years old, he is reported not only to have been an expert in Islamic law, but also well versed in mathematics and philosophy. It was said later by one of Abdullah Dishi's companions in Erbil, Sheikh Reza Talibani, that the other student contemporaries of Abdullah seemed to learn more from Dishi than from their instructor (a prominent teacher named Mola Afandi).[26]

When he returned to Disha after some years in Erbil and Baghdad, Dishi began to advise on issues of Islamic law for the local faithful. He continued to gain regional prominence, with individuals in the Horaman countryside visiting him with questions of religion. He would occasionally write correspondence answering questions from communities in distant corners of Kurdistan as far as the Turkish border. His reputation for scholarship continued to spread beyond Horaman into the rest of Kurdistan. Soon, individuals from across Kurdistan who sought an expert religious opinion on some factor of their lives would travel long distances to consult Dishi.[27]

Meanwhile, in the Iranian capital, the Qajar dynasty's king, Nasser al-Deen Shah, presided over his mostly Shia empire. He was advised on religious matters by a certain religious scholar and mystic by the name of Molla Hadi Sabzevari of Mashhad. On one occasion, it was said that a disagreement arose about a complex religious question in the monarch's presence. To address the question, the Shah personally demanded that opinions be sought from as many scholars as possible, including from a scholar who could provide a Sunni interpretation on the matter.[28] With respect to the latter request, he was dismayed to hear from his advisers that no Sunni scholar was known in the empire who could comment on a matter of jurisprudence that was so intricate. Nasser al-Deen Shah did not accept that this could be the case, and so he demanded that Molla Hadi Sabzevari explore further to determine whether there were any Sunni scholars of note that resided within the empire. When local informants spread word through the Qajar dynasty's horseback messenger carriers that a person of stellar scholarly reputation existed in Kurdistan, the Shah's adviser, Sabzevari, was skeptical. Nevertheless, Abdullah

Dishi was eventually summoned to Tehran by the Qajar governor of the Horaman region through a royal correspondence.[29]

To the surprise and fascination of the Qajar sovereign and Molla Sabzevari, Abdullah Dishi refused the invitation. He responded that he was too busy with local matters of interest to participate in meetings at the royal palace. A follow-up request was also refused. This likely intensified the interest, if not ire, of the Qajar king. At that point, the sovereign decided it was no longer Dishi's choice to attend. The local governor of the Horaman region was informed that Dishi's participation was mandatory, a message which he surely communicated to Dishi in no uncertain terms. Abdullah Dishi at last felt obliged by the royal decree; he prepared to travel to the imperial palace for what he was told was a meeting among Iran's Islamic scholars. Such meetings were not uncommon in the Qajar era, and one issue and scholar were usually the meeting's focal point. In Mofti family narrative, Abdullah Dishi was the focal point of this meeting.

Many Sunni and Shia scholars of Iran at the time were invited to this meeting, without an apparent sense of doctrinal division between them that would make such a meeting improbable today. After weeks of debate on the questions of jurisprudence of the day, and conferring among the scholars who had attended, it was said that Abdullah Dishi had made such a profound influence on the religious establishment that he had been considered one of the de facto chiefs of knowledge toward the end of the meeting.[30] Contrary to what the Shah had been led to believe by his ill-informed advisers, Dishi was not only a worthwhile scholar but one of the most noteworthy in the whole of the empire. His knowledge on diverse Islamic matters was so great that the nickname of "Al-Farabi the Second" was attributed to him, and remains to this day.[31] As a Sunni, the title of Ayatollah could not be applicable to Dishi. Rather, as a result of this newfound recognition in Tehran, like the handful of other Sunni scholars of pre-eminence across the Muslim world outside of the dynasty, he was named the "Mofti" of Iran's Sunnis by Nasser al-Deen Shah. From that point on (around the year 1895), Abdullah Dishi became known as Mola Abdullah Mofti.[32] He became the first official *mufti* of Iran's Sunnis.

This scroll commemorates the appointment of Abdullah Dishi and his residence at Dar al-Ihsan. It is issued with the official stamp of Mohammad Ali Shah, and dates from July 1907.

Image 4 Scroll Denoting and Commemorating Mufti Distinction delivered by the Royal Qajar Government

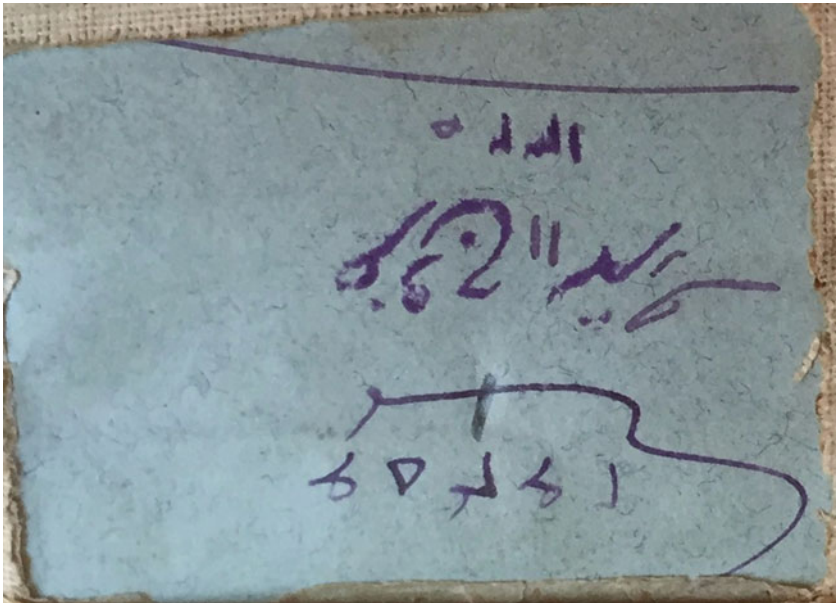

Image 5 Scroll Denoting and Commemorating Mufti Distinction delivered by the Royal Qajar Government

As alluded to prior, there had ostensibly never been a *mufti* in Iranian Kurdistan, formally declared by the sovereign, until that time. To this day, the descendants of Mahmoud Khaledi remain the only individuals to have held this authority. The distinction between the new "Mofti" in Horaman and the *sheikhs* who had preceded Mola Abdullah Mofti in the Kurdistan region is a complex but important one. To define it simply, while the *sheikhs* rather abstractly predicated their foundational legitimacy on Islam, almost none of them were formal scholars of the religion who maintained that legitimacy through Islamic scholarship. Likewise, they were not accorded a formal distinction of scholarship in the manner that a modern *mufti* was. The *sheikhs* were political beings at their core. While the *mufti* lacked the same base of popular support and alliances that delivered the *sheikh* his distinct status (tribal, financial, political), he held a different sort of doctrinal and governmental legitimacy. A *mufti* would then have to build popular legitimacy upon his position, with all of the complexities that arise naturally out of such an arrangement. In the case of the Moftis of Sanandaj, their very ascendance to formal *mufti* status can be said to have been enabled by the *sheikhs,* as we saw from Abdullah Dishi's close relationship with and sponsorship from Sheikh Omar.

The circumstances surrounding the return of Mola Abdullah Mofti and his extended family to Sanandaj are somewhat hazy, but the return enabled by the power struggles that were taking place within the Qajar dynasty during the reign of Mozaffar al-Deen Shah. These events would have left a vacuum of sorts for other large families or tribes who were hoping to make inroads into Sanandaj to fill. What we do know is at some point, within a decade of returning to Disha from his religious scholarship and anointment as *mufti*, Dishi journeyed back to Sanandaj to preside over its biggest mosque, Dar al-Ihsan. This was approximately the year 1905. When he left Disha, he reportedly donated hundreds of hectares of land to the local villagers, which contributes to an enormous deference to any Mofti family member and the Mofti institution in Disha and parts of Horaman to this day.[33]

Eventually, when the Pahlavi dynasty formally took over Iran and Iranian Kurdistan came under its control, it did not interfere with the Mofti institution that was operating out of Sanandaj. Soon afterwards, it sent official representatives to meet with the Mofti, and from the beginning of the Pahlavi dynasty, treated the institution as part of the region's political and cultural landscape.[34] In this way, Reza Khan, the first Pahlavi Shah, ratified the institution.

Dar al-Ihsan, the religious center where Mola Abdullah Mofti (Abdullah Dishi) presided, had historic ties to the Al-Azhar mosque in Cairo, one of Sunni Islam's primary historic centers of scholarship. Oral tradition in Sanandaj narrates that groups of scholars trained at Al-Azhar would travel to reside temporarily at Dar al-Ihsan for much of the nineteenth century. As one of the few Kurds to ever lead such an establishment, Mola Abdullah Mofti had stepped into a realm of Islamic orthodoxy that was unique to Kurdistan.

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Mola Abdullah Mofti had two wives. With his first wife, he gave birth to a single child whom he named Mahmoud after his father. Mahmoud underwent religious training to succeed his father as Mofti of Iran's Sunnis. When his father passed away, he duly took over those duties. He is known by most as Molana Mahmoud (Mofti). Molana Mahmoud, who became the longest serving Mofti in the history of Sunni Islam in Iran and Kurdistan generally, came to lead Dar al-Ihsan during the Pahlavi dynasty's ambitious modernization efforts.

As alluded to prior, Molana Mahmoud Mofti was born and bred to be a scholar of the *Shafi'i* school of Sunni Islam. Like his father, he spent a number of years studying jurisprudence abroad, going as far as Egypt for a period of time, while performing most of his religious scholarship in neighboring Iraq. He was a scholar of significant rank in the Islamic world who developed a relationship with the prestigious religious centers of Baghdad and Cairo and often was invited to present interpretations on complex Islamic questions by the prestigious Al-Azhar.[35]

While we know little about Mola Abdullah Mofti's (Dishi's) relationship with the Qajar dynasty and the subsequent Pahlavi leadership of his day (besides his appointment), Molana Mahmoud Mofti's nature of leadership is more well known. Molana Mahmoud was said to have sought a neutral, and as far as religious matters were concerned, cordial relationship with the central government. He did not see himself as an active participant in political matters and there are no salient examples that would demonstrate his being a truly politicized member of the *ulama*. Molana Mahmoud even participated in religious gatherings in the capital and taught seminars at the University of Tehran.[36] But there are a number of examples from his life that demonstrate that he harbored some political acumen and nationalist sentiment. This was a result of both his Kurdish cultural awareness, and his view that a *mufti's* authority is primarily religious and not fully derived from the sovereign.

One historical example rather clearly demonstrates the limits of the Mofti's acceptance of the Shah's authority. The precise nature of these events are narrated differently depending on who you ask among those familiar with the story. But the narrative is recounted by a politically diverse cross section of Sanandaj's population, so at least some version of these events is probably true: Around the year 1940, a young peasant man from one of the villages neighboring Sanandaj learned that his wife had been raped by a local sergeant of the Shah's army. When he heard this news, the young man vowed revenge on the culprit soldier. He made arrangements to find a weapon, and inquired widely as to where the local soldier could be found. When he finally found the soldier near his barracks one evening, he killed him in cold blood. An advisory went out from the Royal Army—an army that was given a great deal of discretion and authority by the Shah during this period—demanding that the young man who murdered a sergeant be caught and brought in to face justice. The young man, desperate to escape his own foregone execution by the army, felt he had no choice but to try and seek refuge at the Mofti's home in Sanandaj.[37] He traveled at nighttime under the cover of darkness to the Mofti's home in the center of the city.

Upon receiving the young man in his home and hearing his desperate story, Molana Mahmoud decreed that the man had acted within his rights in killing the alleged rapist, and told him he could stay in the Mofti's home until the affair subsided. The rumor mill in a small city like Sanandaj worked efficiently, and within a day, it was learned by many, including the Royal Army, that the man was hiding with assistance from the Mofti. Correspondence soon came from the Royal Army to Molana Mahmoud, informing him that it was believed that a fugitive was hiding in his home, and requesting that he respectfully hand the individual over to the local garrison. Molana Mahmoud was said to have had official correspondence sent to the local gendarmerie, requesting instead that an official release order for the man be affected "by mid-day," since his alleged crime was actually justified. The Shah's local representative very respectfully said that he would turn the world upside down for the Mofti, but could not overrule the Royal Army's official edict, as it was not a local ruling but one that came directly from the Royal Courts. The response from Molana Mahmoud was brazen: If he did not receive the requested release order for the young man by the next day, he would turn Sanandaj into a "blood bath." By the next day, the edict relieving the man of his death sentence was received by the Mofti's office.[38]

The general idea that Molana Mahmoud, despite his ultimately deriving legitimacy from and being patronized by the central government, still maintained a strict vow of independence, is popular in Sanandaj. Legend has it that when the Mofti would receive correspondence from the Royal Government, he would, without fail, put a line through the calligraphy in the header which venerated the Shah. He would then proceed to write above it, "in the name of God." One descendent of the Mofti family narrates that he would often find himself in the vicinity of the Mofti when he was visited by official representatives of the Shah. In one instance, he distinctly recalled the Mofti being visited by the central government's gendarmerie in his home; he recalls being surprised at the change in the behavior of Molana Mahmoud, who took on a stern and formal demeanor, requiring that shoes and hats be removed, and communicating through one of his followers who was nearby (despite all individuals being in the same room). When the gendarmerie left, he recalls Molana Mahmoud becoming more relaxed and even smiling and playing with the children.[39] Of course, third-party hindsight of this sort can produce desired characteristics in an individual that did not necessarily exist. However, this sort of anecdotal evidence about Molana Mahmoud's general independence and borderline opposition to the Iranian sovereign is consistent, even among the non-religious and left-leaning (read, anti-Mofti) citizens of Sanandaj. He was the son of Abdullah Dishi, after all, who famously rejected the Qajar Shah's invitation to attend the Royal Palace twice before being obliged to do so. Likely influenced by the subsequent history of this family, perpetuated through fact and fiction alike, this mythology about the Moftis' fearless and incorruptible nature has found a way of embedding itself into Sanandaj's collective mind. It is perhaps most personified by the main character of this book, Molana Mahmoud's son, Ahmad.

Toward the beginning of this chapter, a popular proverb from Sanandaj is referenced: "The duckling is born and it floats on the water without having to be taught. And the Moftis are similarly born as poets." It is a somewhat curious perception; why is it that a ruling religious family was recognized for strength in poetry? Was this even a desirable trait for a religious family? While we will leave the latter question unanswered, some insight can be proferred on the first. It is said that Molana Mahmoud always kept a Quran on his prayer rug. Next to the Quran, he would keep a book of Saadi's poetry, and on top of it, Hafez's poetry (two reputed Persian poets). Molana Mahmoud's granddaughter reports that when her father asked Molana Mahmoud why he would put Hafez's book on top

of Saadi's, he responded that "Saadi's poetry is a great sea, and Hafez's poetry navigates its most beautiful waters."[40] Molana Mahmoud was an avid reader of the Persian poets especially, while conversant in the poetic canons of the great Arabic and Kurdish poets as well.

Now, the Moftis of Sanandaj were orthodox scholars of the *Shafi'i* Sunni order, and were not sufis. They formally disapproved of many of the rituals of the sufi *sheikhs* and were against the formal institution of the sufi orders.[41] But, this sort of context demonstrates an important attribute of the nature of their Islam: it had a spiritual, mystic tendency to it. Ahmad Moftizadeh comments on this in his writings. "Molana Mahmoud [my father] and even his father Mola Abdullah Dishi were known for their opposition to the practices of the *sufi sheikhs* of their era. Nonetheless, my father had a genuine belief in the spiritual power of [certain of the *sheikhs*]."[42]

Moftizadeh goes on to describe certain *sheikhs* of the sufi orders that were well-respected by the Mofti family and appreciated for their genuine connection to the spiritual realm—ideas that would be considered unorthodox by the Sunni Arab centers of Islamic learning. Ahmad Moftizadeh's mother, a devoutly religious woman, was said to have decorated a room in the home with one picture: that of a Naqshbandi *sheikh* of the time.[43] How the Moftis of Iran balanced this disapproval of certain unorthodox sufi practices, while harboring a sort of appreciation for many of the *sheikhs* of the sufi orders, is not intuitively clear. But neither is the nature of Islam in Kurdistan, or in many ways, the harrowing story of this book.

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There was a story Ahmad must have heard many times growing up in Sanandaj. It was about the first son of Molana Mahmoud who fell ill with an unknown disease while still an infant. Molana Mahmoud moved mountains to have his son seen by all of the specialists of the region with hopes of finding a cure. The Mofti's wife would create home remedies and both would pray day and night for their dear son's health to improve, until one day, the young boy succumbed to his illness and died. On that same day, an important *sheikh* of the Naqshbandi order, who Ahmad Moftizadeh would later see in his dreams, visited the home to find Molana Mahmoud weeping with his wife. So deep was the sorrow that the couple felt, they could not engage in conversation with the visitor. The s*heikh* Habibullah Bagdadi, clutching his *tasbih* beads, then began to pray, and went to where the boy was covered with a blanket, not far from his weeping parents. The deepest of sorrows prevailed in the room, as he lifted the blanket for a brief moment and then put it down. "Snap out of it!" the *sheikh* yelled angrily

at the Mofti. "Stand up now and get yourself together. I have seen your son live among a wife and kids into his forties." The Mofti, still sobbing, rushed to the *sheikh* and uncovered his son. He could now feel a pulse.[44]

Courage, ethics, and a connection to the spiritual realm—such was the narrative of the Mofti family. Abstract notions such as family tradition are not always grounded in a flawless perception of history. But legends have a way of taking hold of the mind, the way gravity takes hold of the body. Ahmad Moftizadeh's philosophy borrowed from his father and grandfather's Islamic mysticism, as we will see from his fatwas and religious reasoning. This normative Islam, that was at the same time comfortable with elements of the mystical and sufi forms of Islam, contributed to the unique ideas of Ahmad Moftizadeh which will be explored in the coming chapters.[45]

Ahmad Moftizadeh's Early Years

If you have followed the naming convention of the Mofti family to this point, you will have noticed that the first son of a family generally carries the name of his grandfather. This led to the first few generations of Mofti patriarchs alternating between the name Mahmoud and Abdullah. Molana Mahmoud named his first son after his father, Abdullah. Abdullah Mofti was said to be a highly principled man, but one that was uninterested in heavy religious scholarship from a young age. The youngest brother, Hadi, was also reluctant to take a serious interest in the work of their Mofti father. The middle brother, Ahmad, could not have been more different in this sense.

When Ahmad Moftizadeh was born in 1933, Iran was under the reign of an ascending Pahlavi dynasty. The city of Sanandaj where he was born was closer to a village than a city when compared to Tehran or Shiraz. But it was the capital of Kordestan province nonetheless. Ahmad's father, Molana Mahmoud, was the prominent and well-liked Mofti of Iran's Sunnis, running the Dar al-Ihsan Mosque and learning center where Ahmad spent much of his childhood. Growing up, the Mofti sons were known for a number of things. They were tall boys, all of them over 6 feet. They were also known to be good-looking boys with a penchant for principle and stubbornness.

Abdullah, Ahmad's older brother, was known to never shy away from a fight. In one instance when the boys were playing ping pong with some locals, someone is said to have let out an insult to one of the Prophet's companions, Omar, after missing a shot. This was a typical and usually

unwitting remark for a Shia boy in Iran. In spite of that, Abdullah is said to have taken the ping pong paddle and decked the unsuspecting boy in the face, to the astonishment of the other boys. In another instance, later in his life, Abdullah is said to have heard through the neighborhood grapevine that a next-door neighbor would often physically abuse his wife. One day, when he heard what sounded like an altercation next door between the couple, and with no deference for the prevailing culture of the day, Abdullah went next door. It is related by his children that as neighbors watched over their front yard gates, Abdullah pulled the man into the street and beat him mercilessly. As the man was begging for him to stop, Abdullah yelled over him, announcing loudly that the next time he wanted to raise his hand to his wife, he should pick on his neighbor first. Always well-dressed and commanding respect in the community, nobody raised a hand or a voice to Abdullah, the Mofti's son. Unlike the Mofti, however, he instead pursued a career in teaching, becoming an instructor at Sanandaj's high school. It is said now out of respect for Abdullah that he chose himself not to pursue the Mofti legacy. But it is likely that his younger brother's natural talent in matters of *fiqh* and Islamic learning also played a role.

Ahmad also had a reputation for having a bit of a temper, especially when he felt that something was unfair or unnecessarily offensive. But Ahmad's demeanor was more understated than that of his big brother, and he was above all known for his exceptional intellect at a young age. He took a liking to spending time at the mosque and would pick things up quickly, even to the surprise of his elders. At four years old, comparisons were drawn with the genius of his grandfather, Abdullah Dishi.[46] By the time Ahmad was an adolescent, the influence of the Moftis of Sanandaj had formally been established among Sunnis throughout all of Iran, and informally stretched far into neighboring Iraq, where other scholars and laymen would seek Molana Mahmoud's *fatwas* on various religious issues in the traditional *mufti* style.

As soon as his sons were able to read, Molana Mahmoud had teachers report to the Mofti household daily to deliver courses to his children, as well as his half-brother, Khaled, at their young age.[47] The teachers reported that Ahmad was particularly remarkable in his studies. In short order, Ahmad began studying formally under the tutelage of his father, asking him complex questions on a variety issues as an adolescent, although he was said by some to lack focus. His father the Mofti was said to have told him repeatedly that he was too headstrong, even calling him wild.[48] But as

he approached his tenth birthday, he began to take on the characteristics of a young scholar in his knowledge, already relatively advanced in the intricacies of Quranic interpretation and Islamic Law. At the age of 12, he left Iran to pursue more formal scholarship.[49] And like with his grandfather and his father, that scholarship took place across the border in Iraq.

In the vicinities of the cities of Erbil, Sulaymaniyah, and Halabja, Moftizadeh spent the next few years studying under various Islamic scholars.[50] In larger cities such as Erbil and Sulaymaniyah, the formal scholars and schools would teach the more fundamental doctrines of Islamic jurisprudence to students. In and around Halabja, mostly, but also in the villages surrounding other cities, there were certain scholars of discrete learning on specific subjects that had to be searched out. Students of Islam in the Kurdish region would travel to these scholars to learn.[51] Two fellow residents of Sanandaj, the Jalali brothers, recall studying with Ahmad in Iraq. They recall the average age of students at the school they shared being approximately 20 years old. The brothers themselves were no exception. The only exception in age was Ahmad.

Ahmad, a newly minted teenager at 13 years of age, seemed more concerned with horsing around than studying. He relished the opportunity to wrestle with kids larger than he was, surely a result of his having been brought up around his tough older brother. He would also play practical jokes on the other students, and if the teacher was not lecturing, he would find some mischief to get into. The first time the teacher called on Ahmad to interpret a text that the students were told to study the night before, the Jalali brothers were sure that Ahmad's fate was sealed. To their surprise, the boy delivered a detailed, convincing interpretation on the question posed. He even had the gall to challenge the teacher on certain conclusions he had made. The other students were stunned. This was to become a routine, according to the brothers. The teachers would usually finish by telling the other students to be ashamed that this young boy had studied more than they had. According to the brothers, they were too embarrassed to tell the teacher that Ahmad had actually been playing around the entire afternoon.

This book does not ultimately position itself to judge the level or quality of Ahmad Moftizadeh's Islamic scholarship during this period; even if Moftizadeh's contemporaries were to tender a detailed résumé of the texts he had mastered and jurisprudential puzzles he successfully solved, speculation on scholarship is ultimately less valuable than perception. And as Ahmad progressed through his studies in Iraq, his followers insist that

there was little he could not answer and little he did not have an opinion on in the world of Islamic jurisprudence and philosophy. Reminiscent of the tales of his grandfather, Abdullah Dishi, he was said to have easily supplanted the teachers in his mastery of the texts.

Ahmad also must have heard many stories about his father and grandfather, who had come to this place years before, from the village elders. In one of his letters from prison years later, Ahmad would relate a story from the time of Abdullah Dishi's studies in Iraq: When Abdullah Dishi would have trouble solving or understanding certain jurisprudential or philosophical problems, it was said that he would dream of either a certain late Sheikh Beizawi, or his father (Mahmoud Khaledi), who would alternately come to him and help explain away problems. Ahmad Moftizadeh explains that Dishi was especially surprised to see his father delivering jurisprudential guidance in his dreams, and assumed it was just Sheikh Beizawi taking the form of his father. After all, as we have learned, it was Abdullah Dishi himself who was the first person in the family to undergo any form of scholarship.[52] Moftizadeh explains that when Dishi later met with Sheikh Omar (who sponsored his studies) and recounted his dreams to him, the Sheikh went into a sort of trance. While in the trance, he telepathically communicated as Sheikh Beizawi, and corrected Abdullah Dishi—it was indeed his father that had come to him in his dreams and not the *sheikh*. In the hereafter, it was explained to Abdullah Dishi, his father had attained the level of learning that he had always sought in his heart but never pursued in the physical realm.

Moftizadeh spoke fondly of this time in Iraq, spent between religious study and listening to folklore from elders, all while clowning around excessively with the older students. It seemed to furnish him with a trove of educational as well as personal lessons to last him throughout his life.

News from Home

Approximately one year after Ahmad Moftizadeh arrived in Iraqi Kurdistan to perform his studies, an event took place that would change his and every Kurd's world forever. Amid the chaos of the Second World War, the Mahabad Republic was founded. As Ahmad pursued his religious scholarship, the entire region of greater Kurdistan learned of the person of Qazi Muhammad and his triumphant leadership in establishing an independent Kurdish state to secure the rights of the Kurdish people. They followed news of the republic through the republic's newspaper that was secretly and avidly

read in neighboring parts of Kurdistan not yet independent. They heard about Qazi Muhammad's negotiations with the Shah's army. In the end, they witnessed the republic's perilous downfall, and Qazi Muhammad's execution. An independent Kurdistan was founded for the first time, and destroyed, a couple of hours from where Ahmad Moftizadeh was born 13 years earlier.

Moftizadeh saw Qazi Muhammad as an unrivaled hero, and although he never met or interacted with the leader of the republic, he later spoke of him being a great man that all of Kurdistan should admire. He wholeheartedly supported the Mahabad Republic and saw its destruction as a tragic turn of events. The respect and influence that Muhammad's story and struggle had on his life was always a motivating factor for the positive disposition he held toward Muhammad's legacy party, the KDPI.

Against the backdrop of the historical events relating to the Mahabad Republic, this period of travel and scholarship in Iraqi Kurdistan was impactful for Moftizadeh in a number of ways. Not only did he develop a sense of independence away from home and undergo rigorous scholarship on the Islamic underpinnings that would come to govern the activities of much of his life, but he was also exposed to greater Kurdistan for the first time.

Kurds in Iran, like with other parts of Kurdistan, have a unique practical relationship with their language and culture. Most Kurds in Sanandaj grow up speaking the Kurdish language at home and in their communities, using it in all aspects of their day-to-day lives. Persian, however, is the official language of Iran. Use of the Kurdish language in Iran, like in neighboring countries, has seen varying degrees of acceptance from the Iranian sovereign over the years, all bordering on prohibition. Occasionally, a television channel in Kurdish may have been broadcast for certain hours of the day, only to be taken off the air after a few months. In other periods of history, Kurdish newspapers were allowed, and then banned. The language has always been forbidden as a medium of education. In essence, for all official intents and purposes, Kurdish language and culture did not exist.

This created, and creates, practical scenarios in day-to-day Kurdish life that are somewhat contradictory. Individuals exchange pleasantries and engage in informal conversation with their teachers at school or colleagues at work in Kurdish, but read exclusively from the Persian books provided and censored by the government, and fill out bureaucratic paperwork in Persian—the only language such forms are available in.[53] They switch into Persian when they have their "education" or "official" hats on, but

otherwise carry on in Kurdish. When a Kurdish daughter writes a letter to her mother, a person with whom she has never spoken anything but Kurdish, she is forced to write it in Persian. Many of the most educated Kurds in Sanandaj have historically been illiterate in Kurdish.

The Mofti family was no different in the language they spoke, the clothes they wore, the customs they followed at weddings, and so on. It was all Kurdish. From the hilltops of Erbil to the outskirts of rural Halabja, to the heart of Kirkuk, Ahmad Moftizadeh interacted with other Kurds who spoke with a slightly different accent than he did, but spoke Kurdish to them nonetheless. They, however, were raised in an Arab country. They struggled from the same whimsical oppression of their language and culture that he had seen in his Kurdistan. They too had village guards and army regiments that were not Kurdish "maintaining security" in their cities behind Arabic and Persian dictates. They too saw the proud nationalism of the sovereign grow and function in the form of a purported nation-state, while those people who spoke Kurdish remained stateless. Ahmad himself, a man who never spoke anything but a word of Kurdish with his own family and friends, and who could recite lines from the most complex Arabic and Persian poetry on an impulse, was virtually illiterate in Kurdish. What a curious existence, he must have thought. How could this not have an impact on a young man of his stubbornness? Without having first hand evidence from Moftizadeh's own writings of his Kurdish nationalist sentiment having grown during this period, one can nevertheless take an educated guess that it did. Within a few years, he would make it the cause of his young life.

In his studies, meanwhile, Ahmad was not only smarter than the formal teachers and scholars he was studying under but also more pleasant, according to his contemporaries. The other students soon preferred learning from Ahmad instead.[54] He would casually explain complex jurisprudential concepts to them, and would not shy away from their questions. He was a friend and a resource to the other students like very few were. But despite their desire to see him stay, and after traveling through Kurdistan and learning from all of the region's scholars first-hand for approximately four years, it was time for him to return to Dar al-Ihsan and his home of Sanandaj. He was 16 years old.

Upon returning to Sanandaj, Ahmad pursued a more regimented routine under the tutelage of his father. By this time, given that he was already known for his advanced level of *ijtihad* (religious reasoning) prior to departing for four years of specialized study, he grew into a respected

and moderately well-known person around Sanandaj's major mosque. Still, with his father as the popular Mofti who commanded a great deal of respect in the city, he took a very secondary role in Dar al-Ihsan.

It was around this time, as he approached his 20th birthday, that Ahmad began to question the authority of the Shah more openly with those around him. We discussed Molana Mahmoud's relationship with the Iranian sovereign as an icy one at times, but the Mofti did receive an important mandate of authority to conduct religious business from the central government in Tehran. Ahmad Moftizadeh was said to be uncomfortable with his family's institution deriving legitimacy from the King; as far as Moftizadeh was concerned, such a royal distinction was arbitrary. He also believed that being patronized by the Shah had led to what Ahmad viewed as a distant relationship the Mofti had with the population. While Molana Mahmoud was highly respected, Ahmad thought a *mufti* should be a true man of the people. The point of a *mufti*, he thought, was that he was *chosen* by the people. He was also concerned with the treatment of the Kurdish minority in Iran and what he viewed as potential complacency with the regime by the Mofti, even if it was indirect complacency. While Moftizadeh was born into the *mufti* infrastructure, he saw the state's patronage as dishonorable, if not sinful. He would voice his concern in the form of rhetorical questions in debate with his father, and other confidants around Dar al-Ihsan. The responses he received did not satisfy him.[55]

Despite being significantly younger than many of the other students at the mosque, he meanwhile continued his scholarship and would occasionally stand in for his father as a lecturer.[56] Not surprisingly, some of these students report that they actually preferred the son to the Mofti himself. Not just a simple lecturer, he was known to add an element of nuance and charisma to his talks that were preferable to the more straightforward lectures of the day. He was said to be more approachable than his father was, who due to his stature, as well as his unforgiving and purposeful stare, was somewhat feared in spite of his popularity.

The other major Sunni population in Iran was in Baluchistan, in the south of Iran, bordering Afghanistan and Pakistan. Despite being separated by a significant distance across Iran, the Mofti had authority for Sunni religious matters in the Baluchistan region as well. Young scholars from Baluchistan would study at Dar al-Ihsan and be evaluated by the Mofti himself for their ability to perform Islamic reasoning, for the purpose of ultimately offering guidance to the Sunni population in the

south of the country. Molana Mahmoud would personally provide the authority to these scholars to provide Sunni religious interpretation.[57] Ahmad Moftizadeh became one of the primary interlocutors between the Mofti and the other Sunni populations in Iran, as well as with those who came from Iraq to seek the Mofti's guidance. He would greet them in the Mofti residence and engage in debate and instruction with them. This had the result of further attuning him to the minority status of certain groups in Iranian and Kurdish society, and commonalities between them. His Kurdish nationalism developed. Despite all of this, Ahmad had spent most of his life in Kurdistan. His exposure to the rest of Iran was minimal, and any exposure to national politics in a meaningful way that would help inform his emerging ideology was even more limited. Sanandaj was simply not an important city by Iranian standards. Even by Kurdish standards, smaller cities like Mahabad were the vanguard of the activities that interested him most. Soon, a turn of events would provide him with that desired exposure, and change the course of his life forever.

Tehran, and a Mofti's Passing

Molana Mahmoud was frequently invited to Tehran to meet with other religious leaders and partake in religious seminars—the equivalent of networking for a religious scholar. He delivered short courses at the University of Tehran on matters of Islamic philosophy throughout his tenure as Mofti, but his principal place of duty remained Dar al-Ihsan in Sanandaj, where he presided. During the early period of his relationship with the University of Tehran, his son Ahmad would occasionally join him when he visited the capital, briefly entering the hustle and bustle of Iran's busiest city with wonderment. For Molana Mahmoud, it was a sign of great respect that he was invited to Tehran to deliver lectures; as a Sunni scholar in a Tehran university, he was part of a very small minority. Among the other Sunni teachers at the university was a certain Hajj Abdul Rahman Mohtadi, whose character we will revisit in the next chapter. Molana Mahmoud and Mohtadi were the only two lecturers at the university who were based in Kurdistan. They were also the only two dedicated scholars at the College of Theology that concentrated on Sunni jurisprudence at that time.

In 1958, Molana Mahmoud began traveling more frequently to Tehran at the request of the university. His lectures on Islamic jurisprudence and philosophy were popular among the students there, so it was decided that he would administer a formal course at the law school of the University of

Tehran that year. Ahmad Moftizadeh requested to travel to Tehran with his father to partake in his courses, and study more generally at the College of Theology. He was granted permission to do so. For a few months that year, Ahmad sat in the lecture halls of the university, listening to the lectures of the Mofti that he knew very well by that time. He audited the lectures of other members of the diverse faculty at the university as well, exposing himself to a much more varied array of ideas and interpretations than he had been privy to until that time. He was 25 years old.

Ahmad was said to be fond of Tehran. His assertiveness and sense of purpose was a good fit for the capital, where the anonymity allowed him to bounce ideas off of a new person every day. The cosmopolitan city, now fully in upswing with the Shah's ambitious development programs, would have dazzled any boy from Kurdistan at least at first. But there is no indication that the Mofti's son was at all intimidated.

Ahmad would occasionally engage in debate with the other students in the lecture halls or elsewhere on campus, but few of them had the exposure to *fiqh* that he did, having been raised in a learning center and having traveled for years in the study of Islam. Given the Mofti's other commitments across the country and in particular in Sanandaj, it was only a matter of time before he could not make a scheduled lecture in Tehran. There was no more likely a substitute lecturer than the Mofti's learned son. "I was sick of studying by that point," he would later say. He wanted to teach. On one of the biggest stages in Iran, now, Ahmad began to teach.[58]

It only took one substitute lecture for Ahmad to make a name for himself at the University of Tehran. As Ahmad was a scholar of a Sunni school, the students took an interest in his interpretations and his style of delivery. As one of the youngest lecturers at the university, he was enthusiastic and approachable, and engaged with the students. Throughout the course of 1958, Molana Mahmoud had a health condition that worsened so that he could not comfortably travel to Tehran on a regular basis. His son Ahmad duly filled in. Soon the lecture halls were filled when his seminars were scheduled. The hallways outside of the classroom were filled. Students were sitting on the ground and leaning against walls. It was exhilarating for Ahmad, and he would spew fire whenever he could on the pulpit. He would occasionally steer the course of his lectures toward questions that would allow him to talk about the Kurdish struggle, mostly in snippets.

At the same time, when he was in Tehran, Ahmad was introduced to Kurdish nationalists from different walks of life and different regions of Kurdistan for the first time. Ironically, in the non-Kurdish Iranian capital,

he met with members of the KDPI, some of whom were involved in the Mahabad Republic itself. With his dedication to the cause and popularity, he became a natural consideration for a leadership role in the Kurdish nationalist struggle in Iran, and became involved in discussions about how he could contribute whenever he was in Tehran.

Then abruptly, in the early months of 1959, Molana Mahmoud's condition deteriorated more quickly than previously expected. Confined to his bed, the community in his hometown of Sanandaj began to speak ominously of the great Mofti's illness. Ahmad Moftizadeh went to Sanandaj for a period of time, as did other family members, to be near him. It could be said that the Mofti's precarious health was uncharted territory for the city, and for the Mofti family. This great leader, serious and stern, with the soft heart that helped him wear so effortlessly the heavy burden of his community's expectations, was nearing his last breath.

Talk began to swirl about the Mofti's illness, and inevitably, talk soon turned to his replacement. Inside the Mofti family and for many in Sanandaj, the anticipated replacement was clear. Through those long nights and distressing days, Ahmad Moftizadeh's mother and brothers interrogated him about his intentions. He started with coy answers that put off his ultimate disposition, stating that the Mofti was still alive. Meanwhile, he served as acting Mofti, delivering fatwas and receiving guests in a limited capacity. This gave him a brief taste of a potential life to come, a life that he already knew well from his adolescent years at Dar al-Ihsan. Against the insistence of his family, he refused to don a turban and dress in traditional clothing in that period. This led his family to surmise that they may not have their way with the Mofti's middle son. And when the day came, and Molana Mahmoud, the second Mofti of Iranian Kurdistan and bearer of the burden of Sunni Islamic jurisprudence in Iran, passed away, Ahmad had made up his mind.

In internal discussions with his family members, Moftizadeh now articulated in no uncertain terms that he was too entrenched in his work in Tehran to abandon it, even if it was for what others believed was a compulsory duty. He was not yet 30 years old, so his becoming *mufti* in place of his uncle Khaled would be controversial. But more importantly, the institution of Mofti in Iran that he was born into was one that he did not wholeheartedly support, despite the good intentions and popularity of his father and grandfather. The *mufti*, he explained, was always meant to be chosen by the people, and the Shah's official decree of the Mofti authority was a tarnish on this tradition. To assume the role of the Mofti for him

would have been to go against his own conviction. If he was not going to be loyal to the institution, it made no sense for him to pretend. With the Kurdish struggle in his heart, and ongoing contact with the KDPI about an official role in the nationalist struggle of Kurdistan on his mind, he accepted against the wishes of many in his family and community that his uncle Khaled would be the heir to the Mofti leadership. He would serve as interim Mofti until this could be arranged.

Conclusion

We have conveyed the notion that Ahmad Moftizadeh was always a very opinionated person, as were his brothers and his father. One can surmise that this was a natural byproduct of being leaders in a place like twentieth-century Kurdistan, although they were not technically "Kurdish leaders."

The formal Kurdish political parties, usually banned, had a clearly Kurdish agenda. And even the *sheikhs*, as we discussed, had a political process to oversee in tribal Kurdistan. The Moftis however were at their core Sunni "theologians" in a country where Sunnis were a minority.[59] Their role had no intrinsic link to a "movement." On reflection, given the circumstances of Iranian Kurdistan, we can conclude that this did not inhibit the Mofti institution's gradual politicization. In fact, it may have precipitated it. Consider that the mere existence of a *mufti*, prior to the practice of official appointment of *muftis,* necessitated a consensus based decision whereby an individual was sought out for his knowledge on questions of Islam. That meant that a *mufti* had to maintain popularity based on his ideas and perceived wisdom.[60] Even an appointed *mufti,* like Abdullah Dishi and Molana Mahmoud, had to maintain this popularity and legitimacy for the institution to survive. But this was an interactive process; Dar al-Ihsan was a place where the Moftis constantly interacted with the problems and questions of the region's people.

Returning to our question and primary thesis about the role of Islamism in Kurdistan, it is not a surprise that even the institution of the Mofti in Kurdistan became more politicized on the lines of Kurdish nationalism over time. Kurdish nationalism had its major watershed moment in Iran at the time of the Mahabad Republic. No longer would a Kurd in Iran, regardless of his or her tribal loyalty or affiliation, fail to recognize that there was a national struggle dedicated to the Kurdish language, culture, and identity. Born in the throes of Kurdish nationalism's birth, Ahmad Moftizadeh never saw politics without the implicit understanding that

Kurdish rights had to be part of any political process he could be involved in. Despite a gradual evolution in his political and religious ideas, this was a notion that he never disavowed. One could go as far as to say that had there not been a sort of integration of nationalism into the Mofti leadership over time, the very authenticity of that leadership would be questionable.

By the 1960s, the Pahlavi regime's land reform policies and general undermining of Iran and Kurdistan's tribal fabric had taken its toll. By then, the nationalisms of the Persians and the Turks and the Arabs were in full swing, precipitating populist movements and even wars on notions of identity which did not exist a century prior. The Kurdish people, despite primary allegiances that may have still remained for some to their tribe or sufi order, now all knew themselves to be part of a community that stretched from Northwest Iran, through Iraq to Southeast Turkey, to Northeast Syria. From *rojhelat,* to *rojava*.[61] From eastern Kurdistan, to western Kurdistan. The politicized among them knew that they were in a zero-sum game that pitted their desire for cultural and linguistic liberty and autonomy against vast armies committed to the opposite result.

A boy who was bred on the principles of religious scholarship and tradition over a thousand years old, a credence which amounted to all he was ever taught, gravitated toward a nationalism that was not much older than he was. Instead of nationalists using the tool of religious symbolism as the *sheikhs* decades prior, now the Kurdish religious leaders were speaking the language of nationalism, not religion. History now clearly articulated to them that the "others" were the Arabs, Persians, and Turks. They all called themselves Muslim. And while the Kurds' usually unorthodox Islam-in-resistance still had its role in the personal lives of many, Kurdish nationalism was now default for the whole.

So perhaps it was inevitable that Ahmad Moftizadeh would eventually renounce the authority that brought his grandfather prominence. Perhaps it was inevitable that a formally recognized Sunni institution in Shia Iran had trouble finding longevity. Maybe it was par for the course that as tribal influence began to fade with history, and Kurdish nationalism strengthened in the shadow of the Mahabad Republic, the Mofti institution in Iran would wither. Whether it was the arc of history or not, Ahmad Moftizadeh vacated his seat in Sanandaj in the summer of 1961 to his uncle Khaled. While Mola Khaled was steadfast in his duties as Mofti, the institution of Mofti in Kurdistan would fail to survive another generation. Even during Mola Khaled's life and death in 1980, Ahmad Moftizadeh,

the nationalist who abandoned the leadership of Islam's largest sect in Iran for other ideas, remained the primary source of religious guidance for his followers. He had, in a sense, assumed the authentic role of a *mufti* as he saw it, now with no formal authority from the central government. He did not know it then, but in history's honest judgment, he would be known as the last *mufti* of Iranian Kurdistan.

Notes

1. The name for the Kurdish city of Senā in Persian is Sanandaj. The latter is used more often in English than its Kurdish counterpart, and is used in this book for that reason.
2. The *Kordestan* province is a misnomer of sorts; it only contains about one-third of Iran's Kurdish population, and also is home to significant non-Kurdish populations.
3. It is a well-respected idea that the onset of new forms of nationalism is often enabled by perceived uneven social and economic development in neglected communities. See, for example, Nairn, Tom. *The Break-up of Britain: Crisis and Neo-nationalism*. London: NLB, 1977.
4. Kamali, F. (2003). *The Political Development of the Kurds in Iran: Pastoral Nationalism* (p. 157, 171). New York: Palgrave Macmillan. The Azeri population in Iran is a natural population to compare to the Kurds, since like the Kurds, they are ethnically and linguistically distinct from the Persian majority.
5. This sentiment of neglect no doubt exists outside of Sanandaj and in the rest of Kurdistan, as well, and in analogous ways must have been a motivating factor for the rise of "local" leaders across all of Iran historically.
6. In this book, the institution of *mufti* in Islam is spelled with a "u," while the Mofti family of Sanandaj is capitalized and spelled with an "o," pursuant to the pronunciation and spelling of the word in Kurdish.
7. *Sheikh* is an Arabic word, adapted into Kurdish to mean something fundamentally different in many of its applications (as described in our previous chapter, and further in this chapter).
8. It is possible then that the title of *sheikh* was used by the Kurdish leaders we referenced to signify accessibility to the average citizen and as a term of endearment, more than as an indication of rank.
9. This was natural, as there were less *muftis* historically and more constraints on their time, as opposed to a *faqih* or *qadi*.
10. Vogel, Frank E. *Islamic Law and Legal System Studies of Saudi Arabia*. Leiden: Brill, 2000. 5.
11. Ibid.

12. Ibid at 8.
13. Mofti, Mohammad. Interview by Ezzatyar, Ali. Telephone, Washington, D.C./Iran, February 17, 2015.
14. See Vali, Abbas. *Kurds and the State in Iran, The Making of Kurdish Identity*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2011. 10, which confirms generally the nature of these events by noting the Qajar government's policy of playing local chiefs against one another to maintain their own power.
15. Mofti, Mohammad, Interview.
16. For a concise explanation of the relationship between local tribes and principalities, and the sovereign, see Vali, Abbas. *Kurds and the State in Iran, The Making of Kurdish Identity*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2011. 8.
17. Mahmoud Khaledi is referred to by many as Mola Mahmoud. While his male progeny established a tradition of religious scholarship befitting of the title Mola, Mahmoud Khaledi himself did not appear to undergo any form of religious scholarship at all. It may even be the case that the title of Mola has been attributed to him posthumously.
18. Mofti, Mohammad, Interview. The Horaman region has a mystical reputation to it in Iranian Kurdish culture. It is somewhat far removed even in Kurdistan, with a reputation of birthing warriors and spiritual leaders.
19. Ibid.
20. A member of the Mofti family narrates that he once stopped in Disha on a road trip through Horaman. He met a group of villagers near a fire and started a conversation with them, and eventually managed to tell them he was a member of the Mofti family. He said that the individuals immediately began to treat him with an awkward deference, and although none of them had ever met a Mofti, somehow had the impression that the Moftis were more a mythical existence than a real one. The remainder of this chapter, including footnote 34, provides more insight as to the roots of the Mofti family's stature in the Disha region to this day.
21. Abdullah was probably Mahmoud Khaledi's only son.
22. Mofti, Mohammad Interview.
23. "Dishi" seems to have been taken on as a name some years after the family's settlement in Disha. In Kurdish, *Disha'i* means "from Disha," and Dishi is shorthand for this meaning.
24. Moftizadeh, Ahmad. Letter from Evin Prison to followers. December 27, 1991 (Persian Language, Maktab Quran archives).
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid.
27. Mofti, Mohammad Interview.
28. Rohani, Majed Interviews by Ezzatyar, Ali. Telephone, Islamabad, Pakistan/Sanandaj. September 29-October 10, 2015.

29. Ibid.
30. Mofti, Mohammad Interview.
31. Al-Farabi, of course, is the renowned Islamic philosopher of the tenth century. While a comparison of Abdullah Dishi and Al-Farabi seems a bit far fetched, this title is attributed to the first Mofti of Kurdistan regularly in Sanandaj.
32. This book alternates between the titles Abdullah Dishi and Mola Abdullah Mofti. They both refer to the same person, the first *mufti* of Iranian Kurdistan.
33. Mofty, Soraya. Interview by Ezzatyar, Ali. Telephone, Islamabad, Pakistan/San Jose, California. July 30, 2015.
34. Mofti, Mohammad, Interview.
35. Mardokh-Rohani, Fuad. Interview by Ezzatyar, Ali. Telephone, Islamabad, Pakistan/Sanandaj, Iran. June 20-July 25, 2015.
36. Ibid.
37. During this period, the *mufti* would have been one of the city's most influential individuals, and its most influential civilian on matters of criminal punishment.
38. This tale, and others like it, colors Sanandaj's historic perception of Molana Mahmoud. This particular story also demonstrates Reza Khan's practical view on managing his far flung provinces.
39. Mofty, Ali. Interview by Ezzatyar, Ali. Telephone, Islamabad, Pakistan/Los Angeles, California. July 12, 2014.
40. Mofti, Parvin. Interview by Ezzatyar, Ali. In Person. California. April 29, 2015.
41. Some examples of the sufi rituals that the Mofti scholars rejected (as orthodox Sunnis) were the performance of magic and miracles. But what was most important to them was not these practices, but the fundamental institution of the sufi orders, or *tariqas*, which they saw as economic enterprises. The practice of accepting (and sometimes requiring) gifts and donations from followers is common for a sufi order. This became a criticism from Moftizadeh when he ramped up his activism in the 70s, as we will learn.
42. Moftizadeh, Ahmad. Letter from Evin Prison to followers. December 27, 1991 (Persian Language, Maktab Quran archives).
43. Mofti, Parvin Interview.
44. Ibid.
45. A similar sentiment on mythology was expressed by P.N. Haksar, reflecting on his family in: Haksar, Parmeshwar Narayan. *Premonitions.* Bombay: Interpress, 1979.
46. Mardokh-Rohani, Fuad Interview.

47. Molana Mahmoud's daughter was also trained in Islamic jurisprudence and was known to be a scholar in her own right. His half-brother, Khaled, was younger than him, but older than his children.
48. Mofti, Parvin Interview.
49. Mardokh-Rohani, Fuad Interview.
50. Ibid.
51. Ibid.
52. Moftizadeh, Ahmad. Letter from Evin Prison to followers. December 27, 1991 (Persian Language, Maktab Quran archives).
53. Bureaucracy is a useful reference here because many of Sanandaj's citizens are part of Iran's inflated bureaucracy, which is symptomatic of rentier states like Iran with no significant private sector. This means that their work lives, on the heels of their primary and secondary educations, take place in a language that is not native to them.
54. Mardokh-Rohani, Fuad Interview.
55. Ibid.
56. Ibid.
57. Ibid.
58. Ibid.
59. As we discussed in the first chapter, on the way to becoming a minority under the Safavid dynasty, Sunni Islam witnessed a high degree of repression. Forced conversion was commonplace, and certain remnants of this distaste for Sunni Islam remain in modern Iranian culture, despite the lack of actual knowledge about Sunni Islam by many Shias. This is not indifferent to prejudice against Shia minorities that exist where Sunni Islam is in the majority.
60. We keep drawing distinctions between the *mufti* and the *sheikh*. Here, we see a real-life example of how the *mufti's* popularity had to be driven by the content of his dictates and his ideas. The *sheikh* had a real geopolitical power that the *mufti* did not have. While the *sheikh* was necessarily a *political* being at his core, the *mufti*, in the Iranian context, was perhaps necessarily a *politicized* being.
61. These are the Kurdish words used to denote the concepts of "Iranian Kurdistan," and "Syrian Kurdistan," respectively.

CHAPTER 4

Prison Under the Pahlavi Regime, and the Lead Up to 1979

By the time Moftizadeh left Sanandaj again for Tehran in 1961, he was a household name in his hometown, but a relative unknown in Kurdistan and the rest of Iran. As the youngest de facto Mofti in the family's history, he was also the first in the Mofti line to abdicate his role while still alive. And that year, 1340 on the Iranian calendar (1961), he returned to Tehran with the intent of advancing the cause of Kurdish nationalism.[1]

Moftizadeh Returns to Tehran with the KDPI

Ahmad Moftizadeh did not waste time getting to work while back in the capital, entering a world of activism that was as new to him as it was appealing. He moved into a duplex in central Tehran alongside a Mofti family uncle (through a second marriage of Abdullah Dishi) and his family. By all accounts, Ahmad was in his ambitious prime during those years. His cousin Soraya remembers him waking up in the early morning to exercise before going off into town, his broad shoulders and horn-rimmed glasses always matched with a clean shave and a smart suit. She recalls the girls who lived next door being smitten by the young Ahmad, who developed a reputation as a heartthrob in and around the neighborhood and at the university.

The late 1950s and early 1960s were a time when the Pahlavi government began experimenting with a carrot-and-stick approach vis-à-vis Iran's political dissidents, in the hopes of releasing some of the mounting

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tension from the wide array of activists that opposed the regime.[2] During this period, some censored radio broadcasts in Kurdish were permitted, produced from Tehran. One of Moftizadeh's three official activities during this period was volunteering his time to the Kurdish radio project. As an expert on religion and a literature enthusiast, Moftizadeh thought he could best contribute to the project in these relatively non-controversial areas. He produced and delivered programs on religious questions of the day that were mostly non-political. Between the time that he was a young scholar of religion in Iraqi Kurdistan and the year 1960, he had also taught himself to read and write in the Kurdish language. This allowed him to present on Kurdish literature and poetry on his radio programs as well. In a similar vein, he was also one of the primary contributors to the only Kurdish newspaper in Iran at the time, which was aptly called *Kurdistan*.[3] He would write and edit articles for the paper, and it ultimately became respected in the Kurdish community as a well-prepared, high-grade publication. Finally, and perhaps most importantly among his official activities, he resumed work at the University of Tehran in his father's stead. There is no indication that his lectures, while as passionate and insightful as ever, were particularly controversial, and this was for good reason. All of these activities provided a sort of cover for Moftizadeh's clandestine activity, as the leader of the KDPI's Tehran branch.

When dozens of members of the KDPI's leadership were executed at the time of the Mahabad Republic's downfall almost 20 years earlier, the party was officially banned. Some of the founders of the Mahabad Republic, however, particularly those who were both from influential tribes and not part of Qazi Muhammad's closest group of confidants, were pardoned.[4] Partly as a result of this, the KDPI practically never stopped operating as a brand of sorts through the 1940s and early 1950s, with individuals identifying as party members even though there were no party meetings or "congresses." In the mid-1950s, the organization began to resemble a formal underground movement again, with secret meetings and activities in many cities of Kurdistan. The KDPI even led a small revolt in the Kurdish city of Bokan in 1952, but it was quickly put down by the Iranian army.[5]

There is some discrepancy, depending on the source, regarding precisely what role Moftizadeh played in the KDPI during this period of the early 1960s. What is agreed is that he became an active member of a group in 1959.[6] According to a Maktab Quran spokesperson, he was a de facto leader of the party, considered its chief representative in Tehran.

According to a then and current member of the KDPI, however, he was merely an active member in the group.[7] The KDPI, when asked to provide the name of its leader or president in Tehran during this period of underground activity, cannot place another individual.[8]

While it is natural to imagine that Moftizadeh's followers may attribute a loftier title to him than what may have been the case, it also does not comport with Maktab Quran's value system to insist that Moftizadeh was ever the leader of a secular-nationalist organization if it were not at least believed to be true. Further, given the extent to which Moftizadeh is a polarizing figure for many secular Kurdish activists who participated in the revolution, including the current KDPI leadership, there could likewise be a tendency to play down his role in the organization in hindsight. Whatever Moftizadeh's official capacity was in this banned group, suffice it to say that the events of the next few pages suggest it was not a minor one.

During this same period, the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iraq led by Mustafa Barzani was also active across the border in Iraqi Kurdistan. Formerly an essential element to the Mahabad Republic's pan-Kurdish enterprise, as well as its most important unified fighting force, this contingency from the Barzani clan was now beginning to receive material support from the Shah of Iran in its struggle against the Iraqi central government.[9] This meant keeping a measure of distance from its Iranian counterpart, the KDPI.[10] From this position of relative weakness, the KDPI prioritized a bottom-up approach to increase its ideological base of support during this period of the early 1960s.[11] The party's leadership agreed that engaging in a limited armed struggle would continue to bear limited success, and to the disappointment of some of its members, discouraged guerilla-type pitched battles in Kurdistan. As part of this novel approach, Moftizadeh was charged with organizing the Kurdish intelligentsia in the capital and propagating the KDPI's platform. His main task at the time was to be the eyes and ears of the group in Tehran while seeking to bring prominent and successful Kurds into the group's fold. In early 1960s Tehran, participating in the sort of out in the open activities that Moftizadeh was partaking in (such as his media work and teaching engagements) was a double-edged sword of sorts. It exposed him as a sympathizer to ideas of Kurdish cultural independence, with the implicit understanding that this meant he also harbored an affinity for greater political rights for the Kurds. At the same time, these were the type of activities that would allow him to argue in good faith that his organizational activities with other Kurds

were professionally motivated in furtherance of work that the Shah's government had approved. This process meant keeping as low a profile as possible in his public persona and in the opinions he outwardly expressed, which was not Moftizadeh's strong suit.

As a young man with growing popularity in his activist circle in Tehran, Moftizadeh is remembered by those who knew him personally for his humor, but also his uncompromising, sometimes stubborn sense of ethics and principle. One of his extended family members remembers him as a simple man with lofty ideals. "Ahmad would engage the neighborhood children for hours. He made them feel like grown-ups," one person said, and is remembered for his patience with the young and the elderly. If one story is any indication, Moftizadeh was less patient with those who he saw as harming the weak or young. One of the then children who lived near Moftizadeh in Tehran, who prefers not to be named, remembers first hand an instance of when Ahmad happened to visit her family's home in the area. Before that day, the family's children who Ahmad would talk to in the courtyard would often complain about cruel treatment from a stepparent who had recently married into the family. It just so happened that Moftizadeh arrived at the home of that family just after one of the young boys who lived there appeared to have been disciplined. Upon entering the home and making pleasantries with the family, he noticed that the boy was crying. Within a few moments, through visual signaling by one of the older siblings of the boy (the narrator of the story), Moftizadeh realized that the fresh bruise on the boy's arm was inflicted by this stepparent. Upon seeing this, "He seemed to lose any notion of control," this person narrates. "All I remember was commotion." Without saying as much, it was made clear that Ahmad did not communicate his displeasure verbally, preferring perhaps to inflict his own set of bruises on this stepparent.

While resuming his instruction at the university, Moftizadeh came to know another well-respected teacher from the Kurdish region that was 30 years his senior, Hajj Abdul Rahman Mohtadi. Hajj Mohtadi also taught Islamic jurisprudence at the University of Tehran's theology department. Despite his official post, he had impressive Kurdish nationalist credentials that few in Iran at the time could boast of. He was one of the original members of Komalai Jianawai Kurdistan, the party that gave birth to the KDPI and the Mahabad Republic. When the republic was founded, he served as its Minister of Foreign Affairs.[12] Mohtadi was one of those mentioned prior who, due to his tribal-turned aristocratic influence,

reputation, and wealth, was spared by the Shah for the practical reason of not alienating a larger segment of the Kurdish population.[13] The Mohtadi family was a very well-known one from Bokan, a city that sat Northwest of Sanandaj and technically in Iran's West Azerbaijan province (although part of Kurdistan). In speaking to individuals in Sanandaj now, it is said that even during this period of little interconnectedness between cities of Kurdistan, the wealth and power of the Mohtadi family was known to all of Kurdistan's major families. In addition to the Mohtadis being endowed with a fortune, the family was naturally reputed to be particularly sympathetic to the Kurdish cause.

Hajj Mohtadi had left Kurdistan for Tehran primarily in order to relieve the pressure on his family from the Shah's government.[14] Despite surveillance on him by the Shah's intelligence apparatus, Hajj Mohtadi was said to have an open-door policy at his grand home in Tehran for any young Kurd who was new to town; it served as a base of sorts for the Kurdish intelligentsia that was plying its trade in the nation's capital.[15] Discussions on Kurdish literature, poetry contests, and religious debate would take place in the home. On Fridays, there were often dozens of people mingling over a meal delivered by cooks at the professor's house. People would meet other likeminded activists from their home cities whom they never knew existed.[16] This provided the ideal venue for Moftizadeh to meet and expose himself to the concerns of his target group. One man who also frequented those gatherings at Hajj Mohtadi's home remembers Moftizadeh as a man who would command attention, controlling the room when he spoke. "He was one of the most respected men who would be at those meetings; he had an unmistakable charisma about him." Many an alliance was made over a conversation at Hajj Mohtadi's home, and given his prominence across Kurdistan, Mohtadi's home was thought to be a safe venue to congregate in.

Hajj Mohtadi was not known to champion a particular Kurdish party or movement, but rather Kurdish unity and progress. He was reputed to say that he was Kurdish first, and Muslim second, because the former was not a choice.[17] Hajj Mohtadi saw the nationalist struggle and his religious studies and teachings to be two separate issues that were not to be mixed.[18] His sons Salahuddin (Salah) and Abdullah Mohtadi, however, who lived with him in Tehran, were known to be increasingly left-leaning in their views. Not unlike some of the Mofti sons, they took less of an interest in the Islamic teaching and traditions of their father. Abdullah in particular was a fair bit younger than Ahmad, still a young man when his

father and the other Kurdish nationalists would discuss culture and history over tea or while sitting on the ground at a *sofra* enjoying a meal. Like many of Kurdistan's "elite," though, the Mohtadi sons too were stirred at an early age by ideas of the Kurdish struggle and the nationalist project, and focused their thoughts and activities in this area.[19] Salah and Abdullah Mohtadi will resurface later in this chapter.

With Ahmad Moftizadeh and Hajj Mohtadi both being Kurds and Sunnis, they were a minority in the University of Tehran faculty, and quickly took a liking to one another.[20] They shared a mutual respect of each other's intellect, and were comforted by the intangible quality of their respective family reputations. They would spend hours debating theology at the Mohtadi household and questions of the day.[21] Their lives and families would ultimately be intertwined in ways they never imagined, both good and bad.

There is no doubt that for the young Ahmad Moftizadeh, who frequented the Mohtadi household often, it was a fortuitous relationship in one especially important way. Hajj Mohtadi had a daughter who was about the same age as Moftizadeh. They were introduced by Hajj Mohtadi at Mohtadi's home during one of Ahmad's visits, and it was the Mofti equivalent of love at first site for Moftizadeh. Khadijah Mohtadi was an elegant woman whose demeanor and presence reflected an upbringing without financial complications. Quite the opposite, she was known to have a collection of jewels so stunning that every woman who came across her was left marveling.[22] Mohtadi took care of his daughter; she often traveled with servants and by private car. But Moftizadeh, who had renounced the power and prestige connected to being the Mofti, was not likely motivated much by these factors. Khadijah, who had not undergone the rigors of study familiar to the Mofti family, was also said to have a very simple and religiously devout way about her. By all accounts, she was an extremely pleasant and charming person to be around. Perhaps Ahmad saw providence in the similarities of Khadijah and the prophet Muhammad's wife of the same name, a self-made woman known for her patience and temperament. Within a few months of their meeting, in 1961, Ahmad and Khadijah were engaged. It became the marriage of two powerful families as much as the marriage of two prominent individuals. Ahmad continued to work in Tehran, busily dedicating his time to his activities at the university and with the KDPI. Soon, Khadijah and Ahmad would have a son, whom they named Jiyan (life, in Kurdish). The family continued to live happily in their Tehran duplex.

Moftizadeh and the other members of the KDPI assumed that their activities were being monitored. They took the basic precautions that were standard in authoritarian Iran so as to not put oneself in the crosshairs of the SAVAK.[23] They did not hold public meetings and did not associate with guerilla units "in the mountains," focusing instead on urban activism.[24] But they did not know that the Shah's secret police was preparing for a crackdown against Kurdish nationalist figures in large Iranian cities, purposefully collecting intelligence and gathering information methodically in the early 1960s. It is now also believed that the Kurdish Democratic Party of Iraq may have been providing information to the Shah's government in order to continue to receive its support, to the detriment of the KDPI. With a particular emphasis on connections to KDPI leadership, the survivors among the short-lived Mahabad Republic's patrons became the first line of investigation. Their whereabouts, activities, and acquaintances were duly investigated, and lists were made. Their underground leaders were eventually snuffed out, and one by one, they became targets.[25]

When Ahmad's cousin Soraya came home from school one day in February 1964, her neighbors ran up to her in a frenzied state. "'What happened?!' they asked me. They looked worried and a bit nervous," Soraya recalls. She was confused by the question, responding wryly to her neighbors that she had no idea what they were referring to. The girls then proceeded to tell her that they had noticed two men in suits pacing in front of the Mofti residence earlier in the afternoon, one of them holding a package in his hands. The girls assumed these men were there to deliver something to the Moftis. "Then the good looking man came," they said. The two men in suits called out to Ahmad, approaching him as they spoke. Within moments, the girls next door recounted seeing each of the men suddenly grabbing hold of either side of Ahmad by the underarm, and quickly walking him away.

Soraya rushed into the house. She asked her father if she knew where Ahmad was. He responded unassumingly that Ahmad was not home yet. When she repeated the story she had heard from the neighbors, her father was puzzled. The next 12 hours were full of confusion, with the family placing phone calls to other family and friends. Nobody knew Ahmad's whereabouts until later the next day, when a phone call was received at the duplex. An unidentified man informed the family that Moftizadeh was being held "officially" at an undisclosed location, without providing more information. The implication was clear to anyone who had a fraction of experience with the Iranian system: Moftizadeh had been apprehended by the SAVAK.[26]

Imprisonment for Separatist Activities, and Ideological Transformation

It was likely that the SAVAK, one of the world's most competent secret police forces, took note of the young Mofti's political predispositions well before the year 1964. Had anyone bothered speaking to Ahmad about the issues that interested him for more than a few minutes, they would have heard his controversial opinions on the Shah, on Kurdistan, and a number of other sentiments that were unacceptable in Pahlavi Iran. But the intelligence service's ears must have perked up when they heard of the death of Molana Mahmoud and his planned replacement by the Mofti's middle son Ahmad. A known sympathizer with the Kurdish cause, when he relinquished his duties to return to Tehran, they must have been keeping an especially close eye on him. A few days after his arrest, his family returned home to a ransacked apartment. As was typical for families of political prisoners, they suspected that the home was turned upside down by agents of the SAVAK who were searching for still more information on the activities of the man they held. Throughout his confinement that we will explore in this subchapter, however, he was never formally charged with a crime.

When his cousin Soraya was a child growing up around the older Ahmad, they would often chat at length on Kurdish cultural and political issues. In the middle of one discussion, she recalls him taking hold of her hand, and then squeezing it firmly while observing her. She did not register a complaint, returning his gaze resolutely. "Good," he said "you have it in you to go to prison." As a member of the KDPI with a history like his, being a political prisoner was something he always said he was ready for.[27] However much someone prepares mentally for the experience of an Iranian jail, though, his or her preparation will always be inadequate. Ahmad spent the next year of his life in confinement at Qezelqaleh prison, enduring torture and separation from much of what he knew.[28,29] His arrest, like those of many of his contemporaries who were rounded up that year, was without any semblance of due process. He had only been married a few years and now had a one-year-old son. Despite the improbable life he had lived for a boy from eastern Kurdistan, his time in the Shah's prisons became the most transformative chapter in his 30 years thus far.

Ahmad Moftizadeh was always a devoutly religious man, but he was not an Islamist per se when he went to prison in 1964. As we have learned, he dedicated his mind to the Kurdish nationalist cause in the first part of his adult life. If he had certain notions about what role religion should

play in politics or ideas about Islamic government, he did not articulate them as of yet. Despite this, he naturally relied heavily on his spirituality to cope with his new state of confinement. He also had ample opportunity to reflect on his life and his future. He reflects on this in his writings.

> "…[When I was in prison], I felt that I was suffering from a terrible sickness. I realized I was heading down the wrong path in life. I had a double personality of sorts. I knew how I wanted to be, but had trouble aligning my actions to my desired behavior."[30]

> "There are three conditions you may fall into as far as your spirituality is concerned. One state of being is acting as you feel without regard to God's will. Still another group acts as they wish, but creatively interpret their behavior to try to make it work with God's will … I was in this group [when I went to prison]. When I was incarcerated, I realized this … The third does not do anything without considering God's potential opinion on the matter.[31]

Qezelqaleh prison was built during the Qajar era in a communal style. After some time in solitary confinement, Moftizadeh was housed in an area of the prison that would allow for some interaction with other prisoners, most of them political.[32] All of these individuals were under the intense stress and pressure of their unfortunate predicaments. It is said that Moftizadeh's observation of the demeanor and evolving personalities of the various characters he frequented began to color his perception of the assorted values they championed.

1960s Iran was a busy venue for countless underground political opposition movements to the Shah's regime. Along with Moftizadeh, there were a number of other Kurdish nationalists of various political persuasions who were confined with him in Qezelqaleh. In many ways, this was Moftizadeh's first exposure to certain dimensions of the activist condition, both Kurdish and otherwise. There was an understandable lack of interconnectedness between these activists in the outside world that resulted from both the communication barriers of that era and the efforts of the central government to suppress what they saw as separatist or opposition movements. When many of the country's most engaged opposition members were incarcerated in the same place, with luck and good behavior, prison became an unlikely networking opportunity for them. Communists, Marxists, ethnic minorities, and Islamists all counted among Iran's political prisoners that Moftizadeh would have come across.

Moftizadeh read the Quran and any other books he could get his hands on, and conversed for hours with other activists who were with him in confinement. In this place, where Ahmad began to rely more and more on the spiritual underpinnings of his identity, he surveilled his fellow activists.

Soon after he arrived in prison, Ahmad had a recurring dream that perplexed him. In the dream, he was a child who interacted with the person of the Prophet Muhammad. He wondered why he was always a child in these dreams; he interpreted this as his subconscious belief that he lacked the purity necessary to meet and interact with the Prophet as an adult. In some of these dreams, he was sitting with his head on the figure's shoulder, reading the Quran. He would read for the Prophet, and the Prophet would listen. In these dreams, the Prophet would ask him what certain analogies and stories from the holy book actually meant. Ahmad the child would respond to the Prophet. When he awoke from these dreams, Ahmad would find that he had ascertained certain ideas that he had not yet perceived while he was conscious. He was moved by these dreams, not knowing entirely what to make of them.

Shortly after one of these recurring dreams in prison, he was interrogated by a Colonel in the Shah's army. Unlike some of his interrogations, he was not being especially poorly treated during this interview. In the middle of this question and answer session, the Colonel calmly uttered an offensive slur about the Prophet in apparent disregard to Moftizadeh's sensibilities as a religious man. In a blind fury, Moftizadeh rose from his seat and slapped the Colonel so hard that he fell to the ground in shock. Ahmad later recalled to his friends humorously that in hindsight, he is still in disbelief that the Colonel simply left the room, and did not subject him to the worst torture of his time in prison, or even kill him. His reliance on religion continually grew stronger, and he used this example to demonstrate the sensitivity that he had come to attain in prison to the core of his religious ideals.[33] A cousin of Ahmad recounts hearing someone ask him some years later how he knows so much when nobody ever sees him with a book. He responded half-jokingly, "I read books in my dreams."[34]

Moftizadeh was said to have been positively struck by the resilience of other religiously-minded prisoners, who were often jailed due to their membership in Islamist-leaning political groups. When compared to those who had landed in captivity for other reasons, he found them to be honest, steadfast, and unwilling to abandon their ideals. He also found that some of the others who had been placed in prison for political reasons

were shaky, desperate, and more willing to abandon their ideals under torture and pressure. But this sort of anecdotal referencing seemed inadequate to explain an ideological transformation, so when discussing these assertions with some of Moftizadeh's confidants, the questions necessarily arose: What about the countless Mandelas of human history, and of the world today? What about the strength of other non-religious leaders who found the type of strength they needed to persevere in the mere idea of the condition of their people, or other secular ideals? How about the examples that abound close to home, like Leyla Zana, the progressive Kurdish activist who was jailed for speaking the Kurdish language in the Turkish parliament? She was imprisoned for longer than Moftizadeh was, but emerged as steadfast as she was when she went into captivity. The response was that Moftizadeh's intention was not to belittle the other prisoners. There were indeed exceptions to the rule, and many of his fellow prisoners of non-religious backgrounds were also of the utmost quality of character. But for him, the stars seemed to be aligning for a sort of recalibration of his morals.

While in prison, Moftizadeh befriended a number of individuals who would play active roles in the revolution 15 years later, and they became some of his closest friends there. One of these individuals was Mohammad Beheshti, also known as Ayatollah Beheshti. Beheshti was an Islamic scholar and jurist who had studied in the seminaries of Qom and at the University of Tehran. He, unlike Moftizadeh, was a pan-Islamist at this early juncture, and would eventually join Ayatollah Khomeini in Najaf, on the road to becoming one of the Islamic Republic's early leaders. No doubt, Beheshti would have spoken Moftizadeh's language of sorts, able to contextualize his political aspirations with Islamic reasoning, as Moftizadeh would eventually do. Moftizadeh and Beheshti remained acquainted until the latter's assassination in 1981, in what came to be known as the "7th of Tir" terrorist attack which killed a number of Iranian revolutionaries.

Another one of the jailed Islamists that Moftizadeh got to know was a fellow Tehran faculty member, Mohammad-Javad Bahonar. Like Beheshti, Bahonar was a devoted religious ideologue when he arrived in prison, toward the end of Moftizadeh's time there. He would remain in prison for 11 years, and after being released and successfully taking part in the revolution, he would also be assassinated in the year 1981, in a separate attack. The notorious *Mujahedin-e-Khalq*, or "People's Mujahedin," was responsible for both deaths.

Moftizadeh had fundamental problems with some of the jurisprudential arguments that these Islamists prisoners would make. He had an entirely different construct of religious thinking than some of his Shia friends in prison. He also had little in common with them culturally, as a boy from Kurdistan. But he found that he could relate to a certain sense of loyalty and dependability in them.

One thing that is certain is that the Islamists who he met in prison, although he was not one yet himself, were more similar to him in their thinking than the Communists, for example, or even the other ethnic minorities. In fact, Moftizadeh could be described as a rather unlikely Kurdish nationalist, given his scholarly religious background. It is easy to imagine that even a month in captivity is perhaps all the time in the world when your only real companions are your own reflection. And as Moftizadeh's tenure in confinement grew longer, for whatever reason, he began to see spirituality as the core of a complex value system that he wished to lead the rest of his life by.

As the year 1964 rolled on and his release from prison approached, Moftizadeh's ideology was still evolving. But one of the fundamental realizations he had which would become central to that ideology is perhaps best described as follows[35]: If there was an enemy to man, it was not an outside being, such as a central government that sought to oppress non-compliant individuals. This, for the government and its implementers as well, was but an extension of the ignorance and condition of man himself. All conflict among men was ultimately a conflict within the men who lead conflict. The enemy of man was inside of him. Prison had taught him that life was too fleeting, and as a religious man, he believed, too important a time to be spent struggling with outside elements in a vain attempt to better the human condition. Man had to concentrate on his own soul to achieve salvation in life.[36] For him, the only path to bettering and purifying one's own heart was through a spiritual connection and betterment. To him, there was only one God to seek out with this spirituality, and every person had their own path of seeking this God. But engaging in that process, seeking that betterment, was necessary. This meant that religion had to inform all aspects of behavior, including participation in the nationalist struggle that he had worked so hard for if it were to be successful. His unique interpretation of religion, and in turn, Islam, would ultimately inform the non-violent ideology that would come to partially define his role in the Iranian revolution, as well as his legacy.

Moftizadeh's Release and Return to Sanandaj

As the end of year 1964 approached, Ahmad Moftizadeh was released from prison and was reunited with his family in Tehran. He never revealed a great deal about his treatment in prison, rarely recounting the details of his confinement, and never publicly. But some of the results of that treatment were manifest. One of his family members recalls being surprised at the condition of his skin when he was released, which had seem to take on a grayish color. Doctors told him that it was the result of him not seeing sunlight for months at a time.[37] He also developed chronic pain that would bother him for years, likely as a result of physical abuse.

In the official position of the KDPI, Ahmad Moftizadeh never played an active role in the group's activities again after leaving prison.[38] Much to the contrary, in the years following his release and leading up the revolution, the KDPI's view is that his activism actually undermined the group and the Kurdish cause. In Maktab Quran's view on the other hand, the two groups maintained an amicable relationship, and Moftizadeh was never formally against any of the KDPI's activities. We will revisit these competing narratives in our next chapter. As for the KDPI's activities after the crackdown of 1964, it was driven further underground. Most of its leaders sought to reconstitute an existence in Iraqi Kurdistan, which had itself become increasingly hostile to Iranian Kurdish movements due to new cooperation with the Shah's regime by the Barzanis and the Iraqi KDP.[39]

Moftizadeh was no longer able to teach or participate in any activities that were even remotely political in Tehran without great risk to himself and his family. With some help from the Mohtadi family, Ahmad opened up a small grocery store not far from the family home in Tehran in the months following his release. Through this new enterprise, his goal was to separate his life from political activism both practically and symbolically. Even after the harrowing experience of jail time, one of Moftizadeh's cousins recalls him a lighthearted shopkeeper that was as fond of practical jokes as ever. "He wasn't the typical religious man, rigid or anything. He could send you across town chasing a red herring for a laugh." Another family member who was in his late teens when Moftizadeh was released from jail has similar memories. "I remember dousing him with a bucket of water one time when he was praying, to get him back for some joke he had played on me. Boy if he caught you after you played a joke on him, he would make you pay. But he was always laughing, so we kept at it."[40]

With time, it became evident that entrepreneurship did not suit someone with the type of charitable acumen that Moftizadeh had. "If anyone came in the store with clothes that made them look a bit poor, or who could not afford much more than the basics, Ahmad would not let them pay for anything. He would also quietly put stuff in their bags, so that they wouldn't be embarrassed."[41] Moftizadeh even created a makeshift shelter in the attic of the grocery store. He would offer temporary lodging for the most needy of the people he would meet while working. This became a strain on his ability to tend properly to the grocery store. Not surprisingly, business never took hold, and the enterprise folded in less than a year. "You're not fit for politics *(siasat)*, or business *(tejarat)*," Moftizadeh's uncle reportedly told him in what amounts to more poetic prose in Kurdish than in English. Ahmad responded that he preferred a simpler life anyway, and was thinking about returning to Sanandaj.[42]

The rumor circulating in the Kurdish community in Tehran and in Sanandaj was that Moftizadeh was given an ultimatum by the Shah's regime while in prison. The Mofti's son who was supposed to take on the mantle of his father could return to Dar al-Ihsan and assume his official duties. The Shah would graciously provide him with a home, means of transportation, and a monthly income for his service. All they would ask in return was for him to avoid any activism or political activities, and submit to the Shah's authority. According to the rumor, despite Moftizadeh's own change of heart with respect to his activism, he rejected this offer multiple times while behind bars.[43] The authorities were not likely impressed by his standard of ethics.

And so not long after his release from prison, Moftizadeh packed his bags for a return to Kurdistan. In leaving Tehran, he left a city where so many important events of his life had transpired in the last five years. There he had his introduction to the country's, and one of the Middle East's, most cosmopolitan cities. In Tehran, he found himself quickly a respected member of a group of activists and teachers that were advocating for change in Pahlavi Iran, and it was there that he also met his beloved wife. In the capital, he also met and intimately got to know the still unfamiliar characters that would ultimately play crucial roles in the plot of a great revolution. Finally, against the tide of these events, he was met with the consequences of his activism, confined to Iran's notorious prisons for his "separatist activities." He had changed, but he had not yet found himself. "[Upon returning to Sanandaj], I was well known. Unfortunately, I was not yet mature despite being well known … I considered going away

to try to find myself. I realized that up until that point I liked to hear myself talk. But despite what other people might have been thinking, I never was sure I had the legitimacy to be saying those things."[44]

Prison was informative for Moftizadeh in many ways, and one of the lessons it taught, he would later write, was in demonstrating who his real companions were. The SAVAK continued to monitor much of his life when he left prison and returned to Sanandaj, sometimes very openly. He would receive visits from the Shah's agents, as would those whom he came in contact with. Naturally, these were not very pleasant visits; this contributed to his loneliness, as friends and acquaintances in Sanandaj learned that it was not a good idea to visit Ahmad Moftizadeh. Perhaps due to the novelty factor of a rebel Mofti far away, many of his most loyal followers when he was released from jail were not from Sanandaj, but from neighboring cities in Kurdistan. At this juncture, in 1965, Moftizadeh was a rather isolated man.[45] But to paint the picture of a depleted figure, despite the seclusion and soul-searching that came with post-prison life, is probably inaccurate. The solitude seemed to suit him in some ways. He would later write to his followers about being alone and being able to reflect that "… maybe you think it's bad for you, for me not to be around, but know that it's great for me."[46] His new ideological foundation was forming. For work, he gave limited private religious lessons, often at his home in order to avoid crowds and unwanted attention.

One person who did not abandon him was his wife Khadijah. She moved to Sanandaj to live with Moftizadeh and their young boy Jiyan. Her servants from Bokan would shuffle back and forth to Sanandaj tending to her increasingly unembellished life. She became very easy going with them not being around, and eventually, she sent them back to Bokan for good. She stopped wearing the jewels that she was known for, as she appreciated that they did not quite match the life she was living. It is said that she eventually donated most or all of them away, sold some of them to try to keep the grocery store in Tehran afloat, and later, sold what remained for basic living expenses.[47] Even Moftizadeh's mother was reputed to have asked Khadijah at one point, "you are like the daughter of a king. Are you happy living this way?" She was loyal to Ahmad, responding that she trusted his judgment and was happy with the way things were.[48] With Moftizadeh not bringing in an actual salary, and with one of his philosophies being that one should not accept objects from others unless truly in need, he lived an extremely modest life in Sanandaj as the 1960s rolled on.[49] "One time I was in his home and someone complimented a small rug Moftizadeh

had," an acquaintance remembers. "He forced the guy to take it [and sell it to use the money]. He was [poor, but] always giving things away."[50]

In this period of simplicity, after a couple of years of close supervision, the SAVAK slowly began to reduce its surveillance and dominion on Moftizadeh's life. The secret police had a number of other serious concerns across Iran that were making more noise than the current Mofti's nephew, and Moftizadeh had essentially steered clear of any sort of nationalist (or to the SAVAK, separatist) activities for a number of years. Still further, in his religious teachings, Moftizadeh was advocating for the avoidance of politics and concentration on self-betterment that became the hallmark of his teachings:

> Think about when you see a child come into the earth. The baby is crying and afraid. Her parents meanwhile, and everyone around her is laughing, ecstatic. When you die, and everyone is crying and mourning you, that's when you should be laughing! Your goal in life should be that when you are in the dirt, all alone—that's when you should be happy. Not now. Only at that time have you reached your very best, and achieved your goals. You should work on building mercy in your heart now, because if you don't have it, God forbid getting a bit of power [on this earth], you won't care about anyone... You'll be picking fights with your best friends.[51]

As Moftizadeh was able to balance the ever-present nuisance of the Shah's secret police and his activities more effectively, he began to take on more students. There was significantly more demand than supply, and it is said that the enthusiasm and interest shown during his classes more resembled attendance at a speech than a lecture. Despite Moftizadeh's surveillance (and the hands-off reputation that went along with it), his reputation for religious scholarship was not affected; he was still known as the foremost Islamic scholar in the region. In addition to that, now, for those brave enough to disregard the risk of seeing him, he also had the airy credential of jail time. This only contributed to the esteem that people held for him, and his stature was reinforced as result. Individuals began to travel from all over Kurdistan to meet and learn from Moftizadeh. He later narrated that he began to get so much attention as a teacher "that I would pray for arrogance to be removed from my heart" before every gathering. He would often end his courses early, when he felt the rush of popularity coming over him.[52] Clearly, Moftizadeh was saying one thing about his own perceived role, but with his activist history, where did he

actually stand at this juncture? Can we accept that he had no intention to lead a political movement again?

His intentions at this juncture are impossible to gauge irrefutably, and may have even been muddy for Moftizadeh himself. Ironically, though, while Moftizadeh was now formally disavowing any desire to be involved in a movement, he amassed more of an audience than he ever had as a leader in Kurdish nationalist struggle or the KDPI. There are a number of factors that contributed to this, and we mentioned the obvious ones such as scholarly reputation and "resistance" credentials won through prison and rumors of incorruptibility. But one hidden reason might be similar to the reason why the Kurdish *sheikhs* made such powerful leaders years prior. Sheikh Said was a nationalist that used religious symbolism to try and forge a critical mass. Moftizadeh may have actually been incorrectly perceived to be doing the same by the greater population, despite his stated or actual intentions. In now preaching the scripture that he was known for and bred to preach (instead of Kurdish nationalism), he unwittingly became the focal point of his own unique critical mass and a different type of resistance when compared to the others available in the activist "market" of sorts. Not many people actually heard him speak at this time, as he kept his audience small. But he was still perceived as a nationalist and he was a prominent member of the city. While his base was technically smaller than that of the KDPI, it was focused and committed.

The KDPI, for its part, continued its ebb and flow of armed resistance against the Iranian government. In 1967, a power struggle within the group led to the emergence of an invigorated, left-leaning leadership. The newly constituted KDPI was resentful of the Iraqi KDP's relationship with the Shah's government; this led to many of its members again moving across the border into the mountains of Iranian Kurdistan. Under this new leadership, the KDPI again advocated for armed revolt in Iranian Kurdistan.[53] Sure enough, that same year, in some of the very cities where Moftizadeh was giving courses, battles erupted between the KDPI and the Iranian army. In his lectures now, as news came of battles with the central government that were turning bloodier by the month, Moftizadeh began to preach something that was alien to the dialog of Kurdish and Iranian political thought: the notion of non-violence. Many young Kurds who were politicized and left unemployed by a severely neglected Iranian Kurdish economy saw a tour in the *peshmerga* as a right of passage into an

elite Kurdish fraternity. But Moftizadeh, against this tide of patriotic zeal, emphatically discouraged them from going to the front line.[54]

The improbability of this discouragement was high in the politically charged environment that was Kurdistan at the time. Fighting the Iranian government in guerilla-type battles, sometimes as a part-time or "weekend warrior," was common during this period and popular among all segments of Kurdish society. This stemmed from one of the strongest traditions that exists in Kurdish history—a warrior legacy believed by Kurds to be thousands of years old. Kurdish mythology places Kurds in a constant battle with outside forces for autonomy and independence. In the AD era, Kurds note proudly that during the time of the Crusades, their people graciously lent their assistance to the defending Muslim armies. Led by Salahedin al-Ayubi, himself a Kurd, they were the elite of the Muslim forces fighting for Jerusalem, often among the only warriors who had the privilege of riding on horseback due to their skill in battle.[55] Were it not for the Kurds, they will preach, Jerusalem would not have been liberated. The injustice done by the colonial powers and the neighboring Muslims to the Kurds in leaving them without a homeland feeds into the modern narrative, which culminated in the development of a ragtag army to defend the fragile Mahabad Republic. This army, made up of Kurds from all over Kurdistan, with the notable non-Iranian contingent being the Barzani participants from Northern Iraq, was constituted to defend the homeland of *all* Kurds in Mahabad. The *peshmerga* forces, as they came to be known then, were literally "those who face death," in name and in action. After valiantly fighting to salvage their homeland, the narrative goes, the *peshmerga* could not withstand the world's attempt to suppress them again. The army was thus driven underground and reconstituted as a rebel force. Today, all Kurdish guerillas, from all four corners of Kurdistan, are often generally referred to as *peshmerga* regardless of their secondary ideological underpinnings.[56] In Kurdistan's history of misfortune, the *peshmerga* or guerilla, with his or her pristine sense of purpose, is Kurdistan's sacred institution.[57]

None of this changed Moftizadeh's opinion on the matter. His view was that without unity in Kurdistan, there was no valor in launching one-off attacks against the central government for little to no gain. Violence in Kurdistan would only lead to instability, reducing the likelihood of its population reforming itself through spirituality, and attaining the level of unity to overcome its oppressors. Instead, he preached a common saying of the Prophet Muhammad, "fight with the ink of your pen, rather than your blood."[58]

Meanwhile, as Moftizadeh sought to maintain a lower profile in his public persona, Iran on the whole was heating up politically. The oppositional landscape to the Shah's regime grew increasingly diverse and robust, as the Shah took inconsistent measures to try to suppress political activists while offering them limited concessions. The high price of oil combined with the Iranian regime's aggressive "rentier state" driven development program produced high levels of inflation and a new urban society of haves and have nots. Among the many simple and complex ideological underpinnings that made up new opposition movements in Iran, Communist- or Marxist-leaning ones became popular. This applied to the Kurdish region as well. In the year 1969, the Organization of Revolutionary Toilers of Iranian Kurdistan, more commonly known as the Komala party, claims to have been founded on this basis.[59] As mentioned briefly in the second chapter, they would come to be one of the two main Kurdish opposition groups to the Iranian regime, before and after the revolution.

Of all of the main factions vying for influence in Kurdistan under the Shah's regime, Komala was by far the most radical in its platform. It advocated for disruption of not only the Iranian government's policies toward its Kurdish minority, but also existing traditional power structures in Iranian Kurdistan itself. In classic Marxist-Leninist style, this meant targeting the gilded landowners who represented the bourgeoisie "capitalists." In the Kurdish context, this had to mean eradicating Kurdistan's traditional tribal centers of influence. And of course, just as much as the tribes, the regressive religious class also had to be dealt with.

Komala's revolutionary ideals were being disseminated by two particular young men from a good Kurdish family out of Bokan, Salah and Abdullah Mohtadi. In improbable circumstance, after their father's death in 1967, Khadijah's brothers were undergoing an ideological awakening that would inform their participation in revolutionary Kurdistan's ensuing struggle for power.[60]

Out of Tragedy, Moftizadeh Resumes Activism

Moftizadeh was comfortable with his place in the scheme of things as the year 1970 approached, and he had put his time in prison behind him. He was happy with a simple family life and the respect and outlet for communication he inherited through his teaching. His son Jiyan was approaching 10 years old, and he had a closer personal relationship to his father than Molana Mahmoud Mofti's boys had with their father. If things would have stayed this way, perhaps Moftizadeh would have stayed a small-town

teacher with a grand past. Perhaps he would have never seen the light of politics, or the darkness of a prison, or the leadership role of a movement ever again. But destiny had other plans for Moftizadeh.

In the fall of 1971, Khadijah Mohtadi began to complain about tiredness throughout the day to Ahmad. She began to sleep longer than she usually did, and soon afterwards started to feel chest pain and sensed that she was losing weight. In typical Kurdish form, every family member and friend assumed the role of doctor, trying to diagnose the problem. She was obliged to eat certain foods that were good for energy, and other home remedies. Some advised that her "center was off balance," an old superstition in Kurdistan that gave rise to a number of half-baked, although harmless maneuvers to restore balance. But as her situation deteriorated further, her mother arranged for her to be seen by a number of experts in the Kurdistan region. When they did not have a definitive answer, she was seen by specialists in Tehran. Ahmad followed her to Tehran, where they lived temporarily in one of the former homes of Hajj Mohtadi. When the diagnosis of heart problems came, it was so unexpected to all that to call it a confirmation of the family's worst nightmare would incorrectly intimate that they had even considered the possibility of an illness. Khadijah was after all a young woman who had led a healthy, privileged life. Despite their disbelief and requests for second opinions, her sickness, which was never properly diagnosed, quickly worsened.

Image 6 Moftizadeh's wife Khadijah with her and Ahmad's young son, Jiyan

Ahmad tried to remain optimistic in his conversations about Khadijah's illness and tried to stay busy while they were in Tehran awaiting the possibility of surgery; meanwhile, Khadijah's condition improved and deteriorated without apparent rhyme or reason. Some days she would state that she felt fine and insisted on trying to go out of the home on her own. On at least one occasion, she lost energy so quickly while visiting the local showers that one of her brothers had to be called to accompany her back to the residence. The Mofti and Mohtadi households did not know whether to be optimistic or pessimistic.

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On one smoggy Tehran day, Ahmad ventured out into the city in the afternoon to tend to some errands. When he came home a few fateful hours later, he was not prepared to see commotion in the household, and Abdullah Mohtadi (Khadijah's younger brother) standing over his older sister. Abdullah told Ahmad that the doctor already examined her lifeless body, and wistfully murmured that there was no reviving Khadijah, who had fainted less than half an hour before Ahmad returned home.

Ahmad, was stunned. He went to his wife's body and touched her, and told her to wake up. He tried to administer breathing to her, with the hopes of reviving her. Abdullah, choking back tears, told Moftizadeh softly but with a loud voice that it was no use. When Ahmad finally looked up at Abdullah, tears fell from his face. He did not say another word. After briefly looking at his wife's body, he moved slowly away from her, turned toward his prayer rug, and began to pray.[61]

At 37 years, Khadijah had succumbed to her heart condition. The exact nature of her illness was never definitively settled and is still not known. In leaving the world whose jewels she abandoned for the treasures of the hereafter, she left a young boy who was not yet a teenager, and a husband who would never remarry. The year was 1971.

Moftizadeh Regalvanized

The years following Khadijah's death would prove to be crucial in Ahmad Moftizadeh's life. Through the hardship of his wife's sudden illness and passing, Ahmad leaned heavily on his spirituality. He sought to block the sorrow of his tragedy with ideas of the temporal nature of life and continued spiritual self-improvement, as evidenced by his speeches in that period. His courses took on the form of an Islamic spiritual fundamentals course, supplemented by interpretations of the Quran.[62] For

the first time, Moftizadeh actively motivated his students and followers to engage in *da'wa*, or community outreach. Moftizadeh encouraged friends to identify individuals whom they trusted the most and encourage them to improve their daily habits; while the self should be primary in one's spiritual focus, a true friend loves his companions and wants them to flourish as well.[63] His base grew as a result of this bottom-up, people-focused approach. In hindsight, this was his first major step back into the world of activism, and one that precipitated the events of the next decade.

Moftizadeh continued to live an extremely modest life that bordered on poverty in those early 1970s. "There were two kinds of cooking oil in Kurdistan at that time," one of his acquaintances recounts, seeking to demonstrate through a story just how little money Moftizadeh had:

> The animal variety was expensive—it was about 50 tomans for a gallon. and the vegetable variety was cheap, about 15 tomans. Families like ours and the Moftis used the expensive type. So much so that I was embarrassed to be seen carrying vegetable oil in the streets. It was a class thing.
>
> When I was twelve, I would receive an allowance of about five tomans a day, which was almost a dollar then … A dollar gets you 3500 tomans today. Anyway … one day Moftizadeh asked me how much money I had on me. I told him I had five tomans. He asked if I could take it, along with the few tomans he had, to buy as much of the cheaper oil as they would provide for that amount. He said he would pay me back later. He was that poor.[64]

By another account, Moftizadeh only had stale bread and yogurt, often expired, at his home. He would survive on this sort of diet for days. "But he never complained, even once, about not having money."[65] Moftizadeh's one and only valuable asset, which no one but his closest acquaintances knew about, was some land that was sold to him by the Mohtadi family in Bokan; his friends told him the land could fetch him a fair bit of money. "He never considered selling it, though. He did not need any more money in his own mind. He gave away anything he had anyway," remembers one acquaintance.[66] By all accounts, he was highly focused on his teaching and was becoming more vocal about his philosophy during this period.

As early as his days in Tehran engaging in debate at the University with colleagues and students, Moftizadeh was particularly fond of and influenced

by the views of Iranian scholar Mehdi Bazargan.[67,68] In addition to being part of Iran's prerevolutionary intellectual vanguard, Bazargan was a confidant of some of Moftizadeh's fellow detainees in the Shah's prisons. Bazargan's thinking had a diverse set of components to it. One of these components was the application of scientific evidence to support religious conclusions, and the discounting of interpretations which did not comport with a verified modern understanding of the world.[69] Bazargan's movement emphasized that true Islam meant a cohesive, well-rounded approach to religion in all aspects of life. It was concerned with making Islam tangible to the average citizen and popular in society, as exhibited by the populist literature it published in its journal *Maktabeh Tashayo* (The School of Shia Islam).[70] It was a practical Islam of sorts, which appealed to Moftizadeh, who was pro-Islam, but not pro-clergy. He, like Bazargan, had a fundamental desire to see religion bolster people's appreciation of God as opposed to drive people away. In turn, his view was that an Islamic interpretation that isolated individuals from other Muslims and even non-Muslims was fundamentally flawed. Like Bazargan, the populist Islamism of Ali Shariati also contained elements that were attractive to Moftizadeh.[71]

While there was still the official *mufti* in Sanandaj who was respected by the local population, Moftizadeh's following was more dynamic and loyal.[72] Part of the reason that Moftizadeh was not enthused by the idea of being Mofti had to do with his view that the Mofti institution, in dealing mostly with complex questions of *fiqh*, dealt with things that were intangible to a lot of people. He saw the clergy as a useless institution that sold complexities instead of offering solutions. Religion had become "empty" for people in this way.[73] In his role, he had the time and liberty to address individuals' specific problems with answers if he desired. "The Prophet would not say, 'Oh, you have a problem? Well, the Quran says so and so.' He would instead guide people with reason and his actions as well. This was the way of the Prophet and the rightly guided followers of the Prophet," Moftizadeh preached. He did not have to be concerned with the burden of his title as the grassroots teacher he had become.

Around 1973, Moftizadeh was asked by a former colleague whom he worked with at the *Kurdistan* newspaper in Tehran to deliver religious instruction on the radio in Sanandaj. Moftizadeh agreed to deliver a handful of radio broadcasts, and they were extremely popular.[74] The Kurds, despite not being the most orthodox of Muslims, were rather uniformly spiritual. Moftizadeh's preaching style was more about kindness and charity

than proper dress or prayer, and this appealed to many. In smaller audiences, he was never one to hide his criticism of the Shah's government and its treatment of the Kurdish people; in the early 1970s, he became even more vocal in this regard. "Despite the many flaws he had, Ahmad was absolutely uncanny in three ways," a former trusted confidant (who is now critical in many ways of Moftizadeh) recounts. "He was like superman when it came to these personality traits. The first was his sense of charity. He was always encouraging people to be frugal, but he was always giving away everything he had. He had no attachment to material things at all." This was a recurring and emphasized theme in discussions with those who knew Moftizadeh. He continued, "The second was his lack of envy or jealousy. In the absolute, even if he was angry or unhappy with someone, he never wanted their misery. He wanted their salvation—even his purported enemies." He would have many, indeed. "Lastly, he did not fear anything or anyone. I don't think it was possible to be more courageous or fearless than he was. In the many many years that I was with him, through the revolution, through sickness, I saw many emotions, but I never saw a speck of fears in his eyes."[75]

As Moftizadeh's base continually grew and he was approached from all corners of Kurdistan for guidance, the inevitability of his renewed role as a leader of some kind occurred to him. He did not define such a role formally, however. In conversations with his followers, he acknowledged that the time he had spent reflecting on religious issues and studying religious texts (and his struggle for *taqwa,* in Islamic parlance) gave him the very small authority to express an opinion.[76] However, the people should question even *his* ideas, and think critically about his assertions. "Don't turn me into an idol," he would say. "There are those who ignorantly try to treat my teachings like the Prophet himself … and I [corrected them]."[77] If he was to be a leader, it had to be a natural and organic process, he stated. In his mind, he had to be chosen democratically; if someone is a leader, such a distinction should not be his choice. This idea was in line with his fundamental rejection of the *mufti* authority bestowed upon his family and ultimately abandoned by him. The reality was, given his popularity, he *was* indeed a leader already. By 1974, there were hundreds of individuals whose professed ideology had become "follower of Ahmad Moftizadeh," even though such a movement did not have a formal name or easily identifiable label.[78]

The Unlikely Developments of a Society in Conflict

Even after Khadijah's and Hajj Mohtadi's deaths, Ahmad kept a close relationship with the Mohtadi family. When he would visit their home city of Bokan, he would have to schedule at least a week there to see all of the various cousins, uncles, and aunts of Khadijah whom he was so close to. For many, he was considered a respected member of the Mohtadi family as much as of the Mofti family for many.[79] Naturally, he would stay in one of his father-in-law's homes when he was passing through Tehran as well. Abdullah Mohtadi, the theologian's younger son, was a university student there. He was a not so common Kurdish boy who had a privileged upbringing in the capital. He was influenced by his older brother, Salah, who was also a Kurdish nationalist and was espousing increasingly leftist ideas. As a teenager, he spent his years watching as Kurdish activists passed through his father's home, bearing witness to formative events like the wave of arrests that hit Kurdish activists in the early 1960s. He had even visited Moftizadeh and some other family members in prison as an adolescent.

Somehow, despite being the son of a religious man, Abdullah took to leftist and not religious ideas at a young age. This seems counterintuitive and somewhat surprising. How does one born and bred in an ultra-religious family, in a traditional society, take to distinctly non-religious ideals? He explains it rather simply and logically: "I was very politically minded, and I read a lot… and that was simply the most powerful and popular idea during that era. In the 1960s, from the Vietnam war, to Che Guevara, to the 1968 student protests in France, to Bob Dylan and the Beatles, everything pointed me in that direction." He was living through a time where, no doubt, the left had a corner on the developing world's market of ideas. But while other Muslim thinkers in Iran, such as Ali Shariati, had chosen to combine Islamism with certain elements of socialism, this did not appeal to Mohtadi. He attributes his disassociation with Islamism to the heavy influence that Kurdish nationalism and activism had on his family.

This ideological schism did not prevent him from having a cordial relationship with Moftizadeh in the few years after his sister's death. "He was like a big brother to me growing up. I had an immense amount of respect for him," Abdullah says. Mohtadi was personally fond of Moftizadeh during this period, but also believes the feeling was mutual. Moftizadeh,

according to Mohtadi, often would tell the young Abdullah that he respected his intellect and integrity.[80]

But little did Moftizadeh, or anyone in the Mohtadi family, know that by his third year in college, Abdullah's increasingly vocal expressions of Marxist ideas were not just a matter of casual interest. Together with a group of six other Kurdish students who were living in Tehran, Mohtadi decided to risk his life for those ideas. On October 27, 1969, in a secret initiation meeting in Tehran, he narrates that he became a founding member of the Komala party. His membership and activities with Komala were completely underground and not shared outside of the small group of member-activists as he continued his studies at the university.

A former Maktab Quran member who was close to Moftizadeh claims the founding of the Komala party likely did not happen in earnest at such an early date. He notes that even during the early stages of the revolution, Komala referred to itself by the Persian name of *Jam'iateh Zahmat Keshan* (The Hard Workers), and that it was not active or a known quantity until the revolution was well under way.[81] This seems to be confirmed by many laypersons. The truth about when Komala was founded is less relevant than the reality that it only became a visibly active party when the revolution was already under way. If Komala was indeed underground in the 1970s, it would have been one of many underground Marxist or Communist groups in Tehran's universities; such groups outweighed other anti-Shah movements significantly. As alluded to prior, the vast majority of groups, including Islamist groups, contained some element of the traditional socialist or Marxist narrative as well.

Now as a young university student, Abdullah Mohtadi could engage Moftizadeh on increasingly complex political subjects. Naturally, they debated the various facets of subjects like class struggle, tribal heritage and social advancement in Kurdistan, and the proper role of religion in society. However, cultural and familial tradition dictated that the tone of the conversation never truly resembled an adversarial debate. "I never got in a heated argument with him; there was a certain measure of deference that I had to show him as an elder and a scholar... While Ahmad was a simple guy and never asked for it, I would even wash the dishes and do the housework for him... I felt like it was sort of pointless to try to convince him of all people of anything."[82] The practical implication of their respective ideas was certainly unclear to both activists in those early 1970s. It was too early

for them to know at that time that history would render their competing world views irreconcilable.

Moftizadeh Is on the Air

In the year 1974, Ahmad Moftizadeh decided to embark on a journey incumbent on all believers with the capacity to do so: The Hajj pilgrimage. By now, he was a well-respected and relatively well-known quantity in Iranian Kurdistan, although in practice, he still defined himself as a simple teacher of Islam who avoided large gatherings and a formal leadership role. As an undeniably popular and still uncontroversial figure in the Kurdistan region, Moftizadeh would be one of a few people to be asked to speak at various events where large gatherings would take place—civil society meetings, funerals, and religious events being the most common among them. While he would previously refuse to participate, he began to accept these invitations on a limited basis just days after returning from Hajj. There was an overwhelming demand to meet with him, especially in the Kurdish provincial capital, Sanandaj. A freshly minted *hajji* (an alumnus of the *Hajj* pilgrimage), he also decided to formally set aside Wednesdays to meet with laypersons on religious questions of their choosing.[83]

The response to his opening the door ever so slightly to the public was overwhelming. According to a number of witnesses who either spent time with Moftizadeh after his return from Hajj, or went to see him during his "office hours," he was never able to meet with all of the individuals who came to him on a given day. As a result, within months, he also set aside Thursdays to travel to two mosques in Sanandaj, Masjed Seyed Mustafa, and Masjed Rauf, to discuss with larger gatherings. His popularity increased. He soon began to accept more of the invitations that came his way to speak at other events. On certain occasions, where prominent members of society were being buried, an audience of hundreds of individuals could attend.

At events such as these, Moftizadeh's tone became increasingly divisive and stinging with regard to societal issues.[84] He would attack the clergy, or *ulama*, claiming that they did not communicate the true religion of Islam to the people. Stressing the importance of the connection between man and his creator, he preached a message of social justice where equality and charity were paramount. He attacked the sufi orders, lambasting their own guise of charity. Although he would not mention particular leaders or groups, he warned of trusting the *sheikhs* who would take your money

and have nothing to offer in return for one's journey to God.[85] He would also attack the Shah's rule indirectly by speaking about the "condition" in Kurdistan, and the "constant struggle" that Kurds were in in Iran. Soon, those attacks became more specific, addressing the lack of authority of the political leaders who controlled Kurdistan.

Family members report that in the years after his wife's illness and trip to Mecca up until the revolution, there was an extra element of intractability in his views. And as Iran's political activism became more ambitious, Moftizadeh also took a broader societal view of the "struggle against oppression." In speeches, he would discuss recent newsworthy events and disputes that were occurring in other parts of Iran, and comment on political issues outside of the country as well. One of his nieces notes that she recalls Moftizadeh criticizing his older brother Abdullah for eating oranges from Jaffa, Israel, that were imported to Iran. "He would say you shouldn't eat products from Israel, a country that's killing Muslims all the time. My father would simply tell him they were delicious."[86]

Perhaps most notably, Moftizadeh also became controversial in religious circles on account of certain *fatwas* he issued in the years 1975–1976 on the issue of divorce. Breaking with traditional *Shafi'i* Sunni religious interpretation, he declared that divorce was not the unilateral choice and whim of the husband. Unlike traditional interpretations which claimed that a man could divorce his wife by declaring his intentions three times (even in a fit of rage), Moftizadeh claimed that only a divorce that was the subject of multiple discussions between the husband and wife was valid. Any discussions or declarations that took place in anger did not qualify as declarations recognized by God, in Moftizadeh's distinct religious interpretation.[87] What may seem to be an innocuous ruling on divorce caused ripples in the devout community in Kurdistan, and even brought some criticism from other religious scholars in the region.[88] By the middle of 1976, Sanandaj was buzzing with rumors that the Mofti son, Ahmad, was starting to speak up.

In seeking to understand the mood in Kurdistan and the perception of Moftizadeh through people's reflections of this era of history, a few observations finally came into focus. Moftizadeh, the son of a *mufti*, was always going to be associated with the institution and the religion of Islam. But for most, he was not perceived as a clergyman. After all, there were dozens of formal *sheikhs* with their sufi orders, and even another *mufti* (Moftizadeh's uncle) who formally occupied the Mofti of Kurdistan role. Moftizadeh was critical of all of them. He was perceived primarily as a reformist and an

opposition figure to the Shah's regime, and in that, a Kurdish nationalist opposition figure. As long as he maintained this aura, as we will see, his popularity was unrivaled. But how was it that Moftizadeh was not apprehended by the Shah again when his activism ratcheted up in this prerevolutionary period? The answer offered by those who lived through that period is reasonable. By this time, it was thought that Moftizadeh had enough grassroots support and respect from within Sanandaj and throughout Kurdistan such that the Shah's regime was reluctant to reimpose the control that it had exercised on his life in years prior (but that had waned in light of Moftizadeh's subsequent lack of activism). For an increasingly schizophrenic Pahlavi regime that was receiving mixed advice about the dueling notions of security and promotion of liberty, he was a wild card. The regime hesitated. Much like figures from the former Mahabad Republic who were spared death or imprisonment, and other powerful figures in Kurdistan that enjoyed support from large segments of the population, apprehending Moftizadeh was likely to do more harm than good.[89]

As the holy month of Ramadan approached in the year 1976, the Shah's regime granted permission for a part-time television channel in the Kurdish language, based in Sanandaj. "Shabakayeh Sanandaj," or the channel of Sanandaj, went on the air and was allowed to present programming that was non-political in nature.

It was decided by the channel's organizers that during Ramadan, a daily program would be recorded to provide entertainment during the slow fasting hours of the holy month. The program was hosted by Hadi Moradi, a respected Kurdish academic who taught at the University of Tehran. For Moradi, there was no question about who would be the most appropriate individual to present on the show. He approached Ahmad Moftizadeh with the idea of allowing him to present on a different religious question of his choice every day of Ramadan, followed by a question and answer session with Moradi during the second half of the show. Moradi, for his part, would field questions by phone from individuals in Kurdistan before the show would begin, and address the relevant (and allowable) questions to Moftizadeh.

The program proved to be extremely popular with the region's population. It further reflected Moftizadeh as a rational, lighthearted, and principled man, as his charismatic persona and cleanly shaved image was broadcast into the homes of thousands every evening. There were approximately 30 episodes that aired that month, and by the time it was over, "every single person in Kurdistan knew Moftizadeh's name."[90] During

those long days of Ramadan, Moftizadeh would spend hours with Moradi in the television studio. It was said that when Moftizadeh wrote on the broadcaster's stationary, whose letterhead read "By the Grace of the King of all Kings," Moftizadeh struck a line through these words. Above them, he would pen in: "In the Name of God, the Most Gracious, Most Merciful."[91]

The Birth of a School, Turned Movement

In 1976, one of Kurdistan's most notable poets and masters of literature was tragically killed in a car accident. Still a relatively young man, Swara Ilkhanizadeh's death was mourned across Kurdistan as a great loss to the Kurdish community, and his funeral was one of the most heavily attended ever in Kurdistan.[92] None other than Ahmad Moftizadeh, an acquaintance of Ilkhanizadeh, was invited to give the sermon. In front of throngs of mourners and onlookers in the city of Bokan, Moftizadeh delivered a stirring discourse on life and death, and most notably, a hitherto unseen public attack on the Iranian regime.

"This was the first time, at least in Kurdistan, that anyone spoke so negatively about the Shah in public, ever," relates one person who heard the speech.[93] Speaking of the regime's grip on the livelihood in Kurdistan, Moftizadeh related the untimely death of a young patriot and hero of Kurdistan to the long coma of a people. In that speech, proclaiming that all evildoers will get their reckoning, he predicted the downfall of the regime. "No public speech until that time had been even a tenth as controversial, even a tenth as brazen."[94] With this speech, which was recorded and transcribed, and whose contents spread like fire in the dry tinder that was Kurdistan's political landscape, Ahmad Moftizadeh was publicly reborn as an activist.

So in the mid-1970s, Moftizadeh's small seminars on religion in Sanandaj evolved into presentations to larger audiences in other cities in Kurdistan; his insistence on self-betterment and aversion to politics remained verbally, but his criticisms of some elements of Kurdish society began to sound revolutionary; his insistence on Kurdish and Muslim unity was partially supplanted by his criticisms of certain segments of Kurdish society. Moftizadeh had found his way back into the fold of political activism, as his grassroots teaching seemed to be evolving quickly into a grassroots movement. The "followers of Ahmad Moftizadeh," as they called themselves, would soon be aligned formally behind him.

On his relationship with Kurdish nationalism at this juncture, he chose to articulate his belief in greater rights for Kurdistan through the prism of religion. In doing so, he would sometimes reference the Quranic verse which stated that "we created you in nations, so that you may know one another," to demonstrate that God did not intend all people, even of the same spiritual makeup, to conform in terms of language and culture. Islam for Moftizadeh dictated that everyone be treated equally in their diversity—"men and women, Kurds and Christians."[95] According to the KDPI's leadership, Kurdish nationalism was very much a secondary feature of Moftizadeh's thinking in this prerevolutionary period.[96] Maktab Quran chooses to describe Moftizadeh's relationship with his Kurdish identity differently. In its view, he was steadfast to the idea of greater Kurdish rights, but thought that self-betterment and unity was the most effective means to achieve that goal. That is why he attacked the institutions that divided Kurds along faulty designations.

There were those who believed some of his speeches during this period were not always appropriate for the venue, but many of the individuals who heard his speeches were galvanized by them.[97] "People were afraid to listen to his speeches because they were so critical." And according to one of his confidants and friends during this period, he continued to struggle to define how he should be involved in society. "He, like everyone else, wanted the Shah gone. But he did not think that Iranian or Kurdish society was ready for revolution."[98]

With Moftizadeh's base now significantly large, he became further overwhelmed with demands on his time. In this period, he began to explore the idea of implementing something that he had conceptualized for sometime now: a local, administrative system for resolution of problems within the community. He would model it after the Quranic concept of a *shura*, or consultative council.[99] Although Moftizadeh took pains to emphasize that the council was not designed to replace the government, and was to remain non-political, it was implicit in this very idea that the government's bureaucracy was not adequately handling grievances in Kurdistan.

Moftizadeh also decided that his philosophy of a simpler Islam focusing on spirituality, away from the baggage of the clerical establishment, as taught through his seminars and now governed through his council, merited a more formal presentation. In the recollection of the organization's earliest members, he was affirmatively responding to a longstanding request from many of his followers in Kurdistan when he established the first formal branch of "Madraseh Quran," in the city of Mariwan.[100]

This name, translated "School of the Quran," was perhaps unconsciously designed to resemble the name the group led by the Shia academic Mehdi Bazargan, "The School of Shia Islam." By naming it the School of the Quran, Moftizadeh's reach sought to be more grassroots than that of a particular Islamic sect, with the symbolic resonance this entailed.

The philosophy of the school was rather simple. Anyone of any level of learning was welcome to join and interact with other members and learn things from basic literacy, to more advanced religious interpretation. For the many illiterate citizens of Sanandaj and greater Kurdistan, this was an opportunity to learn the alphabet in beginners' courses and read for the first time. For those who knew how to read and write in Farsi, religious instruction was available, and courses that would allow them to learn basic to advanced Arabic were also offered. For those who had some experience in religious scholarship, more advanced courses were available. Ahmad Moftizadeh would design curriculum and train instructors personally, and they in turn taught courses at the various learning levels. Dozens of courses were offered in the first year of instruction.[101]

The school's popularity was enhanced by the fact that it was free of charge. To finance the school's operations, Moftizadeh sold his only asset, the piece of land he had in Bokan. It yielded him approximately 600,000 tomans, a sizeable amount in that period. Part of the proceeds was used to buy simple homes for some of Sanandaj's needy citizens, and the rest was dedicated to the school.[102] The year was 1977. The seas of the Iranian revolution were at the same time moving into high tide.

Conclusion

As a young man, Moftizadeh was known for always having an opinion to offer. But when he left jail in the hotbed that was 1960s Iran, his stubbornness had turned to confusion. The Kurdish cause was still deep in his heart, but the means by which the struggle was to advance were not clear to him. He had meanwhile undergone his own internal struggle, finding religious and spiritual underpinnings in prison that helped him cope and changed his view of the world. He was somewhat reclusive in trying to chart out a path for himself, and became uncomfortable with the idea of activism, if for no other reason than potential danger to his family. The growth of the Maktab Quran school, which would turn into a movement, seemed as improbable then as it seems destined to have happened now. As Moftizadeh dedicated himself to being a grassroots teacher, he preached

an essentialist form of religious-spirituality that he came to believe was a necessary journey for all of mankind. Based out of Kurdistan, he remained steadfast to the notion of a Kurdish struggle. Spirituality, in his view, would help advance that struggle more than anything else could.

Meanwhile, Salah and Abdullah Mohtadi were stirred by other ideas. From a young age, they were taught by their father to be proud Kurdish men. While their father was a teacher of religion, it was the Kurdish struggle that moved Abdullah Mohtadi and his older brother Salah. When Hajj Mohtadi's home in Tehran became a focal point for the Kurdish movement there, Marxism may have been the last idea on the elder scholar's mind. But his sons were part of a new generation of Kurds in the post-Second World War era—one whose search for a means to advance their cause would lead to ideas that their tribal forefathers never conceived. Almost in lockstep with our thesis on Islamism in Kurdistan, Abdullah Mohtadi claims today that the pain of the Kurdish struggle unwittingly forbade him to combine his leftist sentiments with the Islam that his father taught. Marxism was taking the world's revolutions by storm, and an uncompromising Kurdish rebel was created out of its wake.

When exploring the events of the next couple of chapters, it is easy to be struck by the improbability of things. How unlikely, firstly, that the Mohtadi sons would grow to have Marxist sympathies, and come to be leaders in a Marxist revolutionary group? How even more unlikely that Ahmad Moftizadeh, after fortifying a close relationship with Hajj Mohtadi and marrying his daughter Khadijah, would find himself so ideologically opposed his wife's brothers? Upon further reflection, though, this was the legacy of the tribal nature of Kurdistan and the evolution to Kurdish nationalism that we have already discussed.

Tribal allegiances are no longer what they used to be; marriage within a tribe is still preferred in some parts of rural Kurdistan, and a Kurdish person of slightly older age can often describe the reputation of certain tribes and even their historic members. But personal identities in Kurdistan are now modern; the city, the political party, and the Kurdish ethnicity are paramount. At the same time, those tribal traditions have modern implications. The Mofti family started out as a relatively wealthy tribal unit. That influence made them a consequential part of every segment of Kurdistan they migrated to. It contributed to their favor with the *sheikhs* who did not stop and even helped their growth of influence, and ultimately was a necessary precondition to their holding of the Mofti title. Now as *muftis* in an urban Sanandaj, that tribal

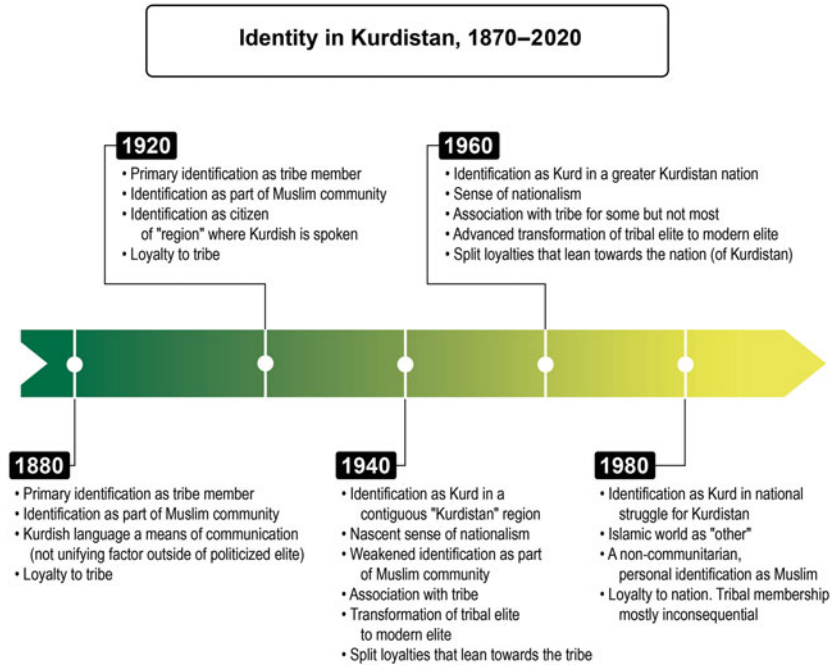

Image 7 The evolution of notions of identity in Kurdistan over time

influence was formally lost, but that power transformed and re-emerged as another form of power. During no part of this transformation was this family an average Kurdish family. The Mohtadi family, likewise, was an influential one with great wealth and stature. The name of Hajj Mohtadi was recognized by most, and his reputation was never to be questioned. This fits into the narrative of tribal leadership and membership at the top of a hierarchy, and followers on the bottom, with the significant difference being that personal identity is much different now for your average Kurd. These two families were the type that married into one another in Kurdistan. And in the end, there is a strong argument to be made that these two families were likely contenders to furnish leaders to Kurdistan, no matter what form Kurdish society may have taken—tribal or modern. One man was now the leader of Kurdistan's religious-minded individuals, while another (Abdullah) was a leader among its leftists. And so it was.

With the KDPI also active and ratcheting up its activities and recruitment, the stage was set for the drama that was Kurdistan during the Iranian revolution.

Notes

1. Mardokh-Rohani, Fuad Interviews.
2. Western observers closer to the time of the revolution would opine that this policy precipitated the Shah's downfall, due to his inability to strike a balance between liberties for civil society and censorship.
3. In his important work *A Modern History of the Kurds*, David McDowall refers to the *Kurdistan* newspaper in passing as a "propaganda journal." This interpretation is probably incorrect. While *Kurdistan* did fulfill the basic requirement of all Iranian newspapers in its ritualistic praising of the King, by historic standards, it was a progressive step forward for Kurdistan's attempts to have its language and existence recognized in mainstream Iran. Kurds of all political persuasions consulted for this book seem to dispel the idea that it was a propaganda publication of the Shah. There is also ample evidence of rather consistent editorial dispute with government censors. According to Soraya Mofty, whose father was the Chief Editor of the newspaper, the newspaper was ultimately shut down the day after it refused to publish an editorial about the Kurdish language's close relationship with the Persian language.
4. Mohtadi, Abdullah Interviews by Ezzatyar, Ali. Telephone, Islamabad, Pakistan/Erbil, and in person, Washington D.C. July 12–October 22, 2015.
5. Kamali, F (P. 168).
6. Rahmani, Seyed Ali. Correspondences with Ezzatyar, Ali. Letter from Qandil Mountains transmitted through KDPI leadership. July 23, 2015.
7. Ibid.
8. Correspondence with Ahmedi, Loghman H (KDPI Head of Foreign Relations). June 2015-December 2015.
9. See endnote 40 of Chap. 2 for more information.
10. McDowall, David. *A Modern History of the Kurds.* 3rd Rev. and Updated ed. London: I.B. Tauris, 2004.
11. Kamali, F (P. 169–171).
12. See Kamali, F (P. 108). Hajj Abdul Rahman Mohtadi was previously known as Abdul Rahman Ilkhanizadeh. He assumed the name Mohtadi, a second name used by his father, when transitioning back into Iranian society from the Mahabad Republic.
13. Mohtadi had lineage in the Dehbokri tribe, an influential one in the Bokan area. During this period, the tribal elite was in full transition to a modern, gilded elite in Kurdistan.

14. Mohtadi, Abdullah Interviews.
15. Mardokh-Rohani, Fuad Interviews.
16. Mohtadi, Abdullah Interviews.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid.
20. As mentioned briefly in the previous chapter, Mohtadi also had a close relationship with Molana Mahmoud, when the two scholars taught at the University of Tehran.
21. Ibid.
22. Mofti, Parvin Interview.
23. The SAVAK, an acronym in the Persian language, was the secret police and domestic intelligence service of the Shah's regime.
24. A Kurdish expression to denote that someone is a member of the *peshmerga* is to say he or she is "in the mountains."
25. Correspondence with Ahmedi, Loghman H (KDPI Head of Foreign Relations). June 2015-December 2015.
26. Mofty, Soraya. Interview by Ezzatyar, Ali. Telephone, Islamabad, Pakistan/San Jose, California. July 30, 2015.
27. Ibid.
28. The amount of time that Moftizadeh spent in the Shah's prison is difficult to pin down. One of the KDPI representatives consulted for this book claims he was in jail for two months. This was also in the context of him seeking to portray Moftizadeh rather negatively. At the same time, Komala's position (not likely to have come from a positive place either) is that it was at least 6 months and up to a year, while Maktab Quran's is that it was just under a year.
29. Mardokh-Rohani, Fuad Interviews.
30. Moftizadeh, Ahmad. Letter from Evin Prison to followers. July 21, 1990 (Maktab Quran archives).
31. Moftizadeh wrote in allegorical style about his difficult time in prison. Because of this, decoding what sorts of experiences were formative during that period and deciphering his mental state took some assistance. In one of his later writings, Moftizadeh would mention a small group of men in his life that he had a special relationship with and an unshakable trust in. The testimony of these individuals helped paint the picture of a spiritual and ideological transformation. Moftizadeh, Ahmad. Letter from Evin Prison to followers. January 27, 1991 (Maktab Quran archives).
32. This prison was destroyed during the Shah's own tenure, and "Laleh Park" in Tehran currently stands where it used to be. Mohtadi, Abdullah Interviews.
33. Mardokh-Rohani, Fuad Interviews and others to remain anonymous.

34. Mofty, Soraya Interview.
35. The word "man," here, is used rhetorically, and refers to humankind, including its just as important if not more important participant, the woman.
36. This idea is the most constantly recurring theme in his many writings and speeches to his followers.
37. Mofty, Soraya Interview.
38. Rahmani, Seyed Ali. Correspondences with Ezzatyar, Ali.
39. McDowall, David. *A Modern History of the Kurds.* 3rd Rev. and Updated ed. London: I.B. Tauris, 2004. 253.
40. Sadjadi, Sadeigh Interview by Ezzatyar, Ali. San Jose, California. October 27, 2015.
41. Mofti, Soraya Interview.
42. Ibid.
43. Ibid.
44. Moftizadeh, Ahmad. Letter from Evin Prison to followers. July 21, 1990 (Maktab Quran archives).
45. Mardokh-Rohani, Fuad Interviews.
46. Moftizadeh, Ahmad. Letter from Evin Prison to followers. July 21, 1990 (Maktab Quran archives).
47. Mofty, Soraya Interview.
48. Mardokh-Rohani, Fuad Interviews.
49. Ibid.
50. Rohani, Majed Interviews.
51. Moftizadeh, Ahmad. Letter from Evin Prison to followers. October 3, 1990 (Maktab Quran archives).
52. Moftizadeh, Ahmad. Letter from Evin Prison to followers. July 21, 1990 (Maktab Quran archives).
53. McDowall, David. *A Modern History of the Kurds.* 3rd Rev. and Updated ed. London: I.B. Tauris, 2004. 253.
54. Mardokh-Rohani, Fuad Interviews.
55. Nicholson, Helen J., and David Nicolle. *God's Warriors: Knights Templar, Saracens and the Battle for Jerusalem*. Oxford: Osprey, 2006. 97.
56. We have covered how Kurdish nationalists who have fought to advance the cause of Kurdish autonomy in its various forms have often had secondary ideologies. Whether it be the PKK in Turkey (Marxist), the PUK in Iraq (Socialist/Democratic), or others, these guerilla armies all bear the name of *peshmerga* for many politicized Kurds, borrowed from the historic army of the Mahabad Republic. Groups also have more specific group labels, like the YPG in Syria, or the PJAK in Iran.
57. Like with other popular institutions, a lot of criticism can be found about the *peshmerga*'s hierarchy, with allegations of corruption, etc. However, generally speaking, they remain a sacred institution for most Kurds.

58. Mardokh-Rohani, Fuad Interviews and others to remain anonymous.
59. As mentioned later in this chapter, although Komala's leadership claims 1969 as a founding date, the ability to verify such information is difficult, particularly given the reality that they were not a known party for another ten years.
60. Although Salah Mohtadi was perhaps never a formal member of Komala (likely to maintain the appearance of impartiality), he was aligned with the group throughout the revolution, as we will further explore.
61. Mohtadi, Abdullah Interviews.
62. See Moftizadeh, Ahmad. Letter from Evin Prison to followers. January 27, 1991 (Maktab Quran archives) for an example of this interplay between Islamic guidance and greater notions of morality in Moftizadeh's lectures, as supplemented by Mardokh-Rohani, Fuad Interviews.
63. Ibid.
64. Rohani, Majed Interviews.
65. Ibid.
66. Ibid.
67. Bazargan played a role in the Iranian revolution itself and even served in government, before eventually leaving Iran. He counts among the many important actors of the revolution who eventually became alienated and disillusioned.
68. Mohtadi, Abdullah Interviews.
69. Bayat, Asef. *Making Islam Democratic: Social Movements and the Post-Islamist Turn*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2007. 29.
70. Ibid.
71. Maktab Quran's view on Moftizadeh's influencers today is that while a number of Iranian and non-Iranian theologians and scholars had some influence on him, no single scholar was his role model. Instead, he borrowed from the rightly guided portions of wise men, and discarded that which he did not agree with.
72. Far from being a critic of the sitting *mufti*, Mola Khaled, who executed his duties with grace and efficiency, Moftizadeh's popularity was the natural result of the organic following he had developed, as opposed to the official and formulaic continuity of the Mofti hierarchy which Khaled inherited (perhaps unwillingly himself).
73. Mardokh-Rohani, Fuad Interviews.
74. Rohani, Majed Interviews.
75. Ibid.
76. Mardokh-Rohani, Fuad Interviews and others to remain anonymous.
77. See Moftizadeh, Ahmad. Letter from Evin Prison to followers. March 29, 1991, reflecting on the pre-revolutionary period.
78. Mardokh-Rohani, Fuad Interviews and others to remain anonymous.

79. Mohtadi, Abdullah Interviews.
80. Mohtadi, Abdullah Interviews.
81. Rohani, Majed Interviews by Ezzatyar, Ali. Telephone, Islamabad, Pakistan/Sanandaj. September 29–October 10, 2015.
82. Mohtadi, Abdullah Interviews.
83. Rohani, Majed Interviews.
84. Mofty, Soraya Interview.
85. Mohtadi, Abdullah Interviews.
86. Later in his life, Moftizadeh is said to have expressly advocated for a non-violent solution to the ubiquitous Israel–Palestine issue, claiming that taking up arms would never serve the purpose of Palestinians.
87. Rohani, Majed Interviews.
88. Ibid.
89. For a discussion of founders of the Mahabad Republic that were ultimately spared from punishment by the Shah in 1953, refer to the previous chapter.
90. Rohani, Majed Interviews.
91. The attentive reader will recall from Chap. 3 that a popular legend in Sanandaj about Moftizadeh's father, Molana Mahmoud, bears resemblance to this narrative.
92. Ibid.
93. Ibid.
94. Ibid.
95. Mardokh-Rohani, Fuad Interviews and others to remain anonymous.
96. Rahmani, Seyed Ali. Correspondences with Ezzatyar, Ali. Letter from Qandil Mountains transmitted through KDPI leadership. July 23, 2015.
97. Mardokh-Rohani, Fuad Interviews and others to remain anonymous.
98. Ibid.
99. For a more thorough discussion of the *shura* system and Moftizadeh's views of government, see the next chapter.
100. This name would evolve in the aftermath of the revolution into "Maktab Quran." Both *madraseh* and *maktab* mean school in the Persian language. However, *maktab* has the connotation of a "school of thought" in the way that *madraseh* does not. In English, the difference would be similar to that of elementary *school* (*madraseh)* vs. the Keynesian *School* of Economics (*maktab)*. Maktab Quran's name change connoted a more ambitious intent to reform society.
101. Rohani, Majed Interviews.
102. Mofti, Parvin Interviews.

CHAPTER 5

Revolution, Kurdistan, and the Maktab Quran Movement

News from Tehran

In 1978, occasional news of protests to the Shah's regime in cities across Iran became more frequent. Leftist student groups began brazenly organizing gatherings in the capital that would morph into anti-Shah and "anti-imperialist" political gatherings and poetry readings. The SAVAK's continued arrest and abuse of suspected dissidents led to widespread paranoia and anger. In January of that year, seminary students in Iran's religious capital, Qom, organized large rallies against the Royal Government. The genesis of these protests was an anonymously published article (usually code for SAVAK) that called a hitherto little-known Iranian cleric abroad, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, known affectionately as the *Imam* (leader), a foreign agent.[1] Scores of these protesters were killed, which, despite the government's frequent heavy-handedness, was a watershed moment. The commemorative mourning ceremony for those who lost their lives in Qom turned into still larger protests, expanding into passionate demonstrations across the country that spring.

The summer of 1978 saw a short lull in the commotion that coincided with the Shah's significant easing of censorship and reshuffling of the SAVAK.[2] While thousands of protesters would still gather in many of Iran's major cities every 40 days, coinciding with the Shia Islamic schedule of mourning, the numbers of protesters began to wane. That was until August 19, a day that is thought by many to be the day Iran's revolution was made irreversible. In the southern city of Abadan, a movie theater

A. Ezzatyar, *The Last Mufti of Iranian Kurdistan*,
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by the name of Cinema Rex was set ablaze by arsonists. Over 400 people perished, making it one of the largest mass killings outside of war in world history. While it is now rather universally believed to be the work of Islamist revolutionaries, Ayatollah Khomeini from his base in Najaf, Iraq, blamed the SAVAK for starting the fire. This allegation was picked up by the protesters. Soon, the protests would spread, and hundreds of thousands of Iranians rallied in support. The Shah took the unprecedented step of declaring martial law in Tehran (and a handful of other cities) on September 8. When many thousands of protesters emerged in defiance of the curfew order, chaos ensued. Dozens of protesters were killed in a crackdown that was condemned widely and even halfheartedly by the Shah himself. Ayatollah Khomeini announced from abroad that thousands were martyred by the Shah's army. The date of September 8, 1978, went down in infamy as *Jom'eyeh Sia*, or Black Friday. The Shah's reign went into a tailspin.

As word of protests in Tehran, Tabriz, Mashhad, and Qom came into Kurdistan and Sanandaj, there was a great deal of focus and interest in them. The Kurdish population was naturally sympathetic to the cause of the protesters and to the general idea of reform, or even regime change, in Iran. There was a sense for most that a new regime in Iran would ultimately mean greater rights to the Kurdish people as well. But there was a difference in the revolutionary fervor that swept the rest of Iran when compared with Kurdistan. In Kurdistan, it was a more practical, less euphoric atmosphere, as subsequent events would demonstrate. Unlike the rest of Iran's revolutionaries, who were advocating lofty ideals such as the dismantling of Western influence in Iran and socialist distribution of the country's vast wealth (even by the Islamists, who adopted Marxist/socialist rhetoric), the Kurds saw the revolution through the prism of their ethnicity's historic second-class status in Iran.

As more news of unrest across Iran spread to Kurdistan, many student groups in Sanandaj started to meet informally and more openly to criticize the Shah, motivated by instability elsewhere. News of a few instances of government buildings fired upon or stoned by civilians in Kurdistan spread around the community in Sanandaj. Much of the activity during this period in Kurdistan still lacked formal organization. Besides the KDPI, which was still a banned party in Iran, there was no other political opposition group in Kurdistan that was well known or active as of yet.

Despite his open criticism of the Shah's regime, Moftizadeh was reportedly apprehensive toward the idea that revolution could be coming.[3]

"He would say, 'We are not mature enough yet. Iran is not ready. We [the Kurds] are not ready.'"[4] Moftizadeh was the only notable person in Sanandaj who had publicly criticized the regime and referenced its downfall, so such a sentiment would have struck many as untimely and perhaps unfortunate. Against his own instinct about his community's readiness for large-scale political change, he nonetheless felt compelled to support the people's demands. "His view was that the will of the people was forcing him, unwillingly, to get involved," one acquaintance recalls.[5] If Moftizadeh was a somewhat unwilling participant who jumped into the next series of events without optimism, it was not without a visible determination.

In August 1978, suspicions began to mount that the SAVAK was actively seeking to foment division among opposition groups to weaken unity among the protesters. A statement that the Shah uttered publicly in the prior weeks (that if his regime were to fall, Iran would become "Iranestan" [split up into pieces]) fed these suspicions. Residents of Sanandaj recall seeing flyers in August and September announcing that Shia theologians in Qom proclaimed that Sunnis in Kurdistan were not Muslim. These messages spread like wildfire in Kurdistan, which indicated to many that SAVAK had to be involved in propagating the divisive literature; the conspiracy theory took on a life of its own. The people spoke of "unnamed sources" that were predicting a sudden crackdown by the Shah's secret police in Kurdistan. The rumors began to be so significant that dozens of individuals began to inquire to Moftizadeh about whether he had heard them, and further, what his thoughts were on such a possibility. It was around this time that Moftizadeh's name began to make the middle pages of Iranian and foreign press articles as a spokesman of sorts for Sanandaj's population.[6] Moftizadeh's message was assertive: "Beware, be united and stand up against any division between you (the Kurds) and other Muslims [including Shia]."[7]

It was also at this time that a little-known group calling itself the *Jam'iateh Zahmat Keshan* (The Hard Workers) issued a statement calling on the population of Kurdistan to "heed the call of the wise man of God," in reference to Moftizadeh. We now know that this group was essentially the precursor to Komala in Sanandaj. Komala was not a known entity at this stage, despite claims of having been founded nearly ten years prior. According to Abdullah Mohtadi, the group was still underground, not publicly revealing its entire platform to protect its existence; while underground, it had nonetheless claimed to have recruited a number of well-respected members of Kurdish society over the previous decade.[8] These

individuals made up the rank and file of civil society groups like The Hard Workers.[9] The statement announcing alignment with Ahmad Moftizadeh is believed to be the nascent Komala group's first public communication.

There was an anxious sense of satisfaction and unity in Sanandaj, and as the weather began to cool down in the month of October, the perception that government forces were not likely to crack down in Sanandaj set in. For many, this was seen as a victory for the Kurdish people. The population was emboldened. The Iranian revolution had officially begun in Kurdistan.

A Speech at Iqbal Square

In Kurdistan's other major city of Mahabad, another religious leader was also stoking the flames of revolution: Sheikh Ezzedin Hosseini. Appointed the Friday prayer leader of the city approximately ten years before the revolution, Sheikh Ezzedin had now become more forward and partisan on the particular issue of Kurdish rights. Unlike the *sheikhs* of the early Islamist-nationalist movements of Kurdistan that we have covered, Ezzedin did not couch his nationalist sentiments and demands in religious symbolism or rhetoric. He employed a discourse of democracy and autonomy for minorities in a new Iran.

Moftizadeh and Ezzedin enjoyed amicable relations. "Sheikh Ezzedin would visit Moftizadeh, and Moftizadeh went to visit him as well. In 1976, when Moftizadeh was in Mahabad, he stayed with Sheikh Ezzedin. He encouraged Ezzedin to distance himself from the Shah back then," a natural preference for a man who renounced the Shah's own higher Mofti distinction himself.[10] But Sheikh Ezzedin did not see his role as a political one at that time, despite his nationalist sentiments. Sheikh Ezzedin would become one of the more popular figures in Kurdistan after the Shah left Iran and the revolution was successful. During these prerevolutionary months, however, perhaps still suffering from the handicap of having been appointed by the Shah, his popularity was eclipsed by Moftizadeh. Prior to the year 1979, few in Sanandaj recall having heard his name, or learning of the small protests he led with Kurdish youth the previous year. "It was Moftizadeh who was the revolutionary," one person recalls. But was it possible that those who fell more in the Moftizadeh camp were not aware of the Marxists or the KDPI's influence because of who they were frequenting in their own activities? Because of where they lived, or what they wanted to hear? The response was a rather logical one. "During the

revolution, there were no secrets about who was and was not popular or active. Anyone who could garner attention or support for their cause, or call people out into the streets, didn't hide. They tried. We heard about meetings that the Communists had occasionally. But there were never more than 200 people. We were living in Kurdistan, we were on the ground. It was clear."[11,12]

Across Iran, violent protests against the Shah's regime were supplemented by crippling general strikes in September 1978. Across Kurdistan, protests were now erupting on a weekly basis. News would filter in about groups of Kurdish youths rioting in Urumia, followed by protests and arrests in Paveh. In Mahabad, KDPI *peshmerga* reportedly attacked government forces on the outskirts of the city. In Tehran, as well as countless other cities across Iran, the Shah's army was being overwhelmed by unrest, causing excitement as well as anxiety in Kurdistan.

In Sanandaj, meanwhile, and across large parts of Kurdistan, Moftizadeh's popularity flourished. "Nobody could compare to him in terms of popularity in all of Kurdistan during this period," one individual recounts. "He was the only one."[13] Seeking to capitalize on this, in October 1979, Moftizadeh organized a protest in a main square in the city of Sanandaj, *Mayan Iqbal* (Iqbal Square). It was meant to be an open venue for people to voice opposition to the regime and hear various leaders speak about Kurdish unity, but as word spread to the rest of Kurdistan that such an event was being planned, it was being billed as "Ahmad Moftizadeh's rally." Individuals from all over Kurdistan made plans to travel to Sanandaj to attend the protest. Sheikh Jalal, Sheikh Ezzedin's brother from Bana (Baneh in Persian), also attended. Between ten and fifteen thousand people attended, by conservative estimates. It was the largest gathering thus far in prerevolutionary Kurdistan. After a number of other individuals announced their opposition to the Shah and the need for unity in Kurdistan, Moftizadeh took the podium.

Moftizadeh reportedly spoke even more forcefully, and for a longer period of time, than the other speakers. He spoke of the need to establish a constitution and eliminate arbitrary rule. And while he spoke of a need for unity and opposition to aggression in Kurdistan, he also argued for the establishment of Islamic government.

While opposition groups of various persuasions were making news with protests across the country, Moftizadeh was likely emboldened by the plurality of such news emanating out of Iran's religious centers. By now, Ayatollah Khomeini had taken residence in a suburb of Paris

Image 8 Iqbal Square, circa October 22, 1979, on the occasion of Moftizadeh-organized rally in Sanandaj, Iran

(Neauphle-le-Château), and was being covered heavily by foreign press. His calls for the downfall of the Shah's regime were fast becoming the focal point of the revolution, and Moftizadeh was encouraged that the establishment of a broader Islamic democracy based on the *shura* system of consensus could become a reality. As far as we know, Moftizadeh was not directly in touch with any of the revolutionaries at this juncture. His only contact with them was through the principal Shia mosque of Sanandaj, *Masjedeh Hossaniyeh,* and its leader Sheikh Ali Safdari. This contact did not inform his thinking on Islamic government to a significant degree, however. At this stage, Moftizadeh did not use the rhetoric of an "Islamic Republic," and spoke in more general terms.

For the first time, Moftizadeh's political aspirations were articulated on a large scale for the city to behold. Against the tide of sympathetic dispositions toward "democratic" Islamists that were advocating for regime change in Iran, some of Sanandaj's Kurdish residents were

uncomfortable with Moftizadeh's propositions. As word and transcripts of his speech at Iqbal Square spread throughout the region, the perception that Moftizadeh was, despite being a religious man, primarily a Kurdish nationalist, was revised. In particular, the young Marxist organizers of Komala (still known as the Hard Workers) took issue with the idea of religion in society, let alone government. "And they were right. Their respective ideologies had a fundamental contradiction. He [Moftizadeh] was in line with the idea of an Islamic government of some kind," one observer notes.[14] However as we have seen historically, Kurdish society was accustomed to the articulation of greater rights through the prism of Islam. The speech at Iqbal Square was perceived by most as an anti-Shah speech, and it did not dampen Moftizadeh's popularity, as subsequent events will show. The difference between prior decades and the year 1979, when Kurdish nationalism had matured significantly, was that now there were galvanized segments of society that took issue with Islamic symbolism. At this juncture, at the end of 1979, these individuals and groups began to set their sights on undermining Moftizadeh's monopoly on leadership. Komala was primary among them.

After appointing a military government in November 1978, the holy month of *Muharram*, with its imbued connotation of sacrifice and oppression in Shia historical chronology, arrived in Iran. By December, millions of Iranian protesters were out in the streets. Much of the focus of the Shah's army was on Tehran and larger cities outside of Kurdistan. Opposition groups across the board were energized, including those in Kurdistan. As Moftizadeh began to embark on a public discourse of what he believed proper government should look like, with his supporters publishing a pamphlet of his various utterances on Islamic government, other political parties in Kurdistan began to seize the limited tide of discontent with the idea of Islamic government and amplify it.[15] Anti-Islamic graffiti suddenly appeared on homes around Sanandaj, including on the walls of Mofti family households. On Moftizadeh's well-respected brother's home, Abdullah, the phrase "There is no God but God … has expired" was plastered.[16] Still, the momentum seemed to be on Moftizadeh's side.

Later that month, when two religious scholars and a few of their students from Sanandaj were arrested by the SAVAK, Moftizadeh called for a sit-in at a local public mosque. Answering his calls, thousands of Sanandaj's citizens made their way to the mosque despite the chilly November weather. They vowed to stay in the mosque until the men were released. Within

days, the prisoners were set free, and Moftizadeh declared victory: "The government did not explain why it decided to free them, but apparently it was forced to," he announced confidently. Galvanized by their success, the protesters decided to continue the sit-in.[17] An American journalist summarized these events:

> Apparently fearful of provoking the region's 3.5 million Kurdish tribesman and possibly reviving their warrior tradition, local authorities have given in to demands … [while Moftizadeh] stressed that the region's Kurds do not seek to take advantage of the current unrest to set up their own separate state in Iran … [O]pponents of the Shah in Sanandaj generally seem to have refrained from the mob violence that has struck dozens of other cities and towns across Iran since the beginning of the year … The 42-year-old Muftizadeh, who claims to speak for the Sunni Kurd who make up about two-thirds Iran's Kurdish population, said he favors "passive resistance" and peaceful strikes to oppose the government.[18]

Moftizadeh mixed no words in his pronouncements to followers and the press, expressing "hate" for the military government established by the Shah, and calling for sweeping democratic change. The American journalist noted that "for the time being, some of the younger and less conservative followers are willing to go along with this kind of protest to avoid violence. 'But if this way is not successful,' one said, 'we will take up arms.'" Indeed, against the run of play, so to speak, and to the surprise of many, some youths occasionally swept into the mosque during the sit-in, mocking the protesters and yelling anti-religious slogans.[19] Moftizadeh's followers immediately associated these hooligans with the "Communists."

Meanwhile, Sheikh Ezzedin's popularity was growing in Northern-Iranian Kurdistan. It was in this prerevolutionary period that he poised himself to be an umbrella-type leader of Kurdistan's diverse nationalist parties. And he was almost always accompanied by his right hand man, Salah Mohtadi. Moftizadeh and his brother-in-law, increasingly becoming known as a leader among Mahabad's leftists, had enjoyed strained relations of recent for obvious reason. Moftizadeh blamed the leftists, Kurds who were all educated as part of the Tehran upper class, for undermining the unity of the population in Sanandaj. Their ideas, in his view, were fundamentally a bad fit for Kurdistan's population. Komala for its part, with support from Salah Mohtadi, was now actively looking to sideline Moftizadeh, and became increasingly intolerant in its approach with Maktab Quran members.

In communication with the KDPI and its soon to be iconic leader Abdul Rahman Ghassemlou, Sheikh Ezzedin continued to steer clear and be critical of any notion of Islamic government in Kurdistan without recognition of Kurdish rights. In the words of one writer on Kurdistan during the revolution, "the further he distanced himself from religious concerns, the greater the popularity and respect he received."[20]

The Shah's Departure

On January 16, 1979, Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi left Iran in the midst of massive and unrelenting protests. He appointed Shahpour Bakhtiar, a disciple of Mohammad Mossadegh (the popular coup-ousted Iranian prime minister of 1953) and a longtime opponent, as prime minister. While the Shah had not technically abdicated his throne, his reign was effectively over. He would never return to Iran.

On February 1, Ayatollah Khomeini returned to Iran amid throngs of supporters that reportedly numbered in the millions. He was initially welcomed by Bakhtiar, who intended to make him the figurehead of the revolution but not cede power to him. But soon after arriving in country, Khomeini announced that he would form government, and that the Bakhtiar government was as illegitimate as the Shah's. Pitched battles broke out between Khomeini supporters on one side, and the still-Royal army and Bakhtiar supporters on the other. Insurrection ensued within the ranks of the military, with entire units of soldiers declaring their allegiance to the Ayatollah. Soon, the military, through the Supreme Military Council, would officially declare its neutrality, putting the final nail in the coffin of the Royal Government. Within ten days of Khomeini's return, Prime Minister Bakhtiar would be forced to escape the country under threat of arrest. On February 11, 1979, the revolution had officially toppled the regime of the Shah.[21]

Moftizadeh cautiously welcomed the departure of the Shah, along with other groups across the country and the Kurdish region. He briefly traveled to Tehran one week following Khomeini's return, and met with the Imam among a larger group of religious scholars.[22] While no major party—including the KDPI and Komala—publicly denounced the new revolutionary government's platform at this early juncture, some were more suspicious of the pronouncements of Khomeini. KDPI, with its belief in democracy for Iran and autonomy for Kurdistan, and Komala, which was a more radical Marxist group that partially employed a Kurdish

nationalist platform, were not enthused by the idea of an Islamic government. They were meanwhile gathering more support in their respective regions (the KDPI in the north of Kurdistan, and Komala in the south of Kurdistan) at the expense of Moftizadeh. Unlike the other parties in the region, Moftizadeh was more optimistic about working with the new regime than other parties in Kurdistan. "He would say, this is not the time to fight the regime. It's a people's regime, it's popular. Let's help them."[23] This drew the ire of the Marxists in particular, who were more actively beginning to combat his influence. Soon after the departure of the Shah, one citizen in Sanandaj remembers seeing flyers distributed around town announcing that Moftizadeh was being paid by the mullahs in Tehran, an allegation that he maintained was baseless.

Rather remarkably, and in line with the thesis of this text, Iranian Kurdistan was the only major region in Iran that did not see mass showings of support for the Ayatollah. So while he remained popular in Sanandaj at this juncture, as an early supporter of the Islamic revolutionary government, Moftizadeh can be said to have set himself at odds with the greater Kurdish region. Frustrated by the activities of the young "Communists," he began to take aim at their ideas in his discussions. "He became intransigent with those who advocated for Kurdish rights first with no regard to Islam. He was unsympathetic to the Communists (as Komala were known to many), but those groups began to transform in their popularity."[24]

Moftizadeh had an advantage in the chaotic who's who of post-revolutionary Iran and Kurdistan: He had spent time with some of Iran's successful revolutionaries in prison and enjoyed amicable relations with them. He sought to take advantage of these relationships right away, believing in ostensible good faith that he could help encourage Iran to adopt an Islamic system in line with his interpretations of the *shura* system advocated for in the Quran. This, in his view, would ultimately bring decentralization and autonomy to the Kurdish region and Iran's Sunnis.[25] He began to make plans to meet with successful Iranian revolutionaries in the capital, and also scheduled meetings with other Kurdish leaders in the hopes of forming a unified front in Kurdistan. But in the spring of 1979, some Kurdish parties had other thoughts, and proceeded with a sense of opportunism.

Rebellion in Kurdistan

As Moftizadeh prepared to travel to Tehran for meetings with other Islamic revolutionaries, a piece of news from Mahabad came that shocked everyone in Iran and in Kurdistan. In the last week of February, 1979, Kurdish

guerillas attacked and seized the military garrison and headquarters in the city of Mahabad.[26] In doing so, they also wounded its commanding general, who was the brother-in-law of a prominent revolutionary and the Khomeini government's labor minister, Dariush Forouhar.[27] Within days, much of the news surrounding the revolution in Iran focused on events in Kurdistan for the first time. With Abdul Rahman Ghassemlou and Sheikh Ezzedin adopting roles as spokesmen for the events in Mahabad, the KDPI was catapulted back into the spotlight. The KDPI peacefully took over the garrison from those who ransacked it and began negotiations with the central government. While Ezzedin and Ghassemlou publicly announced their support for the revolution and the person of Khomeini, their actions seemed to suggest otherwise. Kurdistan was perceived across Iran as the first region to splinter from the revolution's general direction.

Moftizadeh was of the opinion that attacking the central government at this juncture weakened the hand of Kurds in formation of a new constitution, which was being planned after a March 30 referendum on the Islamic republic.[28] His view was that the best chance of advancing Kurdish rights in any new regime was through dialog, even if nothing was guaranteed. All other major groups in Kurdistan were more skeptical.

In the midst of instability in Mahabad, on March 5, 1979, Moftizadeh nonetheless traveled to Tehran to meet with prominent revolutionaries. They were gathering on the occasion of the 12-year anniversary of the death of Mohammad Mossadegh, Iran's universally popular ousted prime minister from the 1950s. Ayatollah Mahmoud Taleghani gave a stirring speech that day at Mossadegh's tomb, commemorating the death and announcing that Mossadegh's legacy had lived on. Through intermediaries, Moftizadeh met with Taleghani while in Tehran and announced his optimism that an accord could be reached between the Kurdish people and the central government for a system that would placate all parties. He proposed that formal discussions take place to design a system whereby Kurdistan would be an autonomous region, yet fully in line with the central government, in accordance with Quranic mandates on consensus in rule. Returning to Sanandaj, Moftizadeh seemed unsure about how his meeting was perceived, telling individuals that he was cautiously optimistic.[29]

Indeed, Moftizadeh's supposition that the Islamic regime would negotiate with him were confirmed approximately one week later: Ayatollah Khomeini released a statement announcing that the revolutionary government would negotiate with Moftizadeh as the legitimate representative of the Kurdish people.[30] Despite this, Moftizadeh himself was suspicious that the government actually had a preference for the Shia cleric of the

Hossaniyeh mosque in Sanandaj mentioned prior, Ali Safdari.[31] He nonetheless remained engaged in trying to forge a political agreement with the regime.

Approximately ten days later (March 16), galvanized by the progress he had made, Moftizadeh traveled to the city of Saqez to meet with another prominent clergyman who was the Friday prayer leader of that city (Mola Abdullah Mohammadi). While in Saqez, however, unexpected news came of unrest in Sanandaj. "At first the news was murky. We knew that the garrison had been attacked, but we did not know to what extent and how successful the attack was," says someone who was traveling with Moftizadeh at the time. Sanandaj had been calm in the weeks leading up to Moftizadeh's departure, and Moftizadeh still believed he had the city's support at this juncture. "We thought it was supporters of the Shah or a mutiny against the new Islamic revolutionaries."[32]

What it was, in fact, was Komala's first major operation: an attack on the military headquarters in Sanandaj, with the overarching plan to neutralize the army and take control of the city. Timed to coincide with Moftizadeh's departure, and in open defiance to his leadership, the Komala members first occupied the city's radio and television station.[33] They broadcast a message to the city's citizens: The army headquarters in Sanandaj had to be taken, and "anyone with an arm should proceed to the garrison!"[34] Advancing to the military outpost in a group of a few hundred at most, the rebels hoped that the population would join them. One of these rebels was none other than Abdullah Mohtadi.

Mohtadi claims that the march on the garrison was not designed to undermine Moftizadeh's influence, but was the result of Sanandaj's population being dissatisfied by the heavy-handedness of the army in the previous weeks. He claims that an internal struggle between those aligned with Moftizadeh and those aligned with the Shia cleric of Sanandaj had caused instability and a desire by many to neutralize the central government's army in Sanandaj (which was aligned with the Shia cleric, Safdari). Regardless of Komala's motivations at the time, they proceeded to the garrison against the wishes of Moftizadeh.

Upon arriving at the garrison, however, they were overwhelmed by the army, which was loyal to the central government. The military presence in Sanandaj, the administrative capital of Kurdistan, was more substantial and better fortified than the one in Mahabad. Further, Sanandaj did not have the same tradition of rebellion as Mahabad did; its surrounding areas were less fit for guerilla warfare and were not home to as many *peshmerga*;

its population was more in line with events in Tehran, after years of cultural exchange with the capital. Although this made Marxist ideas more palpable in Sanandaj than in Mahabad, explaining why Komala's popularity had grown there, an invasion of the garrison was premature. After mixed reports about fighting at the garrison and a partial takeover, on the evening of March 16, the takeover ended in failure.[35] Approximately 150 rebels were arrested and held in confinement. Moftizadeh's brother-in-law, the younger brother of his beloved deceased wife, was in the custody of the very regime he was putting his weight behind.

The arrest of hundreds of youth at the garrison came at the same time that tensions were mounting all over Kurdistan. Small battles broke out in Sanandaj and its surrounding areas when it was learned that a number of Kurds had been arrested at the military headquarters. Kurdish militants who were late to the game called for the release of the activists, and pledged to take the garrison by force.

More generally, we know that during the months following the revolution, much of the central government's security apparatus was in disarray. There was a perception across the Kurdish region that the central government was favoring non-Kurdish and Shia residents in Kurdistan by providing them arms to defend themselves in the midst of the chaos, and denying arms to the indigenous population. This agitated many, and also led to suspicions that the revolutionary government was planning to deprive Kurds of the greater rights they sought in any future government. This view was propagated by the other major Kurdish leaders at the time, such as Sheikh Ezzedin and Ghassemlou.[36] An excerpt from the Washington Post dated March 20, 1979, sums up the events after the failed takeover of the garrison:

> Reports of deaths in the fighting ranged from 4 to 150. This followed even sketchier reports of fighting in another, smaller Kurdish locality, Ghorveh, near the large center of Hamadan, with numerous deaths and wounded. Reports of that fighting were backed up by a British doctor, who runs a hospital there, who said his staff had treated a large number of wounded …
>
> It seems established that the fighting in Sanandaj started after both the local Revolutionary Committee and the military refused requests to distribute arms and ammunition to the local Kurds to defend themselves against the large Iranian minority in the town …
>
> More fundamentally, however, there seems to have been growing unrest in the region since Khomeini issued a statement dubbing a moderate Kurdish leader, Ahmad Moftizadeh, as the 'Kurds' sole religious and political leader.'

> This was an obvious attempt to undercut the much stronger autonomy demands voiced in Kurdistan by a leading religious figure, Sheik Sayed Ezzedin Husseini, elected after the Islamic revolution by left-of-center Kurds as the spokesman for their demands.[37]

Moftizadeh returned to Sanandaj in a hurry. Along the way, he and his acquaintances tried to make sense of events. They discussed the possibility that the new regime, despite its public announcements, might be fomenting division in the Kurdish region to weaken Kurdistan's bargaining power in negotiations over autonomy. Whatever the case was, Moftizadeh hoped that his presence in Sanandaj might calm the fighting.

In discussions through intermediaries after he arrived, he took issue with Komala's actions, calling them destructive to the cause of securing further rights in Kurdistan. "He was extremely harsh in his words," one witness remembers. Moftizadeh sent representatives to the garrison to try and allay fears that arms were being provided to some citizens, and not others. One representative recalls the instructions from Moftizadeh being that no arms should be distributed if at all possible, and a deep concern about the possibility of violence between Kurds and the army, or between Kurds. "If someone is angered by not receiving something, we can calm that person down, but if someone is killed, there is no going back," Moftizadeh instructed.[38] Rumors were spread in the city by unnamed sources that Moftizadeh was sending people to the garrison in the hopes of arming his faction, and depriving the rest of the city with arms; this was an allegation that would never be substantiated, but fed into a broader narrative that Moftizadeh was in cahoots with the revolutionary government. Moftizadeh would later explain that he cooperated with Kurdish forces that were armed, and that some of them may have considered him their leader. But the idea that he organized a militia to protect the city and maintain the rule of law is disavowed by Maktab Quran.[39] Meanwhile, Abdullah Mohtadi waited haplessly in a makeshift dungeon near the garrison. He came within minutes of execution more than once while being held. "They stripped us down and blindfolded us and lined us up for execution multiple times. I could hear the soldiers and militants that held us arguing with each other about whether or not we should be executed. One would say that it was time, and another would yell back, 'no! this hasn't been authorized!' I assumed it was only a matter of time."[40]

As Moftizadeh met with individuals from various political parties and eyewitnesses to the events of the last few days, word came that he would

receive visitors from Mahabad. Sheikh Ezzedin and Salah Mohtadi had come to Sanandaj, and wanted to see Moftizadeh.

Moftizadeh received them in his brother Abdullah Moftizadeh's home on March 20, give or take a day. As Moftizadeh sat face to face with his brother-in-law and Kurdistan's increasingly popular *sheikh*, the mood was somber. The men discussed the planned visit by a high-level delegation from Tehran in the coming days to negotiate the release of the prisoners and a cease-fire. Meanwhile, Moftizadeh was informed, perhaps for the first time, that Abdullah Mohtadi was one of the people who marched on the garrison. Salah Mohtadi appealed to him to intercede. Sheikh Ezzedin tried to avoid the merits of the actions that the rebels had taken, and appealed simply to Moftizadeh's connections to the government, insisting that Abdullah should be released without preconditions.

Moftizadeh focused on the fact that it was a mistake to march on the garrison, and it would be a further mistake to negotiate for one prisoner. He argued that he did not have a position from which to argue for anyone's unconditional release anyway, and that it had to be part of a larger negotiation about releasing the rest of the prisoners, as well as a cease-fire. He chastised Salah for sabotaging the progress that was being made with the central government, as he had heard that Salah too was in attendance at the march on the garrison. The visitors implored Moftizadeh to at least start negotiations by trying to release his own brother-in-law. Moftizadeh continued to refuse. Tempers ran high in the room, and no consensus was reached. Ezzedin and Mohtadi reportedly left amid an exchange of cold pleasantries, outraged. They departed Sanandaj prior to the arrival of the delegation from Tehran. It would be the last time Moftizadeh would speak to any of his brothers by marriage.

"The Promise of Autonomy Is in My Pocket"

The government delegation that arrived in Sanandaj on March 25 to negotiate about the prisoners was led by none other than Ayatollah Taleghani, who Moftizadeh had met at Mossadegh's tomb. He was accompanied by Abolhassan Bani Sadr,[41] Ayatollah Hashemi Rafsanjani,[42] as well as Ayatollah Beheshti.[43] The delegation, a catalog of some of the revolutionary government's most important figures, underlined the significance of events in Kurdistan to the central government.

In negotiations under heavy public attention and scrutiny, Taleghani agreed to the release of the prisoners in exchange for cessation of hostilities

Image 9 Moftizadeh with delegation from Tehran. From left to right: Ahmad Moftizadeh, Ayatollah Taleghani, Ayatollah Beheshti, Ayatollah Rafsanjani, Bani Sadr

and an evacuation of *peshmerga* forces. In addition to this, Taleghani expressed support for the Kurds' right to cultural freedom, and was enthusiastic that negotiations toward autonomy in Kurdistan could also be successful. A committee of five individuals would be established in Sanandaj to govern the city until a citywide election one month later would establish a permanent body (a *Shura Idareyeh Shahr*, or City Administrative Council). Those elections would actually be the first elections in the Islamic Republic's history. The five initial "governors" would be Mozafar Partoma [a US-educated National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) scientist], two of Moftizadeh's followers (Fuad Mardokh-Rohani and Hadi Moradi), and two individuals among the leftists (Yousef Ardalan and Said Sheikholislami). The prisoners were released, amid sporadic fighting that continued in the Kurdish region.

In what seemed like a positive result, leftist Kurdish nationalist parties were immediately critical of Moftizadeh for "colluding" with the regime. They proclaimed that "… if Moftizadeh would have participated in the efforts, or at least not actively opposed them, the garrison would have been taken over. Then we would be the one making demands."[44] Furthermore, in pronouncements by the revolutionary government and Taleghani after these negotiations, Moftizadeh's role was not underlined. Another Kurd, Mozafar Partoma, was the man charged with heading the *shura* council.

Why events unfolded in this manner is unclear. Did the Iranian delegation seek to take credit for breaking the impasse themselves? Did they obey a request from Moftizadeh designed to avoid his being cast as a collaborator with the regime, given sensitivities in Sanandaj at the time? Or perhaps, did the Iranians sense that Moftizadeh was losing his popularity? There are a number of different theories behind why this took place, but suffice it to say, the result was less than ideal given Moftizadeh's ongoing attempt to secure support for his mandate in Kurdistan. He had expended a fair bit of political capital in negotiating with the delegation from Tehran. In the view of many Maktab Quran members presently and at that time, Khomeini had trouble vesting his trust in a Sunni with known Kurdish nationalist sympathies. This seemed to be borne out by the fact that local Shia clerics seemed to receive disproportionate support from the central government, despite the public pronouncements of the government.[45] Moftizadeh and Ali Safdari, the ranking Shia cleric in Sanandaj, did not have the same political or social agendas, despite their both being engaged with the regime. On one occasion during a meeting between them, it was reported that Safdari proclaimed that the discord in Kurdistan was not acceptable, and that it was a shame that "Sanandaj has not yet given a martyr to the revolution." Moftizadeh reportedly chastised him directly in front of a group of onlookers. "As if that is a test of honor! Honor is preventing the death of a young man!" Safdari was unnerved by the unexpected rebuke.[46]

The referendum on the Islamic Republic was in a few days' time. It asked one simple question, "yes or no to an Islamic Republic for Iran." No further detail about what "Islamic Republic" meant was given.

The battle lines, so to speak, were drawn between Moftizadeh and the rest of Kurdistan's parties on this issue. Moftizadeh encouraged participation in the referendum, and continued to oppose violence as a means to effect change vis-à-vis the new government. Komala and the KDPI, behind Sheikh Ezzedin, advocated for a boycott of the referendum. They argued that the vague nature of the term "Islamic Republic" did not permit them to advocate a "yes" vote. Despite attempts by intermediaries to create a unity of purpose in Kurdistan, including by Sheikh Ezzedin's brother Sheikh Jalal (who visited Moftizadeh around this time), no agreement was reached.

When the results were released shortly after April 1, despite an overwhelming "yes" vote across Iran (reportedly to the tune of 99 %), participation in the Kurdish region was thought to be around 50–60 % at

best, with some estimates putting participation as low as 15 %.[47] The other ethnic minorities in Iran, including other Sunni minorities, voted in more substantial numbers.[48] Tehran took notice; the result added to the suspicion in Tehran about support for God's revolution in Kurdistan, and also was the first major sign of a setback in Moftizadeh's ability to influence events. The opposite of Sheikh Ezzedin, who by now was becoming better known in the rest of Kurdistan, the more Moftizadeh was perceived as an Islamist ally of the Khomeini-revolutionaries and less as a Kurdish nationalist, the more popularity and respect he seemed to sacrifice to rival groups.

After the referendum, Sanandaj began preparations for the City Administrative Council local elections of April 13, 1979. This election, the first "general election" of the new regime, would serve as a major test of the nascent republic's democracy and for stability in Kurdistan. In the lead up to the election, Ahmad Moftizadeh nominated individuals that would represent Maktab Quran and the platform of an Islamic Iran with Kurdish autonomy. This group was known as the "Moftizadeh List." Komala, on the other hand, ran on a platform of Marxist-Socialism, with autonomy for Kurdistan.

When the election results were released, the Moftizadeh List had won eleven seats, more than any other party in Kurdistan's capital. Fuad Mardokh-Rohani, a Maktab Quran member, was the highest vote-getter. Komala, for their part, won three seats. This was still a rather impressive showing for them, given that just months prior, very few individuals had heard of the group. But all in all, it was an indication that despite the pessimism that was setting in about relations with the central government, Moftizadeh remained the most popular figure in Sanandaj. In effect, he received a mandate from the Kurdish people to engage with the central government. He was not helped, however, by pronouncements about the election from Tehran, which either consciously or unconsciously were dividing Kurdistan's sympathies. In reference to the results, President Bani Sadr labeled the Komala candidates "non-muslims," which fit into an overall trend of the regime increasingly describing the rebelling Kurds as infidels or unacceptable in the eyes of Islam.[49]

There seems a disconnect at this juncture in the Kurdish population's loyalties. Support for an Islamic Republic looked to be low, as exhibited by the lowest turnout in all of Iran for the referendum. At the same time, support for Moftizadeh—the only major Kurdish leader that advocated for engagement with the Islamic regime—remained high. Given that there

are no reliable numbers for turnout during the referendum, could it be that it was higher than what has been accepted by today's Kurdish parties and historians? In the mind of Abdullah Mohtadi, the explanation was simpler. Moftizadeh remained a popular and trusted personality, perhaps the single most trusted in Kurdistan. But for many, a vote for his government in Sanandaj did not amount to an affirmation of support for the Islamic Republic.[50] People had faith, in some sense, that he might manage to make the most out of his negotiations with Tehran, despite their having little interest in the idea of an Islamic Republic.

In Tehran, meanwhile, the first signs of disagreement within Iran's new ruling establishment started to surface. Ayatollah Taleghani, who was known as a moderate, was reported to have taken issue with the unilateral decision making of the regime that was becoming commonplace, as well as its lack of tolerance for dissent. He spoke out the week following the elections in Kurdistan, stating that Iran was in danger of returning to authoritarian rule. This reportedly led to intense meetings between him and Khomeini, and what seemed to be a public rebuke by the Ayatollah, saying that Mr. Taleghani (instead of Ayatollah Taleghani) is "sorry" for what he did. The relationship between Taleghani and the regime remained rather tense throughout the summer.[51]

Still a largely popular regime's official choice to represent the Kurdish people, Moftizadeh remained steadfast in trying to convince citizens in Sanandaj who were on the fence about the merits of engaging with the Islamic Republic. "Without dialogue, we have no chance," he argued, taking the position that even if attempts at achieving autonomy failed, finding an Islamic solution to the problem was the only one that would be acceptable to the regime. At the end of May 2015, Moftizadeh traveled to Tehran to meet for a second time with Ayatollah Khomeini himself. While speaking to the Imam, he reportedly "announced that the Kurds were willing to be part of the Islamic Republic, and that they believed in Sunni–Shia unity. He encouraged Khomeini not to create policies that would revive old inter-Islamic tensions, by disadvantaging Sunnis in the constitution … He also advocated for cultural and linguistic rights within a unified Iran, making specific reference to the Kurds."[52] The Imam was reportedly cordial, and positive in response to Moftizadeh's demands.

Upon returning to Tehran, Moftizadeh was met by supporters at the airport. In addressing his supporters, he informed them that high-ranking members of the government had assured him that all was on track for autonomy to minorities in any new constitution. He further informed

them that despite withdrawing his name from elections for the constitutional "Assembly of Experts" (The first *majleseh khobregan*), he would be attending the meetings that would be chaired by his friend Ayatollah Beheshti. Toward the end of his speech, he also uttered a fateful sentence that would come to define his legacy in the eyes of his critics: "The promise of autonomy is in my pocket."

Meanwhile, *peshmerga* guerillas of the KDPI and Komala were inflicting losses on the Iranian army in the Kurdish region, and any negotiations or cease-fires between the Kurds and the central government proved to be short-lived. While the City Administrative Council formally governed the city of Sanandaj, rebels allegedly aligned with Komala also launched attacks against local makeshift police stations and organs of the central government throughout the summer months of 1979, weakening the formal government's authority.

A Constitutional Sham, and a Fallout with the Regime

The idea of forming a democratically elected body to draft a constitution was one that was first proposed by Khomeini while in exile in France. The Imam announced that a "Constituent Assembly" would be elected from the people to adopt a new constitution, and that such assembly would later have power transferred to it from any interim government.[53] But the summer of 1979 saw a different process unfold.

After the initial referendum for an Islamic Republic passed, elections were indeed planned for a constitutional approval council, in line with the idea of a Constituent Assembly. In preparation for these elections, draft constitutions were prepared and published between April and June. These drafts were somewhat promising, making specific reference to minority rights and the Kurdish ethnicity. The leftist Kurdish parties still called for more specifics in the areas of resource sharing and freedom of education in one's mother tongue, but many were optimistic. That summer, however, the fortunes of the Kurds, as well as Moftizadeh, would change for the worst.

Khomeini believed that the preliminary versions of the constitution were sufficiently advanced in their draft forms. In his view, a draft constitution should be put to a referendum right away without elections, and without a Constituent Assembly's review and approval. When there was pushback from non-Islamist groups as well as some of Khomeini's own

entourage, including Ayatollah Taleghani, a different assembly was authorized: A smaller and less representative "Assembly of Experts," which reflected approximately one representative for every 500,000 constituents. This body would perform a final review and approve the constitution. Ironically, those who pushed back on the idea of an immediate referendum would live to regret the decision.

Abdul Rahman Ghassemlou decided to contest the Assembly of Experts elections for the mixed Kurdish and Turkish city of Urumieh, in Northwest Iran (as Mahabad was not given a seat). By August 1979, after a summer of fighting, *peshmerga* forces effectively had control of a number of important cities in Kurdistan, including Mahabad and Paveh. This made Ghassemlou's participation in the elections rather remarkable; most importantly, it signified a continued willingness on the part of the KDPI to acknowledge sovereignty of the central government over the Kurdish region. Moftizadeh, for his part, decided to withdraw his candidacy in the elections and seek to be a neutral expert consultant to the constitutional body on ethnic and religious issues. Elections for the assembly were planned, and took place on August 3, 1979. Earning approximately 80 % of the vote, Ghassemlou successfully won a seat in the Assembly of Experts.

Between the time that the elections took place and the assembly was convened, however, the heaviest fighting in months took place in the Kurdish region. Notably, the central government failed in a surprise attempt to recapture the city of Paveh, suffering heavy losses. Khomeini was incensed; he chastised the army for lacking dedication, and demanded a redoubled effort in Kurdistan.[54] On August 18, Khomeini issued his first *fatwa* to the armed forces as commander in chief. Merciless in its content, he directed the armed forces of the revolution to march on Kurdistan immediately, threatening them with severe punishment if they were not successful.[55] This was arguably his most ardent and direct public call to war to date, even including his responses to the Shah's crackdown on protesters.

Just as quickly as news came of Ghassemlou's victory in the elections, then, determination to prevent his participation became evident. In the week leading up to the first meeting of the Assembly of Experts on August 18, the KDPI party was officially banned. Ghassemlou was publicly declared a corrupt individual belonging to the "party of Satan."[56] His candidacy and membership in the constitution-writing body was annulled, as thousands of government soldiers were battling *peshmerga* a few hundred miles away with limited success.

When news spread of Khomeini's cancellation of Ghassemlou's election victory, pressure began to mount on Moftizadeh, who again was invited to the assembly as an independent expert, to boycott.

Moftizadeh and Ghassemlou enjoyed a moderately amicable relationship until this point. The KDPI's platform of democracy for Iran and autonomy for Kurdistan, and its nationalist agenda, was acceptable to Moftizadeh. This was in stark contrast to Moftizadeh's non-acceptance of Komala, whose Marxist agenda was partly dedicated to destroying conservative religious tradition in Kurdish society. Geographically speaking, as discussed previously, KDPI was not a main rival to Moftizadeh in the Southern-Iranian Kurdistan region around Sanandaj. Perhaps most importantly, as a former leader in the KDPI itself, Moftizadeh maintained a great deal of sympathy to the cause of Qazi Muhammad and early Kurdish nationalists of the Mahabad Republic. All of that being said, however, Moftizadeh could not reconcile giving up the region's only representation in the constitution-drafting body at a stage when the draft of the constitution seemed to be on the borderline of acceptability. KDPI's original charter that established the Mahabad Republic announced that "rights are not given, but taken." To the contrary of this, Moftizadeh argued that in the face of a civil war that was aligning much of non-Kurdish Iran behind the government, not speaking at all was the only way to guarantee that no progress would be made. He declared that he would attend the meetings. Moftizadeh was in effect gambling his political capital on the outcome of the constitution.

When it convened, the Assembly of Experts surprised many by immediately discarding much of the draft constitution seen two months prior. Instead, subcommittees organized closed-door drafting sessions on a new constitution that would contain more Islamic jurisprudential features, including the cornerstone of Khomeini's famous idea of *velayateh faqih,* or guardianship of the jurisprudent.[57] None of these additions comported with the values of Sunni Islam as interpreted by most scholars, and even less so the idea of minorities' rights. Moftizadeh kept a close eye on the proceedings and engaged committee members in discussions about the importance of establishing a constitution that would satisfy all of Iran's citizens.

Meanwhile, approximately three days after the inauguration of the First Assembly of Experts toward the end of August, Khomeini ordered a siege of the city of Mahabad. For the first time since the revolution, the Khomeini government employed large-scale air sorties, bombing the city with fighter

jets, followed by tank regimens. Reports of a massacre turned out to be credible, with hundreds eventually confirmed dead. The regime was unsuccessful in definitively prying the city out of the hands of the mostly KDPI militia, who, after retreating, would ultimately take back the city.[58]

In Sanandaj, the central government had played cat and mouse with rebels since the failed takeover of the military garrison in March. With tensions running high after heavy casualties in other parts of Kurdistan, it was unclear who had control of the city as September approached. Without a constitution or a permanent constituent assembly, the revolution's meting out of order and justice was necessarily rudimentary at this stage. In addition to sending armed units to crush rebel activity, Ayatollah Khomeini also instructed that those captured in battle against the army of Islam be punished immediately.[59] A makeshift judge (Ayatollah Mohammad Sadeq Khalkhali) was sent to Kurdistan to hold trials; he would soon make a name for himself.

Khalkhali was first dispatched to the cities of Paveh and Mariwan, from where news quickly spread that a number of Kurdish rebels had been tried and executed for treason against the government.[60] Harrowing stories of torture and ruthless apprehension of suspected rebels by any means, followed by mass burials would surface.[61] Rumors spread that Maktab Quran members had apprehended suspected communists and handed them over to the Iranian army, which was denied by the group.[62] Khalkhali's next stop was Sanandaj. Similar news came there that judgments were handed down immediately after "trials" lasting only seconds, from a rudimentary "courthouse" established inside of Sanandaj's airport. The mere suspicion of membership in a rebel group brought the death penalty, without the opportunity to present evidence by the accused.

Then the next morning, on August 27, the Iranian daily *Ettela'at* newspaper released an anonymous photo under the caption "*40 people executed by firing squad in Sanandaj, Mariwan, and Paveh.*" The picture, a vivid, black-and-white still of what looked to be a firing squad, was reportedly taken at Sanandaj's airport. The image, picturing blindfolded men, some of them injured, falling backwards to their deaths in an open field, went "viral," being picked up by international publications within days. Shocking the conscience of the world, it was the first glimpse into hitherto opaque stories of the revolutionary government's use of violence, which, in less than a year, was making the Shah's pale in comparison. It became arguably the most iconic photo to come out of revolutionary Iran, winning a Pulitzer Prize.

Image 10 Firing squad at Sanandaj airport. *Source*: © Jahangir Razmi/Magnum Photos

Many of those executed in Sanandaj were reported to be Komala members, which automatically raised suspicion of Moftizadeh and Maktab Quran's involvement. The group blamed Maktab Quran for treasonous cooperation with the regime in hunting down other Kurds, a charge that the group continued to deny.[63] Khalkhali, upon whom history would bestow the name "Hanging Judge," would leave Sanandaj and move on to other Kurdish cities, reproducing his justice machine everywhere he went. In later years, Khalkhali would be asked repeatedly about the nature of his trials, and whether he had any regrets. His response was famously that to the contrary, he would repeat every execution again if he could. With respect to cooperation with Maktab Quran, he would later confirm that Moftizadeh had no part in helping him capture or execute Kurdish "infidels," and in fact sought to prevent the executions. Quite the opposite, he described Moftizadeh as a separatist that, like the other ill-fated defendants in his court, deserved to be tried and ultimately receive the "judgment of God."[64]

Regardless of whether Moftizadeh's collaboration with the regime was real or imagined, Moftizadeh's supporters report that Komala increased violence against them in that winter of 1979, ratcheting up intra-Kurdish

violence in Sanandaj that complemented Kurdistan's war with the regime. The word *jash*, or traitor, originally coined by *peshmerga* to describe Kurds who collaborated with the Iraqi regime in the 1960s, began to be used widely to describe Maktab Quran members.[65] Dozens of Maktab Quran members reported being attacked by Komala partisans, with a number of them beheaded by alleged Komala members.[66] Komala leadership today denies these allegations.[67]

In this environment of uncertainty in Kurdistan, the drafting sessions on the constitution continued in Tehran. As a special observer on the subject of minority ethnic and religious rights at the Assembly of Experts, Moftizadeh fought to prevent the exclusion of provisions relating to rights of Kurds (and other ethnicities), as well as the distinction of Shia Islam as the official religion of the republic. Moftizadeh made passionate appeals in front of the assembly, stating that the constitution passed as drafted would lead to potentially violent division between Iranians. He was reportedly supported in his disagreement with significant sections of the draft constitution by a number of clerics who supported a more minimal role for the clerical establishment, including Ayatollah Taleghani himself. Taleghani, who was an early proponent of limited clerical rule in the Islamic Republic, took issue most with the discarding of the secular portions of the constitution in favor of Islamic jurisprudential ones. He was purportedly in disagreement about the necessity of the institution of *velayateh faqih*, as well. In early sessions of the assembly, he was successful in arguing for the institution's exclusion.

Then, on September 9, 1979, news that Ayatollah Taleghani had collapsed during a meeting with the Soviet Ambassador to Iran hit the newswire. Shortly thereafter, Taleghani, known as the most progressive cleric in the ruling establishment, died. Like so much about Iran's history during the revolution, his death was shrouded in mystery; the last powerful moderate in the Assembly of Experts was gone. Just days later, *velayateh faqih* was voted to be added in the constitution's draft, according to minutes of the assembly's sessions that were released later.

Moftizadeh sensed that events were spiraling out of his control to the detriment of his position, and the optimism he had placed in negotiations with the government began to unravel. With little hope in further engagement with the Assembly of Experts, Moftizadeh made a trip to Qom and requested a meeting with the Imam. It was the morning after Section 12 of Article 1 of the constitution was approved by the assembly, declaring Shia Islam the official religion of Iran.

Moftizadeh was met in Qom by Khomeini's son Ahmad, and escorted to a room in the seminary. A prominent religious scholar from Baluchistan (also a Sunni) who will remain unnamed, as well as Majed Rohani, accompanied Moftizadeh to the meeting. They sat in a simple room there and waited for the Imam. Rohani narrates:

> *Khomeini entered and sat next to Moftizadeh, to his right. [The Baluchi cleric] was to Khomeini's right, and I sat in the corner of the room. Moftizadeh recounted events of recent days to him (Khomeini). He chronologically described events related to the drafting of the constitution, and then began his argument … He stated that if the constitution passes as it is, then Sunni Shia rivalry and violence would be unavoidable. He referenced past promises made to him and said that he was being deceived. Khomeini listened, then placed Moftizadeh's hand on his left knee and spoke. He said that on his side, he also had his necessities [and his requirements for building consensus]. He said that there were certain people in the government that would not accept a constitution as Moftizadeh wanted it, and asked rhetorically how he was supposed to propose that these elements be forced into the constitution [with the implicit reference to the fact that the Kurds had been anything but cooperative since the revolution, and did not have much support outside of Kurdistan]. 'If people continue to die, are you willing to have the blame to be on your neck?,' Khomeini asked rhetorically. He looked at [the Baluchi cleric], who responded with a cowering 'no.' Moftizadeh, after a pause, responded, 'we have pursued dialogue honestly. [We are the minority and we just want our rights.] If there is bloodshed, it is not our fault, it is the fault of the government. It is your fault.' After hearing this, Khomeini's face became agitated. He stated that he was tired, got up, and left the room.*[68]

Hours after meeting with Khomeini, Moftizadeh then went to see what he perceived as another moderate cleric in Qom who was one of Iran's highest-ranking (Grand) Ayatollahs, Ayatollah Mohammad Kazem Shariatmadari. Shariatmadari was also influential among many of the members of the Assembly of Experts. Majed Rohani remembers Shariatmadari's home being much fancier than where the Imam stayed. They were served by household staff and told to wait. When Shariatmadari arrived, Moftizadeh repeated the arguments that he had made to Khomeini. After an impassioned delivery by him, Shariatmadari responded rather nonchalantly that writing a constitution was a process, and that it would take some time. He encouraged Moftizadeh to be patient. Shariatmadari would not specifically address the fact that certain untenable sections had already been agreed;

Moftizadeh left in defeat.[69] It was at that moment, in the belief of Majed Rohani, that Moftizadeh had a change of heart vis-à-vis the regime. He began to believe that more likely than not, he was being intentionally misled. The consequences of all of the events of the last year dawned on him.

If Moftizadeh was going to be snubbed by the revolution's leadership, he decided he would make his voice heard publicly. It was, it could be said, his last hope of changing the tide of events before the constitution was finalized and the mayhem in Kurdistan escalated still further. A Tehran mosque famous for its history of activism—where Ali Shariati presented his reformist interpretations of Islam that would liken him to a Muslim Martin Luther, and Mehdi Bazargan presented his controversial ideas of Islam and the state—Moftizadeh entered the hallowed grounds at the Hosseinieh Ershad.[70] When the time for his first sermon came, at the top of his voice, he spared no feelings:

> *In the name of Islam, they have arrested a world of Sunnis and Shias, these liars! How dare you compare Khomeini to the companions of the Prophet? One thousand Khomeinis does not rise to the level of one of them … (speaking directly to the regime) You mischievous, honorless men! You claim we are brothers, and then when a Sunni criticizes Khomeini, you threaten to arrest him and call him a hypocrite, a wretched man. Is this brotherhood? I thank God that until now we have not sunk to the level of calling you nonbelievers. I thank God that until now we have not claimed that God is on our side, that our religion is correct and yours is wrong. Thank God for that. I encourage you to not put division between us either … We for our part don't criticize this government on their religion, no. The leaders of this government, who are drunk with power, we criticize them as men, when they put this many Sunnis and Shias and Muslims behind bars, that's why we criticize them. In the face of all of your treachery, we have not retaliated against one of you. But we will announce it … You say that Guardianship of the Jurisprudent is the true Islam, but we are against the Guardianship of a man, we don't accept man, we accept the Quran: (reciting the Quran) amrahom shura beinahom. Whether you call it the Royal Shah's government, or Velayateh Faqih, the rule of one man is the rule of one man … May the hands of the treacherous be broken!*[71]

After openly declaring in a Shia mosque that the regime was deceitful, and that he no could longer cooperate with the Imam (Khomeini, who he compared to the Shah in his arbitrariness), a number of listeners grew agitated. Moftizadeh was forced to leave the mosque through a back entrance.[72]

The Hijrah

Moftizadeh returned to Sanandaj in the midst of an all-out war between Kurdish rebels and the central government. The drafting of the constitution in its final stages, his decision to no longer work with the regime could only do so much to save his reputation. A handful of copies of his speech at Hosseinieh Ershad were distributed around the city by supporters, but the sound of government artillery and fighter jets drowned out the limited effect such an about-face could have on Moftizadeh's tarnished reputation in the eyes of many. His detractors sought to paint his supposed falling out with the regime, which they called a hoax, as yet another devious plot by the Islamic Republic to deceive the Kurds. Komala, in particular, successfully consolidated its base of support when it was proven that the wise man of God, as they once called him, was the last leader in Kurdistan to break with the regime that had murdered so many Kurdish civilians in cold blood.[73] A painfully satiristic expression began to make its way around Sanandaj: "Ahmad Moftizadeh took his suit to the cleaners, and forgot to remove the 'promise of autonomy' from his pocket beforehand."

By November 1979, the capital of the *Kordestan* province Sanandaj was effectively divided between an increasingly militant Komala group and Maktab Quran adherents who had lost much of their political mandate and raison d'être after the fallout with the regime. To make matters practically worse for Moftizadeh, the regime's military offensive that restored government control over many of Kurdistan's urban centers proved to be temporary. By December, the majority of Kurdistan's major cities were under the effective control of Kurdish parties again. This intimated to many that the war option for Kurdish guerillas was working.

Also by this time, the Assembly of Experts had submitted its final draft of the constitution. Its contents were manifestly inimical to the idea of minority rights, and arguably, democracy in Iran. In addition to Shia Islam being the official religion of the country, the Persian language became the official language of Iran (after the concept of ethnicity was publicly ruled un-Islamic by Khomeini), and *velayateh faqih* gave one Shia theologian arbitrary veto power over much of the country's affairs. When the new constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran went to a nationwide referendum during the first week of December, voter turnout was much lower than in previous referenda and virtually non-existent in Kurdistan and certain other minority provinces. It nonetheless passed with an overwhelming majority. Moftizadeh's political failure was finalized.

On a cold winter day in Sanandaj, Moftizadeh's brother Abdullah was at home with his family. The family's oldest son Reza, younger brother to three sisters, went to take some garbage from the kitchen to the street. Within a few seconds of him closing the front door, shots rang out. Reza scrambled back into the home to his startled family. When Abdullah went outside to investigate, he was forced to run back into the home under a hail of bullets. The holes left on the outside wall of the family home were evidence enough for the family that Komala members had tried to assassinate Moftizadeh's brother and nephew. This came on the heels of multiple attempts at Moftizadeh's own life in the months prior.[74]

At this juncture, despite his instructions, Moftizadeh also became aware of rumors that his followers and supporters were involved in instances of armed conflict with Komala rebels. Individuals who claimed allegiance to Moftizadeh had more likely than not committed their own retaliatory attacks on Komala members in Sanandaj. With hope for a political resolution lost and violence increasingly commonplace, it did not take much to imagine that events in Sanandaj could spiral into an all-out turf war between the Kurdish parties. Komala and KDPI accused Maktab Quran of ongoing collusion with the regime, or at best, incompetence in being fooled by the revolutionary leadership that waged war in Kurdistan. These parties were still gaining in their popularity as the new year approached and they held onto Kurdish cities triumphantly. The irreconcilability of the Maktab Quran and Komala views of the world was coming to a head. Moftizadeh, even if he did not fear death, knew his life was in danger, and further understood that his assassination would lead to civil war in Sanandaj and beyond. To avoid fratricide, there was only one clear option for him.

In January 1980, Moftizadeh announced to his supporters that he would leave Sanandaj and take up residence in Kermanshah, two hours away.[75] In describing his decision, he made reference to the Prophet Muhammad's *hijrah* from Mecca to Medina to avoid a conflict with Meccan tribesmen who wanted to kill him.[76] Like the experience of the Prophet and his companions, "though we do not want to kill them, they will kill us," he stated, in reference to Komala sympathizers in Kurdistan. He forbade his followers from engaging in any fighting with rival groups, and invited anyone who feared for their life to leave the city. That same month, Moftizadeh followed through on his announcement. Komala had effectively won its battle for influence in Sanandaj as the Mofti's son retreated.

Over the course of the next year and a half, Komala and other Kurdish rebels would fight a bloody war with the central government that would cost thousands of lives, ultimately without success.[77]

A War Imposed

From the city of Kermanshah, Moftizadeh continued to criticize the regime emphatically. He delegitimized its war against the Sunni minority, and denounced the Islamic Republic as being un-islamic—the ubiquitous "low-blow" of the revolutionary era. He instructed his supporters to boycott all forms of political life in the regime and withdraw all cooperation with the government.

Despite formally withdrawing his support and participation for the new government and becoming yet another opposition figure in Kurdistan, Moftizadeh did not this time retreat into private scholarship. His experience of the last few years had convinced him that Iran's Sunnis could never be properly served by a government that was suspicious of them and spiteful of their very core beliefs. He believed that Iran's Sunni minority needed to organize among themselves if they were to survive.[78] For all of these reasons, he announced the creation of SHAMS (*Shurayeh Markazi Sunnat,* or The Sunni Central Council). As a civil society group but not a political party, he hoped it would be the unified voice of Iran's Sunnis at a time where a Shia government sought to stifle it. Through the beginning of 1980 to the end of that summer, KDPI forces seemed to take the mantle of negotiation in mostly backdoor channels with the regime on Kurdish issues, and the fighting continued. Regardless of how prevalent or how earnest such negotiations were, about which there is some disagreement, they did not bear fruit.

On September 22, 1980, the unexpected event took place that would change the tide of Iran's history forever. Sensing weakness in his primary and more powerful rival to the east, Saddam Hussein ordered a land and air invasion into Iran. His hope was to take control of Tehran and install a friendly government, while annexing the oil rich portions of the south of the country. The recipe for success seemed to be there: The Iranian military was bogged down in Kurdistan, with many of its star generals from the former Royal army either executed or imprisoned. There was political dissatisfaction on a number of fronts domestically, and there were ethnic minorities (including Arabs) that would surely take advantage of such an attack to further ratchet up their conflict with the Islamic regime.

In the war's first months, as predicted, the Iranians suffered heavy losses in land and personnel. The revolutionary government that inherited one of the world's most capable armed forces scrambled to defend itself. Air force pilots from the Shah's army were yanked from their jail cells and thrown into American-made fighter jets and told to defend the homeland, as young Iranian men who had never held a gun traveled from all over the country to join the battle front and Khomeini's call to *jihad* against the invading army.

The Kurdish rebels in Iran were also caught off guard by the invasion and struggled to define what their position should be. On the one hand, joining the Iraqi army presented what seemed like the clearest opportunity yet to hand defeat to an Islamic Republic that had not acquiesced to any of their demands since the revolution. On the other hand, Saddam Hussein was also an established enemy of the Kurdish people, and collaborating with the Iraqi regime against the Iranian government would lead many Iranians to believe that the Kurds' asserted desire to be included in a unified and democratic Iran was a sham. This led to a number of confused alliances that were fluid in the first years of the war, exacerbated by the fact that in opportunistic fashion, the Iraqi KDP (with a much more tribal, and less idea-based alliance structure at this stage) colluded with the Iranian army to fight Iranian Kurdish forces in return for benefits if Iraq were defeated. Other Iraqi Kurdish groups, including the PUK, fought alongside their Kurdish Iranian cousins.[79]

Meanwhile, some of the revolution's losing political movements, most notably the leftist People's Mujahedin Organization (MKO) went underground and began a terror campaign against the Islamic Republic's leadership with the hopes of bringing down the regime from within. Ayatollah Beheshti and Mohammad Javad Bahonar, two of the highest-ranking officials of the Islamic Republic with whom Ahmad Moftizadeh reflected on prospects for regime change from the Shah's jail cells, were just two of the many notables killed in such attacks. By the end of 1981, Iran was in the midst of a full-scale war on all possible fronts.

Iran ultimately judged that consolidating its domestic arena was an essential first order of business in the uphill battle it fought with the invading Iraqi army. The Revolutionary Guard elite of the Iranian military redoubled efforts in the Kurdish region. In hoping to capitalize on the now recognized utility of a potent Kurdish nationalism and identity, Iran sought to organize the "Muslim Peshmerga" forces to cooperate with paramilitary units. The idea behind forming this militia was to partially

acknowledge ethnic identity while capitalizing on the anti-Communist sentiment of traditional conservative Kurdish society. By all accounts, this attempt failed to organize a significant portion of Iran's Kurdish Sunnis—most of the "Muslim Peshmerga"'s participants were tribal mercenaries or Shia Kurds. This meant that participation in the militia was practically insignificant. However, rumors spread that some of these Muslim Peshmerga members pledged allegiance to Ahmad Moftizadeh. As Moftizadeh publicly disavowed the group, the Iranian government simultaneously began its most indiscriminate sweep of political dissidents within the country. One of their primary targets were members of Maktab Quran that had publicly fallen out with the regime. They apprehended a number of these individuals in Sanandaj, where the political crackdown was heaviest, in August 1982. It was likely only a matter of time before they expanded the crackdown to other cities in Kurdistan.

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One hot summer day in Kermanshah, where, with a bit of imagination, the pleasant warmth of the afternoon could conceal for at least a few moments the cold and calculating war that was raging just miles away, Moftizadeh received a very special visitor in his home. The famed Kurdish poet, Abdul Rahman Sharafkandi, affectionately known as Mamosta (Chief) Hajar, had sought out a mutual contact and organized to make Moftizadeh's acquaintance, traveling to him from a suburb of Tehran. Hajar was a living icon of Kurdish culture. A poet and author of Kurdish literature, he was an early rebel of the Mahabad Republic who was forced into exile, only to later return to Iran. He is credited, in his dozens of written texts, of having helped formalize the modern Kurdish language. Upon learning that a number of Moftizadeh's closest followers had been rounded up across Kurdistan in the government crackdown, he wanted to speak to Moftizadeh, a friend of his, and also relay a message.

When they finally sat together, he spoke. "Kaka Ahmo," as Moftizadeh was affectionately known, "you know they are probably thinking about arresting you. If anything, they are planning it now."[80] Moftizadeh responded, looking his friend in the eye, "I know." Hajar continued, "I think you should leave the country. I have contacts that can help get you out of Iran. They are very professional men. There is no danger involved, and it would be their pleasure as a favor to me."[81]

Moftizadeh responded to Hajar, asking rhetorically, "It's not only about me. What about the people they have arrested? If I leave, what will happen to them? Aren't I the reason they were captured?" "They might

kill them instead," Moftizadeh finished. Hajar understood the point Moftizadeh was trying to make. But he nonetheless continued to reason with him, stating that his life was in danger, and if he left, it may actually help settle the nerves of the regime. That might even be the reason that they had not arrested him yet. But Moftizadeh did not entertain Hajar's suggestion. "If they arrest me, maybe they will release the others. My place is here. *Zor spas Mamosta gian* (thank you dear Chief)."

While in Tehran a week later, Moftizadeh sat in the home of Baba Mardokh Rohani, a respected Kurdish author and close family friend. It was August 30, 1982, and someone rang at the gate downstairs. Majed Rohani had just opened the apartment door on his way out into the city, and stated that he would go down to see who had rang. When he opened the gate to the street, four men pushed their way through and demanded to be told where Ahmad Moftizadeh was. They immediately charged up the stairs without waiting for an answer. Majed noticed a van waiting outside, flanked with a handful of other men. He recognized one of the men as someone who had posed as a Komala sympathizer a week ago in the offices of the publishing house where Majed worked. He was very surprised to see this man, who identified himself as "Ali Kayhan"; it dawned on him that the government had been secretly monitoring him and Moftizadeh in the weeks prior. The inevitability of what was happening quickly caught up with him.

Against the protests of the family, the men forced Moftizadeh down the stairs and into the waiting van. The younger men of the family obstructed the car with their bodies, insisting that they accompany the group wherever they were going. "Kayhan" tried to reason with them to get out of the way, before they eventually powered through the men, nearly running them over. The van disappeared down the street.

Conclusion

We have reviewed remarkable details about the inter- and intra-connectedness of the various movements and personages in Kurdistan and Iran—from Moftizadeh meeting and befriending future Shia revolutionary leaders in the Shah's prisons to his ultimately being ideologically pitted against his own family by marriage. But there is perhaps no better example of the fine line between brotherhood and division that existed in Iranian Kurdistan at this time than a story related by Moftizadeh's niece, daughter of Ahmad's older brother Abdullah. When she traveled back to Iran on

the occasion of Abdullah's passing away in the late 80s, she was surprised to see a poster of Ayatollah Khomeini up in the family's home outside of Tehran. It turned out that even with his brother Ahmad in the Islamic Republic's jails, and despite hosting Moftizadeh on occasional home visits from prison and praying daily for his release, he kept a picture of Ayatollah Khomeini up in his home until he died. So embittered by what he saw as a terror campaign in Kurdistan by the "Communists" that forced him and his family out of Sanandaj, he supported the government's successful effort to subdue them.

Moftizadeh's perennial mistake in the eyes of many Kurdish nationalists was his optimism about the intentions of the revolutionary government, and his painstaking attempts at forming a consensus with it instead of siding with the other Kurdish parties and their demands unilaterally. But Moftizadeh was right when he stated that the revolution and its leaders were extremely popular in Iran. Most of Iran was optimistic about the intentions of the Imam. Most of Iran trusted the regime to be more democratic than the previous regime. The real question, then, is not why Moftizadeh associated with the revolution's leadership; it is why the rest of Kurdistan did not. And there is an answer to this question.

The Iranian government would eventually gain control of all of the restive Kurdish cities by the end of 1982. But battles in Kurdistan would continue throughout the Iran–Iraq war, on both sides of the border. In cities like Sanandaj and Mahabad, a generation of Kurdish men vanished in the haze of their leaders' disparate ideas, leaving scars that continue to haunt the region today. Thousands of children born in close proximity to the war were left orphans, or if lucky, ended up in the diaspora, with their destinies forever altered by the hands of events that were uncompromising. Just miles away near the Iraqi border, Saddam Hussein would fight his own, even more brutal battle with the Kurds that he coined the Al-Anfal (Spoils of War) campaign after a verse of the Quran. The campaign culminated in the chemical weapons attacks on the Iraqi Kurdish city of Halabja broadcast in photos around the world. All told, Hussein killed nearly 200,000 Kurds in less than three years, in what is now called a genocide. As the Islamic Republic and Ba'ath regimes painted their wars in Kurdistan as a *jihad* against the infidels, Kurdish nationalism and sovereignty was the enduring ideology that all Kurdish parties advanced to some degree during this period.

While some tribal leaders sought to denounce the leadership of the main Kurdish nationalist parties at the time of the revolution (especially those

tribes that were patronized by the Shah), most tribes pledged allegiance to one of the main Kurdish parties or were overwhelmed by the nationalists. By the time of the Iranian revolution, Kurdish tribal identity for the majority had adopted Kurdish nationalism as the form of exceptionalism that would differentiate it from the "others" around it—Arab, Persian, and Turkish identity, as well as Islamism. In that sense, despite his nationalist credentials, as an Islamist, Ahmad Moftizadeh's movement was an anachronism. Islam was no longer a unifying factor in Kurdish identity by this time, and so seeking to make Islam a fundamental feature of a Kurdish movement, even one that emphasized nationalism secondarily, would necessarily fail.

The Marxism of Komala, a group founded by Kurdish intellectuals in Tehran, would also fail to unite Kurdistan as Islamism did. Komala would soon form a practical alliance with Sheikh Ezzedin to broaden its base. And as Komala further developed, it essentially discarded the Marxist centrality of its doctrine.[82] Decades after the revolution, Komala and the KDPI would arguably become two branches of the same group, with Kurdish nationalism as their fundamental ethos.[83] Maktab Quran, for its part, continues to exist as a religious organization with Kurdish identity. As will be discussed, it is involved in no political activity, and remains a relatively small and devout core group of members. And as this book's final part explains, Iranian Kurdistan, like the rest of Kurdistan, has developed a cross-cutting Kurdish nationalism that is now the cornerstone of its political ambition. In an era of resurgent political Islam, no significant Islamist presence exists across Kurdistan's thousands of miles and 40 million or so people.

Kurdistan did not follow the general Iranian pattern of optimism, association, and cooperation with the revolutionaries of the nascent Islamic Republic, because this was inimical to Kurdish identity as it had developed over the previous 100 years.[84]

Notes

1. Khomeini was, of course, known in Shia religious centers as one of its highest ranked clerics. But to your average Iranian, as with the rest of the world, he was unknown at this stage.
2. Amuzegar, Jahangir. *The Dynamics of the Iranian Revolution the Pahlavis' Triumph and Tragedy*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991. 253–256.

3. This was corroborated by all individuals who were close to Moftizadeh during this period.
4. Rohani, Majed Interviews.
5. Mardokh-Rohani, Fuad Interviews and others to remain anonymous.
6. See Branigin, William. "Kurdish Unrest Adds to Woes of Iran's Military Rulers." The Washington Post, November 21, 1979.
7. Ibid.
8. Mohtadi, Abdullah Interviews.
9. Mohtadi's claims about Komala's history seem plausible, especially given how quickly the group seemed to attract prominent members after declaring itself publicly in the days following the revolution. In the Komala narrative, these individuals were in fact underground members of the group for many months or even years prior to the revolution.
10. Rohani, Majed Interviews. Coming from a person who does not hesitate to critique Moftizadeh, Majed Rohani, this argument seems most plausible.
11. Ibid.
12. Mohtadi, Abdullah Interviews. Even Abdullah Mohtadi admits that Moftizadeh was unique in his popularity and influence in the months before and after the revolution, calling him "the most popular or second most popular person in Sanandaj." He explains Komala's support for Moftizadeh's anti-regime statements before the revolution as evidence of the group's desire to promote unity in Kurdistan despite claims that it fomented division. Maktab Quran members instead view this support as the opportunistic bandwagoning of a hitherto little known and inactive group.
13. Mardokh-Rohani, Fuad and others to remain anonymous.
14. Rohani, Majed Interviews.
15. Around November 1978, Moftizadeh released *Hokoomateh Islami,* or Islamic Government, which was a book composed of transcripts of a series of speeches he had made on the subject of the *shura* system of Islamic government.
16. Mofti, Parvin Interviews.
17. Branigin, W. "Kurdish Unrest Adds to Woes of Iran's Military Rulers."
18. Ibid.
19. Rohani, Majed Interviews.
20. Kamali, F (P. 184).
21. Bakhtiar would later be assassinated in Paris, allegedly on the regime's orders.
22. Rohani, Majed Interviews.
23. Ibid.
24. Ibid.

25. For a more thorough discussion of the *shura* system and Moftizadeh's views of government, the next chapter provides further context.
26. C.R., Jonathan. "Kurds' Autonomy Cries Rekindle Ethnic Flashpoint in Iran." The Washington Post, March 2, 1979.
27. Ibid and Prunhuber, Carol. *The Passion and Death of Rahman the Kurd: Dreaming Kurdistan*. New York: IUniverse, Inc, 2009. 50. Forouhar, who later withdrew support for the Islamic Republic as it was eventually enshrined, was assassinated in his home in the 1990s.
28. See Koven, Ronald. "Troubles Erupt in Iran's Border Areas." The Washington Post, March 19, 1979.
29. Rohani, Majed Interviews and Mardokh-Rohani, Fuad Interviews.
30. Koven, R. "Troubles Erupt in Iran's Border Areas."
31. Rohani, Majed Interviews.
32. Mardokh-Rohani, Fuad Interviews.
33. Prunhuber, Carol. *The Passion and Death of Rahman the Kurd: Dreaming Kurdistan*. New York: IUniverse, Inc, 2009. 50.
34. Rohani, Majed Interviews.
35. Prunhuber, C. (P. 54).
36. See C.R., Jonathan. "Kurds' Autonomy Cries Rekindle Ethnic Flashpoint in Iran." The Washington Post, March 2, 1979.
37. See Koven, Ronald. "Troubles Erupt in Iran's Border Areas." The Washington Post, March 19, 1979.
38. Rohani, Majed Interviews.
39. More on Moftizadeh and his belief in the concept of nonviolence is covered in the following chapter. Komala leadership today does not claim that Moftizadeh ever actively advocated for armed violence or organized an armed militia, but that his rhetoric and alignment with the government bred such activities. Mohtadi, Abdullah Interviews.
40. Mohtadi, Abdullah Interviews.
41. Bani Sadr would become the Islamic Republic's first president. He would later flee the country after being impeached.
42. Rafsanjani would become Iran's president during much of the Iran–Iraq war, and one of the Islamic Republic's major power brokers.
43. Ayatollah Beheshti, who would meet an untimely death as the result of a terrorist act, was a contact of Moftizadeh's in prison, and a close confidant of Ayatollah Khomeini.
44. Rohani, Majed Interviews.
45. Mofidi, Sabah. "Religion and Politics in Eastern Kurdistan." Journal of Politics and Law 8, no. 3, 45.
46. Mardokh-Rohani, Fuad Interviews.
47. See Kamali, F. (P. 179–186).
48. In addition to this, organization of demands on behalf of other ethnic minorities was decidedly less pronounced than it was in Kurdistan. See

Entessar, Nader. *Kurdish Politics in the Middle East*. Rev. ed. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2010. 36.

49. Mofidi, S. (P. 39).
50. Mohtadi, Abdullah Interviews.
51. For a general discussion, see Mackey, Sandra. *The Iranians: Persia, Islam, and the Soul of a Nation*. Plume, 1996. 289–310.
52. Mardokh-Rohani, Fuad and others to remain anonymous.
53. For a discussion, see Rieffer-Flanagan, Barbara Ann. *Evolving Iran: An Introduction to Politics and Problems in the Islamic Republic*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2013. 50–56
54. Prunhuber, C. (P. 77–78)
55. "Khomeini's Fatwa on Events in Kurdistan" (translated from Persian). Kayhan Newspaper, Aug. 18, 1979.
56. Prunhuber, C. (P. 54).
57. The term *velayateh faqih* has become synonymous with the idea of Islamic government in Iranian parlance today. It provides the Islamic jurisprudential basis for the vesting of significant amounts of power in one "jurisprudent," coined in the west as a "supreme leader." Contrary to widespread modern belief discounting the idea as a novelty and "power grab" exercise by the new Iranian regime, Khomeini had actually advocated for this form of Islamic government approximately ten years prior to the revolution.
58. This was the beginning of a protracted, all-out war in Kurdistan that would only end in earnest years later.
59. See Appendix 2, "Haunted Memories: The Islamic Republic's Executions of Kurds in 1979." Iran Human Rights Documentation Center, September 2011.
60. For a general discussion, see Thurgood, Liz. "Iranian Forces Pursue Retreating Kurds." The Guardian, September 6, 1979.
61. "Haunted Memories: The Islamic Republic's Executions of Kurds in 1979." Iran Human Rights Documentation Center, September, 2011. 14–23.
62. Ibid. P. 20.
63. In a taped recording of Moftizadeh likely during his time in Kermanshah (some months later), he would explain that upon first learning of Khalkhaki's executions in other parts of Kurdistan, he demanded to see him when he arrived in Sanandaj. When they met, in response to Moftizadeh's assertion that such executions, if true, were contrary to Islam, Khalkhali reportedly responded—"This is a Revolutionary court, not an Islamic court!" It was while meeting with supporters the next day to determine how to prevent further executions of this kind that he received word by telephone of the August 27 executions.

64. *Nashriyeh Azadegan* (Newspaper), October 28, 1984 (6 Aban, 1363).
65. See Gunter, Michael M. *Historical Dictionary of the Kurds.* Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press, 2004. 151 for information about the word. See also Rahmani, Seyed Ali. Correspondences with Ezzatyar, Ali. Letter from Qandil Mountains transmitted through KDPI leadership. July 23, 2015. In this correspondence, the KDPI representative explains that the word *jash* was first used in Iranian Kurdistan to describe Moftizadeh.
66. Mofti, Hussein Interview.
67. Mohtadi, Abdullah Interviews.
68. Rohani, Majed Interviews
69. Shariatmadari would later be involved in an alleged plot to overthrow the government, and was confined to house arrest until his death in 1986.
70. Sreberny, Annabelle, and Ali Mohammadi. *Small Media, Big Revolution: Communication, Culture, and the Iranian Revolution.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994. 87.
71. Here, Moftizadeh advocates for the *shura* system anew, essentially arguing that a consensus based democratic system is the Islamic system of government, not *velayateh faqih.* Speech by Ahmad Moftizadeh at Hosseinieh Ershad mosque in Tehran, October 1979. Maktab Quran audio archives.
72. Rohani, Majed Interviews.
73. Ibid.
74. Contrary to testimony by certain Maktab Quran members past and present, there is no evidence of a concerted effort by Komala's leadership to violently drive Maktab Quran members out of Sanandaj, or of widespread targeting of Komala rivals as a matter of Komala policy.
75. Kermanshah, a Shia Kurdish city, remained relatively calm with respect to ethnic conflict when compared to other Kurdish cities.
76. For more of a discussion on the narrative of the *hijrah*, see the next chapter.
77. It is worthwhile to take a moment to reflect on Komala as a party at this juncture. Most notable is a fundamental, and ironic, similarity between Moftizadeh/Maktab Quran, and the Mohtadis/Komala. Both were Kurdish nationalists that espoused certain other ideas that were at their core more essential than nationalism to their overall ethos: Islam and Marxism were both premised on dialectics that were more fundamental than national identity. Both groups had limited alliances with non-Kurdish groups that employed these non-nationalist ideas to varying degrees throughout their existence, unlike the KDPI. The fact that a Komala party could exist in 1979, however, demonstrates that Kurdish nationalism had matured to a point where it could shoulder the weight of an ideology that was relatively unknown to Kurdistan, namely Marxism. Looking forward in Komala's development, it is not surprising then that as time went on,

they became less pronounced in their Marxist rhetoric, and more pronounced in their nationalist rhetoric.

78. As mentioned in Chapter 1 of this book, there was a belief at the onset of the rebellion in Kurdistan, and such a belief continues to exist, that the Islamic Republic is on a mission to convert Iran's Sunnis to Shia Islam as the Safavids did some centuries prior. The extent of this belief is significant. Partisans of this idea note the exceptional funding Shia institutions of learning get in the Kurdish region, the existence of government pensions and benefits for those who convert to Shia Islam, and the prohibition on free association of the Sunni minority to bolster their arguments about this government policy.
79. Kamali, F. (P. 190–192). Despite political arrangements and ebbs and flows on the battlefield changing by the month, and millions of casualties, at the end of eight years of war, the status quo on borders and autonomy between Iraq and Iran, including their respective Kurdish regions, did not change.
80. In the Kurdish language, the term *Kaka* is the equivalent of a very affectionate form of "Mr."
81. Rohani, Majed Interviews and others to remain anonymous.
82. Mohtadi, Abdullah Interviews. This is not indifferent to the developmental path of the PKK, Turkey's predominant Kurdish party.
83. In 2012, Komala and the KDPI signed a treaty of cooperation between them. Only their distinct histories and, from an outsider's perspective, minor policy differences maintain them as separate parties. Both of the parties' respective platforms now resemble none other than the charter establishing the Mahabad Republic. Of the three smaller splinter groups of Komala that have developed since the 1980s, only one has maintained a Marxist ethos, with a very limited following.
84. This answers the question posed in the second paragraph of this chapter's conclusion. But a second question is, why did the Kurdish parties fail to unite, if there was ultimately unity of purpose? The answer seems to be a combination of some bad luck (geographical disparity in the midst of rebellion, the Iran–Iraq war, etc.), but especially, a very competent Iranian central government that overpowered it. Northern-Iranian Kurdistan and Southern-Iranian Kurdistan were locked in their own respective battles with the central government that also successfully managed to carve wedges between them repeatedly. Truth be told, the Kurdish political apparatus was no match for that of the Islamic revolutionaries, who were better organized through their religious centers, and significantly more powerful militarily.

CHAPTER 6

Letters from Prison: The Legacy of a Progressive Islam of Nonviolence

The Iran–Iraq war had a number of fallouts that were unforeseen when the world threw its support behind the Iraqi invasion. What may have seemed like a natural decision to support Saddam Hussein as a counterweight to Iran's hostile and ambitious revolutionary government had its own hidden complications. As much of the West and the Arab world provided arms and logistical support to the Ba'ath regime, the most enduring effects on Iran were forged in the domestic political arena.

Ayatollah Khomeini was always the figurehead of the Iranian revolution, but an internal power struggle between all of the revolution's participants continued for some time after 1980. It is now known that the injustice felt by ordinary Iranians of all political persuasions at the onset of the war created a unique unity of purpose across the country to defend the homeland against Saddam and the world's aggression.[1] This banding together and focus on a common purpose allowed Khomeini's conservative wing to consolidate power domestically and purge enemies, as well as minimalist elements within the clerical establishment, with little fuss. Those actively seeking to destabilize the revolutionary government came to be seen by many as undermining the country's survival. The international community did not have the relationship with Iran's government that would have been necessary to discourage a bloody consolidation, and attempts to strengthen the drowning moderates in Iran's new government (such as by way of the alleged arms sales to those factions) were in vain. With an Iranian populace

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mostly focused on self-preservation, domestic politics took a backseat and the new government was forgiven for many of its shortcomings.

Behind a cloak of secret courts and maximum security prisons, revolutionary judges administered rudimentary trials and issued mass execution orders, destroying opposition movements' one alleged leader or member at a time. Many who were executed, including many innocent individuals with the wrong association at the wrong time, met their fates without the benefit of any semblance of a fair trial. The 20-minute judgment and execution of 11 Kurds in Sanandaj by Iran's hanging judge was just one of many examples—one that had the benefit, or misfortune, of being captured by the camera's eye for the world to behold.

As we have learned, even many of those who appeared with the Ayatollah in Paris or Tehran around his triumphant return were accused of treasonous plots and summarily executed as the conservative government consolidated its ideology and grip on rule. Henry Kissinger is famously reputed to have said that the only problem with the Iran–Iraq war was that "both [countries] can't lose." But both countries did lose, with thousands of lives lost and countless casualties on both sides. On the Iranian side, thousands of political prisoners were executed or tortured in Iran's prisons during the war, including Ahmad Moftizadeh. He would stay there for over a decade, with charges against him never formally announced.[2] Through his letters from prison, and his limited permitted interaction with family and followers, this chapter seeks to reconstruct his ideological underpinnings and last days.

The Fall of 1982

When Ahmad Moftizadeh was arrested in August 1982, approximately 200 other active members of Maktab Quran were also arrested. Their whereabouts were unknown for some time. At the end of 1982, a handful of them were released, and with their return to Sanandaj came harrowing details of torture and mistreatment in the Islamic Republic's jails. A common feature of the Islamic Republic's broadcast television during this period was the "ideological regret" video. They featured prominent activists professing their curious new allegiance to the Islamic regime (after some time in jail).[3] Many of these activists were very well-known and ardent opposition figures to the regime; in some cases, the entire top brass of prominent groups would be paraded in front of the camera together for a mass confession. The released Maktab Quran members confirmed that

the regime sought to force confessions and apologies from them, and were likely applying the most pressure to Moftizadeh himself.

Eventually, when it was revealed that Moftizadeh had been moved to Tehran's notorious Evin prison, his family and supporters knew his short-term release was rather unlikely. In the first year he was in prison, he was only allowed to communicate with the outside world by phone a handful of times. He was not able to speak comfortably or for any significant length, and was audibly in distress. When his family went to Tehran to try and see Moftizadeh at the prison, they were turned away repeatedly. What his family could not know yet was that he underwent physical torture which made his experience in the Shah's jail pale in comparison. Prone to seizures due to a weak liver, Moftizadeh had taken seizure medicine daily for a number of years prior to being arrested, even breaking his fast on some occasions to consume this medicine which was essential to his well-being. It was deprived to him for weeks at a time while in prison. One can imagine the result.

As doctors would later confirm, the torture he received in solitary confinement also led to a number of broken bones for which he was never adequately treated. Perhaps the worst injury was the one to his neck, which confined him to a neck brace for the rest of his life. With a hood over his head, the tall Moftizadeh was pushed through a doorway, nearly killing him.[4] Despite all of this, stubborn or principled, he remained an ardent critic of the Islamic regime during his entire time in prison, where he spent close to seven years in solitary confinement.[5] In the end, Moftizadeh never appeared on state television to apologize.

One cannot help but reflect on the advice he gave his niece about "being ready for jail," as he squeezed her hand on that foreboding day in Tehran years ago. For Moftizadeh, a person so avowedly averse to political violence, yet so prone to temper tantrums, being a political prisoner in Iran's revolutionary jails brought unthinkable misery. Preparation for the sort of treatment he received would have been impossible, with the tangible value of life so blurred in Iran's war society. Hundreds, sometimes thousands, of Iranians died daily during those first months of his imprisonment, at the hands of a neighboring country and countrymen alike. The execution of a perceived traitor, or someone who "endangered national security," was a decision taken with lamentable ease. Moftizadeh's companions and followers who made official inquiries about his condition often became surveillance targets for Iranian intelligence, and requests to deliver a message or have some sort of communication with Moftizadeh inevitably failed.

Every day was a tentative one for Ahmad Moftizadeh's supporters, waiting for news of some finality, news which never came in that fall of 1982.

Maktab Quran members other than Moftizadeh stayed in prison for up to four years; by 1987, Maktab Quran says that all but Moftizadeh were released. Of course, this did little to satisfy his followers. They were naturally despondent at his continued isolation, and some reportedly left his movement to join the *peshmerga* and take up arms against the government. Despite the injustice felt by all of his followers during this period, though, and despite the climate of war in Kurdistan and Iran generally, Maktab Quran never actively advocated a violent response to Moftizadeh's arrest. The nonviolent credo of the school turned movement's leader holds strong to this day.

As the months and years rolled on, the Iran–Iraq war settled into a stalemate, and the *peshmerga* insurgency was effectively quelled by the Iranian army. Around the same time, the highest-ranking Shia religious theologian in Iran, Ayatollah Montazeri, had reportedly interceded with Ayatollah Khomeini to request leniency for Moftizadeh, whom he knew to be an honest scholar "loyal to Islam."[6] One day, at the same home where Moftizadeh was apprehended in Tehran, a knock came at the door. To the surprise of the Rohani family that resided there, a number of men appeared, with a frail Moftizadeh in front of them. The day he was apprehended, he was 194 pounds. On his first home visit, Majed Rohani, in shock at how much weight Moftizadeh seemed to have lost, weighed him again. He was now 119 pounds.

The occasional home visits became an infrequent routine where Iranian officials would show up randomly with Moftizadeh or call one of Moftizadeh's family members the same day to inform them that Moftizadeh would be brought to attend some event—usually a funeral or mourning ceremony of a loved one. Naturally, all of these events had to occur in Tehran and he was never allowed to visit Kurdistan, for fear that his presence would immediately trigger broader hostilities again. Even in Tehran, a massive security contingent would be on hand to ensure that there was no trouble during these last minute drop-ins. On one of these occasions, Moftizadeh was brought to the funeral of Baba Mardokh Rohani, the close family friend from Tehran in whose home he was originally apprehended. Upon embracing one of his family members and trusted confidants, he placed a letter into his friend's jacket, a gest that was caught by an onlooking guard. With many looking on in confusion, a number of armed Iranian officials reacted with force, jumping on the men around Moftizadeh and Moftizadeh himself, separating

them and leaving the scene with the unfortunate prisoner. Another time, Moftizadeh suddenly appeared with guards at the funeral procession of a friend and well-respected intellectual in Tehran. After the procession, Moftizadeh's family requested his government escorts to allow him to return to one of the family residences for a few hours and have a meal. He was visibly tired and nobody had the opportunity to speak to him during the funeral, so the crowd was irritated by the idea of him leaving right away. When the escorts refused, a melee ensued which nearly turned into a human shield to prevent him from leaving, were it not for the rapid evacuation of Moftizadeh.

Still looking to combat Iran's stated desire to "export the revolution," and undermine its credibility as Islam's flagbearer, Moftizadeh's plight also became a small cause célèbre among Iran's Sunni-Arab rivals. With help from Persian Gulf monarchies and their lobbying apparatuses, Moftizadeh's story was taken up by organizations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch to demonstrate Iran's repression of religious minorities.[7,8] Even non-governmental Sunni groups, such as the Muslim Brotherhood, reportedly advocated Moftizadeh's release and claimed him to be an affiliated member.[9] There is no evidence to suggest he had any material contact with any of these governments or groups prior to or during his imprisonment. Nonetheless, all of this likely had the opposite effect of helping secure Moftizadeh's release, as it allowed and encouraged the Iranian regime to paint Moftizadeh as a collaborator with foreign entities. One related anecdote corresponds to when Moftizadeh was on his longest escorted outside visit, on the occasion of his brother Abdullah's death. During these three days in Tehran, he was allowed to speak by phone with friends and family, and among these conversations, he was called by a cousin in the USA and another family member who was living in Saudi Arabia. According to Moftizadeh's family, these were the only two conversations he had by phone with anyone outside of Iran. When his cousin, a student of political science, was reading pro-Iranian government press out of Sanandaj some days later, she was shocked to find an article on Moftizadeh, which contained a reference to his recent home visit, and his illicit "contacts by phone with external agents from the United States and Saudi Arabia."[10]

Despite these events, toward the late 1980s, as Moftizadeh aged and his health became more tenuous, monitored paper correspondence was allowed to reach him in prison. After the Iran–Iraq war had ended, when it was learned that Moftizadeh's conditions in prison were improving, individuals would travel from Kurdistan to Tehran to try to visit him.

While these attempts were usually unsuccessful, sometimes a letter could be given to him after being cleared by authorities; slowly, an infrastructure developed for his followers to consolidate and deliver religious questions to him in prison by letter. While it is impossible to verify, individuals who were involved in the Maktab Quran movement during the revolution claim that his influence continued among the entire Sunni population of Iran. The content of the correspondence to him while in prison does indicate that he received letters from Sunni worshipers all over Iran, and this is at least one piece of evidence that seems to suggest this was true. Whenever Moftizadeh was allowed an escorted daytime release in Tehran to attend a proceeding of some kind, he was also allowed to leave a correspondence which in large part responded to the questions he had received by letter, and offered some general thoughts on spirituality and Islamic guidance.[11] Many of the dates on his letters from prison correspond to the dates of these home visits as a result of the informal system described above.[12] After six years in prison, his first archived letter is dated October 27, 1988:

> I thank God for the opportunity to address my brothers, sisters, and children. That which is in my heart, that which I desire, is clearly far from my current predicament. But I will choose a few words quickly to express my thoughts to you. In a difficult situation like this, it is difficult for me to offer any guidance to you; I am so lucky and so flattered to have you behind me [and still seeking my opinion on matters] …
>
> Remember above all that your value is in your faith. And your value is in how much you do for the poor and needy. You should stay united by doing good together. Stay patient in the face of adversity, and if you have differences among you, do not let them divide you. Even if another Muslim makes mistakes, you should be patient and seek to nurture him. The goal should be to end conflict, between people and between Muslims. You should be forgiving, so that God likes you. Do work for God and the people. If you have had a conflict or disagreement with someone for some time, act to resolve it now.

On penning this short and high-level correspondence, he was likely given a small window to prepare—he notes in the letter that he wrote it so quickly, he did not have an opportunity to check it for spelling.

Moftizadeh's letters over the next five years would be less rushed, and amount to hundreds of pages of responses to questions from his followers, providing insight into his mind and spiritual evolution before his death. They are used as a primary guide for his followers today in seeking to

maintain the tradition of Maktab Quran in Sanandaj and beyond. It is important to remember here that there were many twists and turns that Moftizadeh's ideas and viewpoints took prior to the interpretations he settled on before his death. Like many historical figures of note, he was a man of some contradiction, both in the chronology of his life and even in the details of his thinking at any given time. Where his ideas stood after a life of activism and two bouts in prison, as well as his temperament, were not always what they were a decade or two decades prior. However, Moftizadeh's letters are the only reliable formal record of his final spiritual outlook, and are the most acceptable attribution to him. Maktab Quran at this stage in the late 1980s settled on a place and saw itself the way it sees itself today: a religious organization (and not a "party") made up of followers of Moftizadeh, who accept his fundamental interpretations of God and spirituality. Those interpretations are presented here.

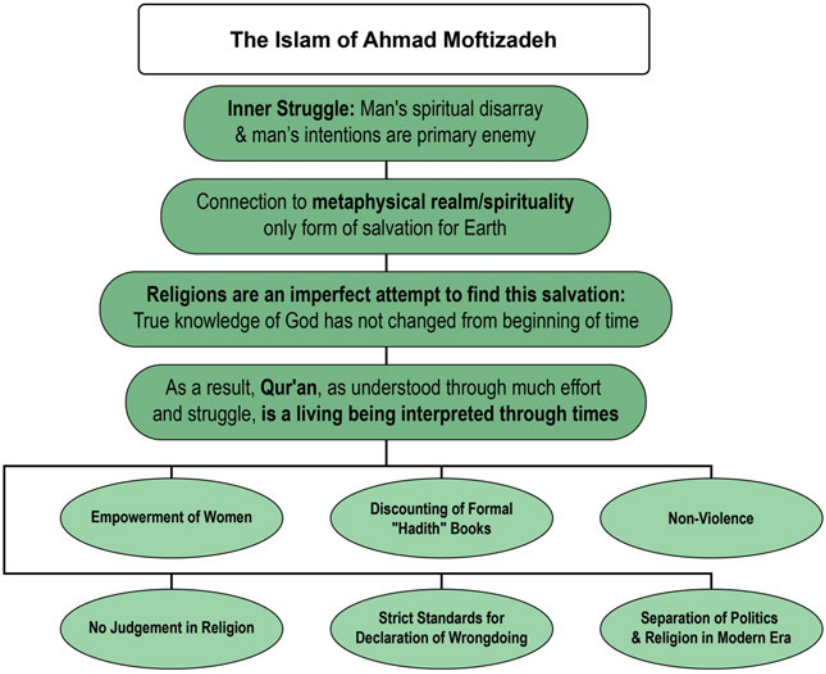

Image 11 Fundamental features of the Islam of Ahmad Moftizadeh

The Quran Is Alive

> All religious obligation can be summed up in one word: Affection.[13]—Ahmad Moftizadeh

In the religious interpretation of Ahmad Moftizadeh, there was no "religion" of Islam, as distinguished between true versions of Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, or Hinduism. There was only one God that all of these religions sought to articulate, and the spiritual connection to this God was personal before it was collective. There was no superiority among the prophets, of course, and disparaging interpretations of certain religious practices, such as the worship of statues as "idols" in other religions, were faulty and simplistic. The various formal religious attempts at connection to the creator were all imperfect for Moftizadeh, and this included the formalized doctrinal Islam of modern times.

In the view of Ahmad Moftizadeh, Muslims failed to see that the Quran, written 1400 years ago, like the revelations in the Torah and other holy books, was not static. If they were to be inspired or sent by God, which he believed they were, they had to be applicable to all times. For Moftizadeh, if the believer sought in earnest to find God in the Quran, he had to first accept that it was a living text and its edicts were fluid; importantly, the Quran could not be contrary to itself and the human spirit on any matter. It was for all times, and hence certain parts of it, if applied simplistically to modern times, rendered decidedly ungodly practices.[14] "The Quran is not a book," Moftizadeh said, "but a forest. A world. It lives, it breathes. Anyone who ever said 'my religion,' or 'your religion,' never understood religion."

Seeking guidance from the Quran, given the complexity of its composition, was a two-part approach. First, the believer had to seek spirituality in earnest. Even Moftizadeh himself admitted that he spent much of his life failing at this task. Moftizadeh believed it possible to know the truth, with zero doubt, but still choose not to follow it. A simplistic analogy is the smoker who knows that smoking is bad for him, but continues to smoke. Following the path that you believe to be correct is a first step in connecting to God.[15]

Secondly, even if one can achieve this steadfastness in most parts of his or her life, having a trusted guide to interpret the religious "texts" is often necessary, given the different levels of progression that individuals

are in with regard to their spiritual development. Most interpretations of the Prophet's actions, and many interpretations of the Quran, were shortsighted. Moftizadeh saw his role as a guide, being someone who had spent more time and effort at the internal struggle of betterment than others, as an acceptable role to have. There was, however, no compulsion in religion, and no compulsion in who such a person's earnestly chosen guide would be.

This gives rise to another important feature of Moftizadeh's thinking that appears frequently in his writings, relating to the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad himself. In standard Islamic doctrine, after the pre-eminent guidance of the Quran, the traditions of the Prophet (the *sunnah*) and his verbal pronouncements (the *hadith*), as narrated and recorded by individuals years after his death, are the main source of behavioral guidance. For Moftizadeh, the content of these secondary sources were to be scrutinized heavily. "When you hear religious guidance, don't believe it automatically. It does not matter who tells you. You have to verify, does it make sense? Does it go with the Quran? Even in the *hadith*. You have to believe something is true before you follow it."[16] He criticizes scholars and individuals who are not critical of *hadith* that clearly contradict the Quran. Without an in-depth knowledge of and bond with the Quran, one could not evaluate whether certain narrations of the *sunnah* were likely to be valid or not, in Moftizadeh's view.[17]

The Shura System of Governance

> As much as you try to be relevant from this land of Kurdistan, know that all decisions and events are decided in Tehran … Whether I am free or not, this country, Iran, is our collective prison.[18]—Ahmad Moftizadeh

The primarily administrative feature of Maktab Quran and Moftizadeh's philosophy, central to the group's ethos from the day Moftizadeh first opened a Maktab Quran branch in Mariwan, is the *shura* system, or system of "consultation."

This word, the title of one of the Quran's chapters, is mentioned throughout the Muslim holy book and is commonly accepted to imply that at least to some degree, a Muslim has an obligation to make decisions on the basis of consensus with the community affected by such decisions. It is first mentioned in the second verse of the Quran to refer to a decision

on simple family affairs, which demonstrated to Moftizadeh that it was a crucial practice that should permeate every aspect of the believer's life. A booklet entitled *Hokoomateh Islami*, or Islamic government, which is a compilation of speeches that Moftizadeh gave on the subject, is in the Maktab Quran archives and sheds some light on the contours of this philosophy. But as Maktab Quran members will tell you today, it is a simple concept: Every decision affecting a community should be made by consensus. Moftizadeh would often rhetorically state a phrase from the Quran, *"amrahom shura beinahom,"* to imply that the *shura* system should apply to every piece of decision making among any two Muslims. This word and approach came to symbolize Maktab Quran's platform during the Iranian revolution and its claim to be a democratic institution at its core.

When the Shah fled Iran and Moftizadeh left Sanandaj for Kermanshah, he sought to organize Iran's Sunni population along the lines of the *shura* system through an institution called SHAMS, or the Sunni Central Shura. In his mind, such an organization should be the mouthpiece for Iran's Sunnis vis-à-vis the central government. This group, which "reluctantly" concerned itself with the religious and political matters of all of Iran's *ahl al-sunnat* (Sunnis), was originally conceived in February of 1979, but its activities increased (and it was formally called SHAMS) when Moftizadeh fell out with the Islamic Republic. We also learned previously that in discussions with the Islamic Republic's early leaders, Moftizadeh advocated implementation of such a system across Iran to consolidate the different Islamic interpretations that existed across the country. For him, the Islamic Republic's fundamental system of governance should have been expressly based on an interpretation of the *shura* system as explained in the Quran, and he believed that if it were honestly applied, it would have achieved unity among all of Iran's Muslims. As is explained in the next subchapter, his view on Islam in government and politics seems to have changed over time. Nonetheless, his imprisonment and his role in the republic's official life being extinguished, he encouraged Maktab Quran to function on a formal *shura* system for its own organizational purposes.

Moftizadeh explained the simplicity of application of the *shura* principle for his group from his confinement. He started by clarifying that appealing to a formal *shura* system was not necessary if consensus could be found outside of such a system, usually within a person's own family where most problems that were not strictly personal existed. In fact, as most members of Maktab Quran had full-time jobs outside of their group activities, it was discouraged that one should implicate the formal *shura* unless strictly

necessary. Also partially due to constraints on the group's ability to organize, he saw the *shura* as being very practical with respect to its administrative composition. Election of members of the *shura* council should happen periodically (with period left undefined) and such members should be maintained through votes of confidence with community members. The important factor here was that the *shura* should never maintain anything less than a majority of support with the group it oversees. Whenever there was a controversial debate on a subject, the *shura* should meet to hear the various sides of an issue. Opinions should be expressed, but an opinion was only as valuable as the respect that the opinion-giver garnered among the group; Moftizadeh saw his own voice as but one within the community.[19] Solicited opinions of the *shura* on issues relating to individuals (and not the community) were not to be enforced by the community, as this would only be appropriate if the *shura* believed it had a monopoly on the truth, which went against the group's fundamental ethos. Any enforcement or ostracizing as a result of not following the *shura* also had the potential to alienate the individual from the core spirituality that Maktab Quran meant to promote, which was the worst of results for Moftizadeh.

In one letter, Moftizadeh responds to a piece of news given to him that certain community members were questioning his (Moftizadeh's) judgment. His response indicates that this did not present a problem for him, and was in fact encouraged.[20] In other writings, he also offers some recommendations for appropriate behavior within the *shura,* such as maintaining a professional decorum through acts like avoiding the use of real names for purposes of blame or criticism.[21] In short, the *shura* would deliberate on community-related questions or those posed by community members, and in the end, an issue came up for a vote within the *shura*.

Over time, for purposes of efficiency, a sub-*shura* of sorts called the *hay'at ifta' wa qaza* was also formed to work in tandem with the larger *shura* consultative body. This was a group of religious scholars that were hand-picked by Moftizadeh and managed by the *shura* that would answer, in the first instance, basic questions on proper religious etiquette and behavior that existed within the Maktab Quran community. Practically speaking, this functioned like a consultative body of first instance. If someone was not satisfied with their answer, they could still bring the subject to the *shura*.

Moftizadeh had no illusions about the limits of the *shura* system for Maktab Quran purposes, particularly in a repressive Islamic Republic environment. He nonetheless believed it was Quranically ordained, and as a democratic, consensus-driven approach, as good a system as could be

attained under the circumstances. In one of his later letters, he responds to some correspondence to him that articulated disappointment with the *shura's* ability to fulfill its heavy agenda efficiently and deal with the community's problems. He advises that everyone should manage their expectations vis-à-vis the *shura* administration, and that part of the responsibility may lie with the community for not seeking alternate means of dispute resolution and guidance, stressing the importance of dialog and trusted friends.[22]

The *shura*, despite its nature of representative consensus building, was not a political system in Moftizadeh's view, but an administrative one. In fact, the *shura* in modern times should be apolitical. While addressing questions and concerns from his jail cell on the proper functioning of the *shura* system, he at the same time advocated a complete separation of Maktab Quran from the Iranian political process. We turn to this apparent anomaly next.

The Practical Separation of Islam and Politics

After announcing that the Iranian government's promise of autonomy for the Kurdish people had been broken, Moftizadeh advocated the boycott of all political activity within the system of the Islamic Republic. This was an extension of his view that while politics was necessarily a zero sum game of interests, religious matters were essentially personal or at most community-driven in nature:

> Political action is not within our (Iran's Sunnis) reach right now and we have little power in that arena. But that does not mean that we don't make decisions among ourselves. We must try as much as we can to proceed on a proper Islamic and just basis. The most important part of this is working on our own purity [and honesty]. Religion and politics are very difficult to join together, if ever. And to the extent that you don't have to get involved in politics [in this so-called "Islamic Republic"], you shouldn't.[23]

In this ideological evolution, there seems to be an inherent contradiction: How is it that Moftizadeh involved himself in politics, and then withdrew only when his project failed? Does that not intimate that an attempt at participation is acceptable? Further, is not the *shura* system for him, at its essence, meant to be applicable to all behavior, from family matters to those of a larger community? Did he not advocate himself for a *shura* system for the Islamic Republic itself? The only explanation one can reasonably settle on is that Moftizadeh's view on the subject of religion and politics changed at least partially when he was in jail.

As time went on, Moftizadeh became increasingly fixated on the idea of man's imperfection and lack of "true" knowledge of God. He was also acutely concerned with the popularity of religion and the perception of spirituality as an attractive and attainable virtue and not a burdensome one. He believed that it was the duty of religious scholars to promote religion as flexible, and promote spirituality as a matter of degree and improvement over time. It was clear to him that prophetic tradition as instructed through stories in the Quran encouraged the acceptance of imperfection, not the ostracization or castigation of the religiously weak. In one of his letters, he discusses the mistake of Islamic scholars in making a simple religion seem ritualistic and complex, and blames these scholars for the lack of spirituality and acceptance of God's call among some segments of society.[24] As discussed prior, he was influenced in this regard by other theologians that were active in Iran's prerevolutionary landscape, such as Bazargan. For Moftizadeh, spiritual fundamentals in society were a precursor to any spiritually minded political system. On politics, he notes, "it is because of us. We are not ready … Even I am not ready, but I was forced … and you know well how we have suffered. Our lives, our material, our spirits [have suffered]."[25]

Partially as a result of this, with the benefit of hindsight and ten years of decreasing popularity for the new Iranian government as a frame of reference, he appears to have scaled back the ambition of the *shura* system for the modern era of partisan politics. Instead, the *shura* should be an administrative tool for an organization that seeks to find consensus *within its own chosen community*; this made the *shura* system potentially inapplicable for a country, which was composed of sometimes unwilling participants in a polity. In that realm, secular politics—which necessarily had some ideas prevail against other ideas, was more appropriate. Moftizadeh used the example of the Prophet Muhammad's own life. Until the Prophet's society in Medina was spiritually mature and all of its participants were similarly focused in their religiosity, he did not seek to impose his views or engage in promotion of his ideas through conquest. When individuals would engage Moftizadeh further on the Prophet's approach, remarking that such an eventuality "took about 5 or 6 years in Medina, right?," Moftizadeh would say that "in the modern era, it could take closer to 500 years for us to achieve that level of awareness and unity."[26]

For Moftizadeh, the *shura* system could work as a governing entity within a single religious denomination; within the boundaries of a particular sect of Islam, for example, when a righteous path forward is sought, the *shura*

was appropriate. But the legitimacy of the *shura's* dispositions here would not be political, but religiously administrative. Still, in this approach, there are inherent contradictions and difficulties. Should one essentially only live in a society where his or her ideology or persuasion reigns? Maktab Quran followers say no; they state that secular politics should govern the administrative whole (which could be Islamic by name), while the *shura* system should govern the personal matters of particular communities of Muslims. The closest and best alternative to the *shura* system for the wider society and its diverse ideas was representative democracy. This is until there is unity in the Islamic community as a whole—a unity whose future existence depends on the essential necessity of self-betterment for each of the whole's individuals. So what happened if someone believed themselves also "forced to enter politics," as Moftizadeh did? A follower of Maktab Quran and a close confidant of Moftizadeh explained that anyone who wishes to enter politics must leave the group. This is because they believe themselves to no longer be a follower (of Moftizadeh and his ideas), but a *mujtahid* (leader in thought) in their own right.

These are clearly not a pristine and non-contradictory set of positions. But on the ever so relevant subject of Islam and politics, Moftizadeh's views can be most accurately summed up as follows: Insofar as there is any disagreement within society, Islam and religion generally should not be the basis for the politics of which ideas prevail, since differing religious interpretations will necessarily mean the imposition of one group's spiritual view on another group. Islam does not accept such imposition of spirituality, but democratic, majoritarian politics is compatible with such imperfections, and is the best alternative in the human condition of disunity. Meanwhile, with respect to discrete problems, decentralization should give authority to the *shura*. To the extent a community can decide on a general leadership and ideological framework, the *shura* is appropriate. The *shura* itself, of course, should also function democratically but on the basis of religious interpretation.

Nonviolence in Islam

> Gandhi is the indirect student of the prophets.[27]—Ahmad Moftizadeh

We briefly discussed the fundamental tenets on which Moftizadeh's Islamic interpretation was built in our third chapter. These ideas developed during his time in the Shah's prisons, when he evolved from an activist

focused on the Kurdish nationalist cause, to an individual focused above all on spiritual self-betterment. In this phase of his life, he was without a professed party or ideological leaning. In prison, he discovered that spiritual self-betterment was an innate process applicable to all of man. Despite his teachings garnering a significant following, and that following developing into a grassroots movement based on these ideas (which found its way into politics again), Moftizadeh never again claimed to ascribe to a particular ideology or political persuasion—only an improved connection to an eternal truth that resided within man.

Life on earth, and the variety of human experiences that comprise it, should focus on finding the elusive truth of man's connection to his creator. This belief informs Moftizadeh's view that violence to advance one's ideas or spirituality is not acceptable behavior in the modern era. In speeches and discussions with followers, Moftizadeh expounded on this crede as early as the months following his release from the Shah's prisons. Without having a monopoly on the truth, publicizing or seeking to spread one's own interpretation of spirituality or ideology as the one correct interpretation is a type of arrogance that those who seek a connection to their creator should struggle internally against. That monopoly on the truth only resided with the prophets. As we noted above in our section on the Quran, all other attempts, including all religious interpretations of the modern era, are imperfect.

This understanding establishes a fundamental rule that informs his nonviolent ideology: that every attempt at seeking to establish the truth on earth outside of prophethood was incomplete. This means that even the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad as narrated through the *hadith* had limited application to modern man. They were a loose guide at best of practices implemented by someone who was more rightly guided than any modern man. As an extension of this idea, it was abundantly clear to Moftizadeh that violence for the purpose of advancing or spreading religion or a set of political ideas was outside the bounds of adequate human or Islamic behavior and unacceptable for Maktab Quran. This would include violence to establish religious government in Muslim society as much as it applies to the general notion of "spreading religion by the sword." Further, the outwardly practice of religious acts, such as prayer or modest dress, has no value without sound spiritual intent. The abundance of normative Islamic practice or the spreading of a particular interpretation of religion had only one value for Moftizadeh: It has the potential to foster brotherhood and potentially heightened spirituality. It had no other inherent value.

Describing the imperfect nature of man, he would bring forth the clearest example of nonviolence from the Prophet's own life. The *hijrah*, or the migration, is a story well known in Islam. It narrates that in the early days of his prophecy, when Muhammad was living in Mecca, he learned of a plot to assassinate him by "rivals" to his influence in the city. The Prophet did not have an active proselytization program at the time, but he threatened the prevailing order in Mecca and was a menace to his own tribal leadership. Instead of gathering his supporters and fighting to stay in Mecca, the Prophet fled to the city now known as Medina to avoid a conflict. Despite living in extreme poverty and by some accounts having likely garnered enough of a following to wage a "holy war," he chose the peaceful resolution of his own exile. Moftizadeh would emphasize: "This was the Prophet, a man who had no doubt of God's protection of him and the universal truth of his prophecy. [God would have protected him and assured him victory in Mecca.] He even told his companion Ali to stay in Mecca assuring him that he would be safe. [But he himself chose to leave.]"[28] Who were Moftizadeh's followers to choose to fight for their place in Sanandaj? Fourteen hundred years after the Prophet's message and the Quran had been distorted, who were they to claim a monopoly on the truth? As mentioned previously, this also formed the basis of his own *hijrah* from Sanandaj to Kermanshah during the revolution.

While Moftizadeh was in jail, Maktab Quran and Moftizadeh's loyal followers were under intense pressure and attack by government agents as well as Komala rebels. This seems to have given rise to significant frustration on behalf of his followers, many of whom came from a tradition of guerilla warfare and were bred in a culture of war. This led to a litany of questions regarding the appropriateness of "self-defense" in the face of aggression, to which Moftizadeh answered directly and indirectly in his letters. "In the face of an actual physical attack on your person, you are allowed to resist injury … but we should never seek out a fight or hunt a person down [like those that seek to harm us do], not even if the target is someone who seeks to harm us."[29] This meant that under the guise of self-defense, his followers could not initiate any conflict, and any form of self-defense was an individual defense for the protection of the person; it was never a group activity.[30] "[The greatest tragedy is for you] to be responsible for the death of an innocent person—an innocent woman, an innocent child … [Fighting] is not the way of God. If you choose to fight, people will hate you, and God will hate you."[31] In responding to a hypothetical question about how he would react if his followers did resort

to violence, he asks rhetorically, "Do you expect me to be happy with you, when you're so unhappy with those who do it to you? What I will react to is your hearts being full of kindness; that is what I can accept."[32]

Critics of Moftizadeh point to specific events or allegations to argue that Moftizadeh's nonviolent crede was at best inconsistent. They make reference to Moftizadeh's disarming of certain groups during the revolution while defending the central government when it sought to maintain authority through its police forces in Kurdistan. They also claim that his supporters would arm themselves and sometimes initiate fighting with Komala forces with the help of the central government. Without explanation, they feature pictures of Moftizadeh holding and aiming a rifle in their literature (Moftizadeh came from a family of hunters and in fact grew up around firearms, as did the majority of Kurdistan's citizens).

Some nuance vis-à-vis these critiques is appropriate. To the extent Moftizadeh hoped or believed the revolutionary government was working for the benefit of the people, encouraging the population to engage in a dialog with the new government and not take up arms against that government did not necessarily generate equivalence with encouraging the government's use of violence against the people. Similarly, being one of many individuals that helped organize a protection force for the city of Sanandaj when the Shah's police and military disbanded does not indicate that he encouraged the use of violence to advance a political objective. There are many examples of his condemning the violence vaguely attributed to him, in fact. With respect to his supporters collaborating with the government's army, the government's police, or its revolutionary courts, there is no evidence to indicate that any of these things took place to a meaningful degree, or more importantly that they took place with the approval of Moftizadeh. But if they did, which they very well might have, suffice it to say that his behavior after his self-exile in Kermanshah, and his philosophy upon his death, was in contradiction to any notion of violence to achieve political ends.

Moftizadeh would often remind his followers of the imperfect nature of his and every modern man's grasp of the truth in his encouragement of nonviolence. In one letter, he relates a story about the prophet Moses, related by the poet Rumi, where Moses hears a man having a conversation out loud with God, offering to brush his hair and wash his feet out of adoration. When Moses is angered by the man's childish interpretation of God, he receives a revelation from his Lord that he has transgressed in his anger. God informs Moses that his job is to bring people closer to God

however they see him, not drive them further away. "Let's admit it. We (Maktab Quran) are not an amazing example for mankind. Do you think of yourself as being better than your adversaries? Who says you are? This is *shirk*[33]… In the Quran itself it says that an eye for an eye does not apply to everything. [This was even the case in the Prophet's time.]"[34] Moftizadeh encouraged empathy with those who sought to harm his followers, and put their fervor in context:

"At the time of the revolution as well, there were people who wanted to fight with us and attacked us. Among them there were those who did cruel things to us and tortured us, and many may have believed that they were good and we were bad. They may have thought they were advancing the truth and we were hiding it. But we know they were foolish. Did such a man have the right to kill you? Do you have the right to kill him? Even if their *iman* (faith) was wrongly guided, they had *iman*. They believed in their truth. That would make you a murderer to them[, and who is to say who is right]? Thank God that we did not fight then! And now be careful that you do not fight now. If it is meant for us to die in this way, it is our destiny."[35]

Elsewhere, he even encourages empathy with the Shias that put him in prison because he was Sunni. He notes that he read the spiritual texts of Shia theologians when he was younger, and was moved by them. He remembered thinking then, "How could a Shia write something so beautiful about God? … How ignorant I was! … I want you to remove these divisions from your heart."[36] He goes on to state that when he learned later about the biographies of these authors, he became aware of the great empathy and love that existed in their hearts, which was the most primary value for a man. "Even regarding those who have tortured me [in prison], and put me through anguish, I am happy to be in anguish and for them to be satisfied, if it means my salvation in the afterlife."[37]

Moftizadeh had an immense amount of admiration for the person of Mahatma Gandhi. He referred to Gandhi as the "indirect student of the prophets," believing that he epitomized the behavioral ethos of all of God's messengers in his disciplined, nonviolent way of life. His followers draw comparisons between him and Gandhi often in recounting stories of his life, often referring to him as a "Ghandhi of Islam" or Kurdistan. When pressed, one of them explained that this was an apt comparison because it was not as much a philosophy of nonviolence that drove Moftizadeh as it was an essential and inalienable core feature instilled in the very spirituality that he preached.[38] Besides positive

references to some of the most well-known proponents of nonviolent political action (such as Gandhi and Mandela), and unlike with respect to some of his theological influences, there is no indication that Ahmad Moftizadeh sought to emulate any particular nonviolent movement or leader. Rather, his remarkable nonviolent ideology seems to have developed in the unlikely petri dishes of Iran and Kurdistan, where violence and intolerance were ornaments of his entire life.

The Empowerment of Women

> Nowhere in the Quran does it say that a man is higher than a woman.[39]—Ahmad Moftizadeh

There is perhaps no subject that Ahmad Moftizadeh deals with more in his letters than questions relating to the role of women in the Maktab Quran community, and in traditional Kurdish society more generally. As the subject of many questions to him, his views on women's role in the family, religious life, and decision making can be appropriately described as highly progressive, particularly among Islamic interpretations.

In describing some of Moftizadeh's views on the role of women, it is important to reiterate his understanding that the Quran is a living document to be cohesively interpreted through the prism of time and the human spirit. This leads to many *fatwas* from Moftizadeh on the subject of women that do not comport with many modern interpretations of *Shafi'i* Sunni Islam, the sect to which Moftizadeh openly belonged. A statement from one of Moftizadeh's later letters sums up his view on gender roles rather well: "A woman has total independence in her life, and the only right a man has to demand something from a woman is the same right that one Muslim has when demanding something from another Muslim."[40]

In one of his earliest letters, Moftizadeh deals decisively with news reaching him in prison that women were not involved in a recent vote to establish the *shura's* by-laws. One Maktab Quran member recalls that this was in the early stages of the *shura's* reconstitution in Sanandaj, after a number of jailed Maktab Quran members were released from prison and returned to Kurdistan. The members, perhaps unwittingly, did not actively invite female community members to participate in a key organizational meeting. This could have been for a number of reasons—a default cultural preference for major decisions to be made by the men of a family,

practical reasons relating to the lack of integration of men and women in the Islamic Republic's public life, or a conscious decision to discount the woman's authority in the group's management activities. Whatever the reason was, Moftizadeh called for any decision taken at any such meeting to be annulled and reconvened. He confirms, in his instructions, that the *shura* is designed to reflect the entire community, not just its male members. To not include women in the *shura's* constitution, or any of its decisions, would be "contrary to the Quran."[41] Moftizadeh explained that "all people in the community must participate for it to be a true Islamic example. If a group functions other than in this way, its actions are of a lost people. Cancel any results that stem from [the marginalization of women]."[42]

In a later letter, he brings the role of women to bear in explaining certain practical instructions on the *shura's* constitution and functions. In his instructions, he dedicates significant time in stressing the necessity that women participate in all of the roles he suggests for the *shura's* composition. "If I have ever said 'brothers' to you, you should assume I mean 'brothers and sisters.'"[43] "Men and women suffer the same fate in humanity, the same struggle and anguish and happiness. If I speak more to men or about men, it's because men are the ones with the ambition who see themselves as being higher, and more in need of advice!"[44] Despite the latter statement by Moftizadeh, one salient feature while listening to Moftizadeh's speeches and while reading his letters is actually how frequently he references women whenever he references men. He made a habit of referring to the "sisters" of the community (women) often in his discourse.

In one letter, before repeating the importance of a woman's role in all aspects of the community's decision making, Moftizadeh outlines the Islamic interpretation of the creation of the woman, and distinguishes it from one oft-cited Christian interpretation. "Men and women were created equally, with [differences but] no degree of inferiority or superiority between them. The woman is not created from the rib of a man … [Since] the value and authority of the man and the woman is the same, then their authority should be the same in front of the *shura*."[45]

Responding specifically to questions about the woman's role in running a household, and her rights in divorce, Moftizadeh provides a number of specific instructions on what he views as the most just and Godly approach in these matters. Moftizadeh states firstly that a woman cannot be kept from maintaining her financial independence by her spouse, and

that it is appropriate and acceptable for a wife and a mother to work if that is her prerogative.[46] When asked what professions are advisable for women with children, he suggests that medicine and education come to his mind (both highly respected fields in Kurdistan). Importantly, if a husband insists that a woman stay at home, the woman must agree to do so and cannot be forced. In such a case, the woman is entitled to a fair salary from her husband for this sacrifice, which is separate from the living expenses of running the home. Moftizadeh goes even further than this, indicating that a professional-style income is appropriate even if the woman chooses to stay at home herself, without encouragement from her husband. "If there is a woman in the community who decides that she wants to make her job the running of the home, even she has the right to income from her husband. [If she is comfortable that] the entire marital property, including that which the man owns, is shared equally between them, she can accept that as well." The woman does have the right to a salary if she wants it, however.[47]

With respect to divorce, Moftizadeh issued *fatwas* on not only the right to divorce but also fair settlement in the event of separation and ongoing support for the wife. Many modern interpretations of Islamic law with respect to divorce have been criticized by non-Muslims as being decidedly pro-husband. For example, in some Sunni interpretations of Islam, a husband can divorce a woman by choice, without being required to seek resolution of marital problems, and without needing the wife's consent; in some more conservative interpretations, the husband merely needs to pronounce a desire to divorce his wife out loud to her three times. The woman, on the other hand, does not have a unilateral right to divorce in many Islamic interpretations. In the Maktab Quran interpretation, drawing from Ahmad Moftizadeh's teachings, a woman has the full right of divorce.

When delivering guidance on proper divorce procedure and resolution, Moftizadeh addresses the rights of the woman in one of his letters from prison. He states that there should be a settlement of the marital property, and that such a settlement must be fair and equitable, and accepted by both parties, specifically naming the woman.[48] He specifies that this is likely going to mean that the woman takes at least as much of the marital property, if not more, than the man.[49] Further, Moftizadeh outlines the requirement of alimony to the wife in case such an allowance is necessary for her subsistence after divorce. This seems to go beyond most, if not all, other Sunni interpretations of the rights of women in divorce.

Moftizadeh is harsh in his criticism of the institution of polygamy, a practice only allowed to men in traditional Islamic doctrine. "I will not give that right to anyone. I do not know anywhere that it is appropriate and so I don't have the capability to recommend it for anyone. [I don't think] you will ever hear me say it's OK." Since the practice is clearly documented and allowed in certain instances of the Quran, Moftizadeh's interpretations concentrates on its lack of appropriateness for the context of his followers' lives. In one letter, he goes into an explanation of how quickly some men jump to marry second wives—"like animals"—without considering the religiously mandated societal and financial reasons for which polygamy was originally practiced and allowed.[50] "If everyone of us gets married, and there is still a single woman left, then we can have that conversation," Moftizadeh announces.[51]

In other letters, Moftizadeh's edicts are subtle instructions that have the effect of advocating for more tolerance of women's social freedoms and a more cooperative decision-making approach between the sexes. When asked about the requirements of *hijab*, or modest dress, he articulates a reasonable, non-committal view: it depends. Dressing modestly, in the early days of Islam, meant one thing. Today, it means something else, Moftizadeh would explain. Even in different parts of Kurdistan—cities as opposed to villages, certain social circles compared to others, each had their own yardstick of what was normal and modest.[52] In Moftizadeh's view, religion did not define what that modesty was other than to assume that the individual could discern what modest dress was, and should abide by it. A headscarf, then, was neither necessary nor sufficient for "modest dress" in Moftizadeh's view. Removing eyebrows was okay. The scholar in Tehran who said fixing teeth for beautification purposes was wrong, was himself wrong in Moftizadeh's view.[53] He bolstered his argument with Quranic guidance that itself is not very descriptive as to what *hijab* entails, and does not discourage beauty.

With respect to the appropriateness of Kurdish clothing, which tends to be colorful and intricate, Moftizadeh simply encouraged individuals to be themselves in their manner of dressing. "Before the revolution, some of you didn't even speak Kurdish with your children! Now it's chic to wear Kurdish clothes. That's fine, but clothing should [not be a statement of who you want to] be, but who you are …."[54] In another letter, he drives the point home: "Colorful, beautiful clothing is okay. But your behavior is always more important than what you wear."[55]

With regard to the mingling of the sexes in public and private spaces, Moftizadeh again prefers offering general guidance on the purity of intention, rather than specific edicts. He states that it is okay for men and women who are not related to one another to be seated next to each other at a *sofra*, or meal table. In responding to one question, he deals with the all-important subject of Kurdish line-dancing, which is performed by individuals holding hands and parading in a circle, following a set of steps which change depending on the style of the line leader. Moftizadeh, again in contradiction to some modern interpretations of his own school of Islam, approves of Kurdish dance. He even says that dancing with someone that you do not know or are not related to is okay, as long as the intention is pure, and certain traditional dancing customs are abided by.[56] Like dancing, depending on the intention of the person, singing is also acceptable.[57]

Finally, in addressing the administration of the family unit, he advocates a team approach between husband and wife. "The husband and wife should work together, to make decisions that are healthy for their union."[58] "A man should [ideally] not know more than his wife. They should take classes [and be educated] together and grow together, so they have the same level of knowledge on things."[59] In encouraging each of the husband and wife to lean on each other, and to make decisions mutually, he attaches equal value to the sexes, in a manner that must have seemed out of the ordinary to many of his more traditional Kurdish followers.

In reading Moftizadeh's edicts on matters of marriage and gender relations more generally, one cannot help but feel that his views are almost one-sidedly pro-woman. In hundreds of pages of his writings, no example seems to exist where he articulates a husband's superiority over his wife, or the man's rights over a woman, with the possible exception of certain instances where he refers to the man's "obligations" vis-à-vis the household.[60] "It is women that teach the world how to behave—the world's mothers. So pay attention to the way you raise your girls and invest in women … However much our women's minds are elevated, their children's minds will be elevated, and the world will be better … Show them [women] as much respect as possible."[61] In another letter, Moftizadeh explains that "prior to Islam, there was less value attached to women in our societies. The fabrication that Islam is against women came later, and was attributed to Islam … These fabrications are not grounded in truth … I hope these words will be enough for you to respect our daughters and sisters … A mother's ranking is 3 higher than the father."[62]

Perhaps one of Moftizadeh's instructions drove home his views on a woman's independence in Islamic society the most. In his October 8, 1991 letter, he states that a woman in marriage even has the right to pick her own interpretation of Islam or source of guidance for religious and spiritual practices, separate from her husband. The ramifications of such an edict are obviously far reaching, and are not likely followed by many in traditional Kurdistan even today. Such an edict demonstrates however that for Moftizadeh, the woman was indeed a full-fledged, independent member of her community.

No Compulsion in Religion

In stark contrast to the interpretation of modern militant Islamists, Moftizadeh was especially loath to criticize the religious practice of other Muslims, and in particular, highly wary of attaching the label of non-believer to another worshiper of God.[63] In fact, one could argue that Moftizadeh's fundamental theological core is as dependent on the non-judgment of religious and spiritual content as modern militant Islam is dependent on that judgment. In speaking to some of Maktab Quran's most devout followers today, a doctrinal reason for this discrepancy is advanced: The Islamic State, and many modern militant Islamist movements such as the Taliban and Al-Qaeda, do not have a strong jurisprudential basis for their political ideas. Rather, the Islamic scholars that articulate the violent dialectic that drives these movements are not respected in their scholarship, which is almost always limited (Mullah Omar and Al-Baghdadi being rather undisputed examples of this lack of formal scholarship). This is also a criticism of these militant movements voiced by almost all of the modern Muslim centers of learning, including the most conservative among them.

But it is especially the case that Moftizadeh and the Maktab Quran movement are, even among progressive Islamic movements, particularly fixated on the idea of judgment and compulsion in religion. While we will discuss the religious justification offered by Moftizadeh for this view, it is worth noting that there seems to be a practical reason why the movement leans so heavily one way on this issue even today. That reason is likely the context of the Iranian revolution's highly divisive political atmosphere, where as we have learned, the slightest deviation from one group's platform was cause for declarations of heresy, hypocrisy, and treason. Maktab Quran was born in this environment. Chased out of its home city by Marxist rebels after refusing to fight, rounded up in droves by government

forces for endangering national security, and being the subject of scorn and ridicule by large segments of the Kurdish population that craved a militant response to injustices, it needed a pristine message. In order for it to survive as a nonviolent ideology that focused on spiritual advancement, and in particular after seeing failure in its brief national and regional political project, it benefitted from making peace and acceptance the most fundamental piece of its ethos.

As Moftizadeh's speeches and letters indicate, there was an abundance of persuasive Islamic guidance to draw from in developing and continuing to promote these pacifist ideas for the group. First and foremost was use of the Quranic instruction of "*la iqra fi-deen"* by Moftizadeh, or "no compulsion in religion," known well but ignored selectively by some Muslim "scholars" of militant Islam. Moftizadeh draws heavily on interpretations of this guidance in his view that in the modern era of imperfect religious practice, there could be no declaration of apostasy. The principle that religion should not be forced upon an individual was rooted again in the belief that no modern man had prophetic infallibility or knowledge of God's design.

The nature of *kufr*, or the state of disbelief or infidelity in religion (being an infidel), was explained by Moftizadeh in his essay "*Iman va Kofr*," or faith and infidelity. In this discourse, Moftizadeh argues that the standard for declaration of *kafir* (non-believer) in Islam—a word oft-used as a synonym for enemy of religion in Islam—was extremely high. Only the prophets, who embody God's message truly, had the authority to declare firstly what purity was in worship of God, and secondly who was a genuine nonbeliever by way of rejection of a message that was manifestly shown to be true to that person. "If Ahmad preaches something, and you don't believe me, that does not make you a nonbeliever … we have not done a fraction of what is necessary to shed light on the religion of God."[64] Moftizadeh explains that in the Quran, the word *kafir* was only used in the context of prophetic times. For Moftizadeh, holy war in the modern era was not anything that a government or group could claim a monopoly on. God was the arbiter of the just and unjust. The *monafeq*, or the hypocrite, was an even more strenuous standard to declare. A *monafeq*, after all, was a *kafir* who masqueraded as a believer. It was not likely a coincidence that the term *monafeq* was one that Iran's revolutionary government was particularly fond of when describing some of its most avowed enemies. For Moftizadeh, the only individuals who may attain such levels of transgression in God's eyes are the scholars themselves, due to their relative lack of ignorance.[65]

Besides the sister sins of *kufr* and *shirk* (worship of something other than God), the Quran instructed that all other sins were forgivable. Even the sin of murder was forgivable. For this reason, much like the declaration of non-belief or apostasy, there was no assured way of delineating a sinner. "What if the murderer has been forgiven by God for his sin? By cursing this murderer, you have cursed a man that God has forgiven."[66] With such examples, Moftizadeh left little room for judgment among his followers. "Sin is between you and God," Moftizadeh writes in one letter.[67] "Between you and God—the personal sin—asking for forgiveness [and being steadfast in your keeping an oath to avoid such a sin again] will suffice… Between you and the other person, it is not as easy as asking for forgiveness[, so be good to your fellow man]."[68] Notably, Moftizadeh does not intimate that a sin against another person is a sin against society, or a punishable sin. For Moftizadeh, transgression in religion was mostly personal, and when among individuals, disagreements were something that could and should be solved between them wherever possible. Offenses against society were to be judged by a secular, consensus based approached in Moftizadeh's calculation.

Moftizadeh's letters do contain a great deal of interpretation of *fiqh,* but there is an even heavier emphasis on non-doctrinal concepts of morality, such as thoughtfulness and basic decency. He encourages his followers to borrow from each other's experiences, sometimes writing for pages without reference to religious symbolism or ideas. "Think before you speak. Think before you act," he instructs, "… and discuss with people who care about you."[69] He was uncompromising in his belief that vanity and ego were among man's greatest weaknesses, telling his followers to "leave people alone and mind your own business."[70] "The worst thing is to have the feeling in your heart that you're better than someone else. It will destroy you. The heart gets sick with arrogance. It is not an achievement to criticize people or to find faults in people. Finding redeeming qualities is what deserves credit."[71] He preferred that Maktab Quran members concentrate on helping the poor and needy above all other worldly deeds, as it was the paramount behavior of a people with affection in their hearts. "Pay attention to those who are poorer than you, and do what it takes to elevate their level to yours, if you can. It does not matter if they are religious," Moftizadeh would say, in writings that could easily be mistaken for a socialist manifesto at times.[72] "If you don't do good for people in need," he would say, "I will be the first to complain about you in the afterlife."[73]

When Moftizadeh outlined the image of a prototypical Muslim, he did not mention praying five times a day or aversion to sin. He was rather consistent in all of his writings in not attaching value to ritualistic requirements of Islamic behavior. Instead, he placed emphasis on abstract and spiritual concepts that were more reminiscent of the *sufi* poets than of a scholar of religion. "Make anger your enemy, so that you hate anger, and in everything—work, family, friends—be a moderate in your relationships with them."[74] Summing up the spirit of his dogma, he states that faith in God is, of course, the essential feature of a Muslim's spirituality, but "affection is the most essential feature of her behavior." This idea of affection toward others and its importance to spirituality is the most oft-quoted sentiment, in various forms, that has been attributed to Moftizadeh's religious thinking.

The Poetry of Moftizadeh's Life, and Death

Moftizadeh begins a letter dated December 27, 1991, with a statement of how physically ill he had recently been in confinement, and apologizes for not being able to write more often. It was around this time that his family was informed that he was suffering from cancer. He would tell his followers later in person that multiple times, he would be rendered unconscious by one of his meals, only to wake up in the prison hospital days later. He suspected from lesions on his body that he was being injected with some sort of substance while he was incapacitated; he believed that the government was trying to induce his death. His followers pressured his captors to allow him to see specialists, but permission was not granted, and he was never properly diagnosed.[75] Ominously, he continues in the letter that "there are a few things I know I will regret not saying if I don't do so now."[76] That correspondence, from a windowless jail cell far from Kurdistan, became a window into the mind of a man who was loved and despised by many, at the twilight of a life of conflict.

Moftizadeh, who always emphasized the importance of a heart full of mercy and love in faith, wrote from his heart in that letter. One of the important things he decided to share with his followers is a story about when he was deeply in love with someone as a young man. He describes the sadness that filled him when he was unable to be with this person for factors he could not control. "I will never forget that burning in my heart… even now, I am emotional in reflecting on it."

The Moftizadeh view of the universe described elegantly in that letter after years in prison had an emphasis on the shared emotional condition of all people that they neglect to recognize when they fail to see the humanity in each other. This applied to Muslims and non-Muslims alike. He became conscious of this through his own charity work and the diverse writings of individuals "who loved God." When he would read the texts of Islamic mystics and gnostics, he would be moved deeply. "My interests have always been more in the heart than in the mind," he explained, seeing God as an extension of emotion, rather than of intellect. In some writings of Islamic mystics, his scholarly instinct would easily recognize mistakes these thinkers made in their interpretations of the religion, but for Moftizadeh, their love for God made their mistakes "like that of an adorable infant who had trouble pronouncing a word." He always had trouble finishing a book on jurisprudence, but reread books on spirituality dozens of times.[77] Spirituality and love of God was important, because God loved man unconditionally. "When I became a leader and was involved in the revolution, there were so many people who came to me thinking that I would have some sort of power or influence. Then when I went back to jail, they disappeared."[78] But his Lord's support never waned, and strengthened his heart.

Like his father, who would worship with the books of poets on his prayer rug, Moftizadeh was a lover of poetry. In that journal entry of a letter, he recounts some lines of poetry that made such an impact on him that he "must have copied them into the margins of books hundreds of times." One was a line from the ancient Arabian Romeo and Juliet tale "Leila and Majnoon," which lamented the fact that the universe sometimes kept lovers from being together. Another line was a nostalgic one: "I reflect on the time when we were young herders, alone on the pasture for what seemed like forever. What I wouldn't give for us to have never aged, and for our herd to have stayed young with us."[79]

In his final years, Moftizadeh also wrote and spoke about his regrets at length.[80] He mentions a discrete instance when he was angry with a man for attributing too lofty a title to him, indicating dissatisfaction that the man seemed to take Moftizadeh to be at the spiritual level of one of the prophets. "He was a hardworking man who did it out of love for me. I did not need to criticize him so harshly." He went on, belittling himself: "… that Ahmad who works hard to feed his family, and this Ahmad who just eats and sleeps [in confinement], what's the difference between us? Who is better?" [81]

He reiterates that his participation in any political process, no matter what his fate may come to be, was definitely over. He informs his followers of such, saying that if he is ever released from prison, "I want to stay away from any political meetings you have," and that frankly, in his age and health, he had "lost patience for further research and writing [as well]."[82] "He who embarks on a political project is the most likely to lose God's way. Just take a look at the world."[83]

And with hindsight available to him in his prison cell, the train of Iran's revolution long since having arrived at its subsequent destination without him, he describes the fruits of his political labor with a finality of perspective. In the days of Moftizadeh's final letters, Kurdistan remained divided among ideological grounds. For many, Moftizadeh was a traitor for ever having negotiated with the Islamic Republic. For others, his nonviolent teachings kept Kurdistan from realizing its full potential in sustaining damage against the regime. To this day, he is a polarizing figure in Kurdistan. In his view, "Kurdistan was a five year old child dealing with an adult in this revolution [in terms of preparedness]." In describing his own shortcomings, one can almost hear him chafe inwardly, "I swear to you that all I wanted to do was help people. So if I made mistakes, know that that my intentions were good."[84] Moftizadeh always claimed to be a reluctant entrant into political leadership, knowing that it was almost guaranteed to be inadequate:

> From the time of the revolution, my concern for Kurdistan has been its division. This was the primary enemy for us and an enemy which ultimately conquered us as a whole. Our goal [still now should] be unity. I have regretted during my last eight years in jail for even having created a group or been responsible for separating a group of people, that ultimately contributed to us (Kurds) being apart. My intention was to foster closeness between us. But when I went to jail, even our group (Maktab Quran) became groups. It's always the leaders, the muftis, the sheikhs, who ironically become catalysts for division. So it's up to you to stay united. Do you want to die ununited?[85]

The complexities of Ahmad Moftizadeh as a man and a thinker are evident in his story. The words of one of his closest companions, Majed Rohani, are telling:

> Moftizadeh's biggest shortcoming was his deep desire for Islam to be liberal and democratic, and a unifier, which like all of the other religions I am aware

> of, it is not. He would try to twist and turn Islamic doctrine to make it that way, but [to many] these two ideals were not compatible the way he wanted them to be … He would try as hard as he could to argue away the more bitter portions of the Quran. He would say about stealing and cutting off the hand, for example, that 'it only applies to someone who doesn't *need* when he steals.' But that is not in the Quran. The four corners of today's Islam were too restrictive for Moftizadeh, I think. He was too big to be placed in the frame of Islam. But he would try to fit himself in that frame, and try to stretch the frame out, but in the end it was too rigid." [86]

And alas, The frame was perhaps also too rigid for twenty-first-century Kurdistan.

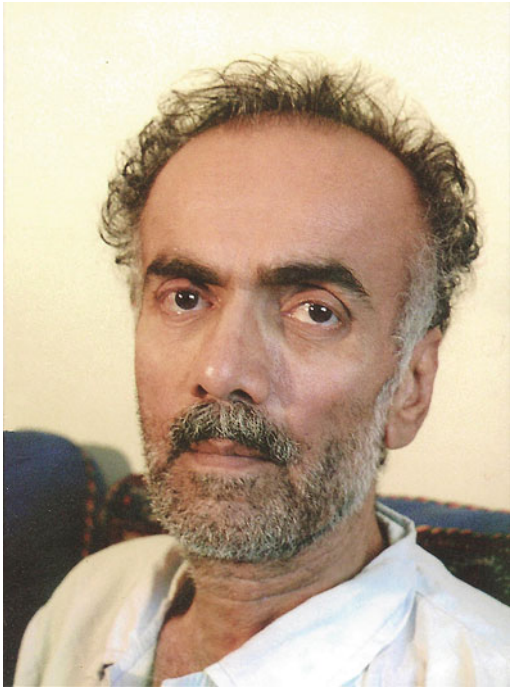

Image 12 Moftizadeh after release from prison

Image 13 A young Ahmad Moftizadeh traveling between Sanandaj and Tehran

In an amateur video recorded of Moftizadeh on his final home visit,[87] when asked to comment about his and Maktab Quran's future involvement in politics, he instead encourages listeners in the room to remove all hate from their hearts. One of his followers interrupts, saying that he (the listener) has a dislike in his heart for many things, despite what Moftizadeh said. "Am I bad?" he asks Moftizadeh. Moftizadeh responds, "No, my love, disliking certain things is necessary, just don't wish the worst on people, don't wish them harm." "What about for liars?" someone responds. "Hold that dislike in a very small part in your heart, but flood it with love for that person," he retorts. "How is that possible?" someone else asks. You can, slowly. "Save yourselves … Revenge is harm on yourself.… Don't think that those in power are happy. Their souls are not calm." He quotes the Quran: The violent person, how wretched he is. In those final communications, the temporal nature of his life and condition—his popularity, his activism, and even his confinement—was narrated like a man reflecting in a waiting room, waiting for a door to another universe to open and take him in.

Image 14 Molana Mahmoud alongside Ahmad Moftizadeh, around the time of the former's death

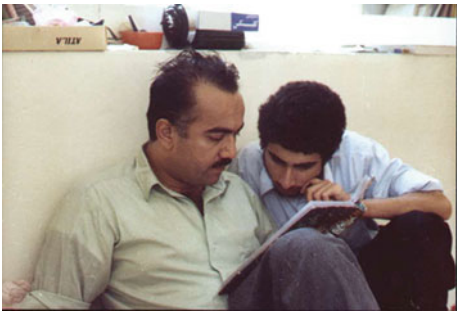

Image 15 Moftizadeh with son Jiyan

When Moftizadeh fell gravely ill in prison, with little likelihood of recovery, he was finally released into house arrest. Witnesses report that he was brought into his home in Sanandaj on a stretcher, unable to walk. It was October of 1992. Those who were close to him in those following

weeks also report that he was not allowed to be transported to see a doctor for the first ten days. Suffering from a suspected cancer of the colon, the government did not grant the family's request to permit him to leave the country to seek treatment. His condition was deteriorating daily. In these last few weeks, his family notes an abstract quality about his personality. "Ahmad was the way people like to describe angels at that point," his agnostic nephew stated. "He had no anger anywhere in his being, no visible sign of emotional stress, only physical stress."[88] Another of his followers notes that "he could barely sit up, but he seemed to be floating."[89]

Majed Rohani, a follower of Moftizadeh, spent a great deal of time with him throughout his life and near his death. He looks back on his life with some emotional difficulty. He recognizes the mistakes Moftizadeh made and says that contrary to what many Maktab Quran members do it is futile to turn him into an idol of sorts without learning from his mistakes. As he discussed this nuanced view of a long-gone acquaintance, he interrupted one of his thoughts on an unrelated question, and paused. "You know I am being taped. They have this phone, and my downstairs phone, and my mobile phone bugged. You know that right? … They are listening to everything we have been saying. You can imagine that they probably don't like a lot of what they're hearing, right? … But I'm not afraid. I am not afraid to speak, not even a bit. Do you know why?" And Mr. Rohani continued, his tone of voice encumbered by the heavy weight of nostalgia, after days of reflection and discussion about Moftizadeh's virtues, the traps he fell into, his hours yelling into the night from his hospital bed in pain … "because Kaka Ahmo's taught me not to be afraid."[90]

Moftizadeh's story is one that elicits mixed sentiments. Looking into the work of his life, there are moments where a neutral observer sees tragic naiveté. There are other moments where one sees a strength of character and will that is inspiring. In the many "mistakes" he made during his short and chaotic entry into the unforgiving world of Iranian politics, in the many contradictions of his life, one cannot help but recognize a certain clarity of vision and principle. The odds against a Kurdish leader in the modern era are stacked, to say the least. And in the chess match of the Iranian revolution, leadership of the group that was rigged to lose definitely brought instances of regrettable and horrific consequence of action. Despite all of this, while many of the other Kurdish leaders we have discussed eventually relieved themselves of the immediacy of such danger, fleeing Iran, Ahmad Moftizadeh stood by those principles which he held dear through prison under two brutal regimes.[91] He, unlike the heroes of the majority, met the fate of the consequences of his action

acutely. From the solitary confinement of Evin prison, and not from a European capital, did he reflect on his failure. And if the verdict is that despite all of his intent, he is not to be forgiven for attempting to make peace with a regime that clobbered the Kurdish soul and set it back some generations, that verdict is the continuation of the division which was the true handicap of the Kurdish movement during the Iranian revolution in the first place.

On February 8, 1993, Ahmad Moftizadeh, endurer of torture and imprisonment under both Iranian regimes he lived under, a man who abandoned the power and prestige of the government's stamp of approval for his ideals, Kurdish nationalist, regressive figure for some, progressive figure for others, practical joker, and leader of a nonviolent Islamic movement, passed away.

Maktab Quran Today: Continued Repression by Islamic Republic

Since Moftizadeh's death and until this day, Maktab Quran continues to function upon the basic tenets set out by its founder: the *shura* system for internal governance and engagement with Kurdish society[92], self-betterment and spiritual ascendance, and nonviolence. Like Moftizadeh toward the end of his life, it recognizes the salvation of Kurds in the connection to God, and unity through nonviolence; as a result, from the time that Moftizadeh left politics in the early 1980s, the group has also been avowedly non-political. In fact, if one of its members decides to enter politics, he or she is asked to leave the group. As explained by one long-standing member of the group, "we are followers of Moftizadeh and the idea that religion and politics don't mix. If someone has different ideas, we love them and perhaps they are correct, but they don't fit into our ethics system anymore." [93]

A small number of Moftizadeh's closest confidants have now broken with the group, and while they maintain a cordial relationship with its members, believe that it has gone too far in closing itself off to the rest of society and idolizing the person of Ahmad Moftizadeh. One of them explains that he was ostracized from the group for voicing his objection to the lack of critical thought vis-à-vis of Moftizadeh in Maktab Quran meetings. "I would point out the inherent contradictions in his religious interpretations, as I did to Moftizadeh himself many times, up until his death … Despite my criticizing him, he still trusted and confided to me at

his bedside in his final days and hours … But his followers today, after all these years, refuse to recognize these contradictions."[94]

The irony of Moftizadeh's own statements in his letters, declaring that he should not be turned into an idol, was hard to overlook. But under the repression of a hostile regime, and in the shadow of a history as bitter as the Iranian revolution, the sort of steadfastness that straddles the line between devotion and blind allegiance is perhaps at least partially inevitable.

Even if Maktab Quran is guilty of undue veneration and naïveté, they do not seem to have veered far from the fundamental tenets found in Moftizadeh's final letters. According to Maktab Quran, however, the Islamic regime never accepted Maktab Quran's vow of political abstinence as a valid one. A number of members of the group have been arrested or exiled from Sanandaj since Moftizadeh's death. There have also been instances where Maktab Quran alleges physical abuse and assassinations by the Iranian regime. One example is of Faroq Farsad, affectionately known as *Kaka Faroq* by the group. In 1995, he was exiled to the city of Ardabil in Iranian Azerbaijan for endangering national security. The group claims that he was simply an active member of the group, criticizing the regime's repressive policies in Kurdistan in private conversation, but not a politically active member. He left his place of house arrest in Ardabil one day and was said to be "lost" by the Iranian authorities. He was found dead some days later with no explanation from his captors. Examples like this are numerous. Members of Maktab Quran are constantly under surveillance, and when they are questioned by the Iranian authorities, they have made a habit of publishing details on their website.

For those familiar with other modern Islamist movements in the Middle East, similarities between Maktab Quran and the Muslim Brotherhood, which also advocated an unembellished lifestyle of religious outreach until Muslim society was prepared for politics, may be detected. There was also the fact that some members of the Muslim Brotherhood have claimed, without evidence, that Moftizadeh was their representative in Iran. "There are a lot of groups who have similarities to us and a lot of people who claim Ahmad was a friend of theirs or a member of their group. I can tell you it's not true… He was kind to everyone, including many members of the Islamic regime that imprisoned him, and he was even cordial with the Marxists who wanted him dead. That doesn't mean he was one of them," said Fuad Mardokh-Rohani, a trusted confidant of Moftizadeh.[95] As for the Muslim Brotherhood, "they are constantly active in politics. Obviously, if they truly believed that Islam and politics was

not appropriate in the modern era, they would not have ran in Egypt as the Muslim Brotherhood and maybe they would not be in the position they are now. In their social ideas as well, they are dissimilar to us in many ways."

That was a perfect segue to inquire about allegations that Maktab Quran, and Moftizadeh, had begotten modern day extremists according to some references and Internet searches. Some hearsay in Kurdistan even attributes Islamic State and Ansar al-Islam sympathizers with Moftizadeh, which seemed to be totally inimical to the group's ethos. What did the group know about that? "Moftizadeh is pretty well known in the region; he was the only public Sunni leader in Iran at the time of the revolution and one of the few known Islamic scholars in the history of Kurdistan. He can't control who wants to claim him posthumously or reference him in their fight against the Islamic Republic, or as a motivation for an extremist Islam."[96] And the Mosque in Halabja with his name attributed to it? Was it established by Maktab Quran? None of the individuals spoken to among Maktab Quran's leadership or longtime members knew about the Mosque's origins. In the words of Fuad Mardokh-Rohani, "I wouldn't have known it existed if someone didn't show me a picture on their phone."[97] It was accurate, then, as alluded to prior, that Moftizadeh was known and used as a reference outside of his group and outside of even Kurdistan. He was not only the jailed leader of Maktab Quran and Iran's Kurds, but for many also a symbol of the Islamic regime's oppression of the Kurds and Sunnis more generally. Given the modern fixation on categorizing and aligning movements, ideas, and individuals in the Islamic world's leadership, this is worth further analysis.

Salafi? Political Islam? Moftizadeh in the Era of Trendy Labels

A major motivation for this book project is the lack of information about Ahmad Moftizadeh and Maktab Quran in the public domain. There are two main reasons why this dearth of information exists. The first is Iran's wall of censorship. In the Islamic Republic's view, the movement and its former leader remain a threat to national unity and national security.[98] Any literature relating to Moftizadeh that fails to be highly critical of him cannot be published in-country, in the Persian language that it would most appropriately be written in.[99] Even publishing information on the Internet

from Iran carries considerable difficulty and risk. It was inherent then that a book like the present one had to be written by someone outside of Iran, with all of the drawbacks this entails.

The second reason for the dearth of information on Moftizadeh relates to the personal and private nature of Maktab Quran. This is itself the consequence of two factors: First, the group has sought to shield itself from the attention of the central government wherever possible by keeping a relatively small public footprint. The second factor is doctrinal. The group's ethos emphasizes self-betterment and internal struggle above all else. It is loath to publish official opinions on public issues besides details of its own oppression under the regime, and the *shura*, still functioning, does not publish its discourse widely, as a group who seeks to gain followers would. Maktab Quran has a stellar reputation for honesty and integrity in Kurdistan today; they also have a reputation for being solemn and insular, however. Given all of these factors, references to Moftizadeh in English, Farsi, and Kurdish on the Internet are limited and often repetitive. In published text, the lack of information is astonishing. Some of the most seminal books touching on events in Kurdistan during the revolution that have been heavily relied on for parts of this book fail to mention Moftizadeh even once.[100]

These deficiencies are highly consequential to the perception of Moftizadeh and his movement today. The post 9/11 era's obsession with categorization of Middle Eastern and Muslim movements and individuals, a practice that often seeks to define history retroactively through the skewed prism of today's perceived "clashes of civilizations" and "wars against extremism," is perilous when information is as limited as it is here. In the finite body that exists on Moftizadeh in the public domain, he is usually defined accurately yet scantily as a deceased Kurdish religious leader active during the Iranian revolution. However, Maktab Quran is also occasionally subject to the vague label of "Islamic fundamentalism" and the interchanging labels of "Wahabi" and "Salafi" by some analysts.[101] One analysis by a private consulting group found through an Internet search states that some extremist movements in Kurdistan were radicalized by Iranian repression and "started with a man named Ahmad Moftizadeh." Specious descriptions of this sort are a dereliction of academic duty. The lack of substantiation or color to such statements intimate that Moftizadeh himself was a militant Salafi, with all of the tarnish and ambiguity that surrounds this term today.

The implication of course is to place Maktab Quran and Moftizadeh in the same category as today's most notorious extremist groups, without the historical context necessary to distinguish meaningful differences. Many Muslim movements see themselves as advocating a pure, authentic, and unpolluted version of Islam. The Iranian government itself claims it is the flagbearer of the "pure Islam of Mohammad." Its nemesis across the Persian Gulf markets the Saudi form of Wahhabism as the unadulterated Quranic Islam of the era of Muhammad. Moftizadeh himself, harkening back to and referencing the original religion of Abraham and the prophets, also saw himself as a purist. But failing to recognize the fundamental uniqueness of his progressive teachings is an intellectual failure. To blame Moftizadeh or specify him as a trendsetter for any violent movement is the sort of faux analysis that facilitates the cultural misunderstandings that define our era. The same critique can be applied to our discourse on political Islam today. With the very nature of Islam called into question in connection with militant Islamism and the failure of Islamic political movements, the depth and diversity of that religion is still not considered earnestly. A purist Sunni Muslim of the *Shafi'i* order, Moftizadeh's progressive and nonviolent thinking is grounded in Islamic jurisprudence. A man who is reported to have memorized the Quran, his scholarship is difficult to challenge, unlike the scholarship of many of the leaders of modern Islamist movements.[102] Where does that leave him in the labeling game?

From the USA to Western Europe to secular countries in the Middle East, Islam for many is necessarily a dangerous ingredient to any social grouping or political process. This is less than three decades after these countries championed the Afghan *mujahedeen* in their self-proclaimed *jihad* against the Soviet army, with the US National Security Advisor famously declaring to them on video that "God is on your side." In the discussion on Islam in social and political life, there will be an inevitable middle ground that the world will settle on, the way that it has with the other major religions—each with their diversity of interpretation, positive applications, and occasional horrific implementations. Perhaps a form of Moftizadeh's ideas has a future role in that discussion. His "fundamentalist" interpretation of the Quran, if that word is to be used, cannot be swept under the rug of Islamist shame, polluted by militant ideas that may use similar vocabulary or rhetoric as him. If Moftizadeh was an inspiration in his life and death for a less-informed militant in Egypt or Iraq today, we cannot judge his ideas by the actions of that militant, any more than we can judge George Washington for having his picture in the home of a white supremacist. His teachings are to be judged by his life and his writings.

This book's forward-looking portions, mostly covered in our final part, are more concerned with Kurdistan and Islamism, and foreign policy implications thereto. To explore the jurisprudential and precedential value of Moftizadeh's thinking for the Islamic world could be the subject of another book entirely. Perhaps Moftizadeh's uncle was correct when he implied after Moftizadeh's release from the Shah's prisons that Ahmad was never cut out for politics to begin with. Perhaps also, Moftizadeh kept the Kurdish movement in Iran from realizing its full potential with some combination of his stubbornness and naiveté. But while his and Maktab Quran's ability to garner a critical mass in Kurdistan were and will continue to be limited for the fundamental reasons that we have covered here, the entrance of his progressive ideas in the world's chaotic discussion on Islam is still crucial.

For the person who tortured me in jail. For the person who tortured the many of my followers and killed them in jail, and the many other greater leaders than me and their followers in jail, and for the men who jailed my supporters, I pray. I don't hate them. I love them as much as I love my closest loved ones, and I pray for their guidance. My loves, you be this way too. It doesn't help to hate. If you hate, you pollute your own soul … Words cannot express how much I wish the best for you. My foremost ambition for you is that you have hearts full of light, thoughtfulness of God, and goodness, so much so that the devil has no space to get into your hearts. I want you to be happy with yourselves, and for other people to be happy with you, when you leave this life … May you be so good that rain of mercy falls onto you. May this brother (Ahmad), that is so unworthy of your love, also be so lucky.—Ahmad Moftizadeh[103]

Notes

1. Despite dissatisfaction with the Islamic Republic setting in soon after the revolution across large segments of the Iranian populace, the Iraqi invasion was widely seen as an opportunistic plot by Saddam Hussein, and this sentiment applied in Kurdistan as well. Blame for the resulting misery was placed squarely on Iraq and its supporters. As a result, the "imposed war," as it is called in Iran, fostered support for the Iranian war effort among many Kurds. This undoubtedly detracted from whatever Kurdish nationalist effort would take place in Iranian Kurdistan over those eight years.
2. Iran: Freedom of Expression and Association in the Kurdish Regions". Human Rights Watch. January 9, 2009. http://www.iranrights.org/english/document-549.php
3. For an in-depth analysis of this phenomenon, see Abrahamian, Ervand. *Tortured Confessions: Prisons and Public Recantations in Modern Iran*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.

4. When Moftizadeh was arrested, approximately 200 other members of Maktab Quran were also arrested. Most of these members were released within two years.
5. Family members confirm that according to Moftizadeh's own words, the primary goal of the torture exacted by the Islamic Republic was not to gather information or punish, but to extract a public apology and confession of wrongdoing. Mofty, Hossein. Interview by Ezzatyar, Ali. Telephone, Islamabad, Pakistan/San Leandro, California. August 23, 2015.
6. In our first chapter, a brief discussion of Montazeri's eventual fall from grace is discussed in the subchapter *A Shia Revolution*.
7. See, for example, "Religious Minorities." IRAN. Accessed August 3, 2015. http://www.hrw.org/reports/1997/iran/Iran-05.htm. This is not to indicate that Moftizadeh's story was not worthy of coverage in its own right, but Maktab Quran was not likely to have the resources, contacts, or exposure to bring about this level of publicity.
8. Mofty, Soraya Interview.
9. Elkarra, Basim. Interview by Ezzatyar, Ali. Berkeley, California, 2003.
10. Mofty, Soraya Interview.
11. These letters were verified and read in advance by the Iranian authorities. As a result, they do not deal with political or Kurdish issues much; they tend to concentrate on Islamic behavioral and jurisprudential questions.
12. While it is not a crucial variable, this means that the dates of his letters sometimes do not correspond to the day he actually wrote the letter.
13. This is a translation of the Kurdish and Persian word of *mohabat*. Moftizadeh, Ahmad. Letter from Evin Prison to followers. December 27, 1991 (Persian Language, Maktab Quran archives)
14. Mardokh-Rohani, Fuad Interviews.
15. Moftizadeh, Ahmad. Letter from Evin Prison to followers. July 21, 1990 (Persian Language, Maktab Quran archives).
16. Moftizadeh, Ahmad. Letter from Evin Prison to followers. May 13, 1991 (Persian Language, Maktab Quran archives).
17. Moftizadeh, Ahmad. Letter from Evin Prison to followers. February 11, 1991 (Persian Language, Maktab Quran archives).
18. Mofty, Soraya Interview.
19. Moftizadeh, Ahmad. Letter from Evin Prison to followers. January 27, 1991 (Persian Language, Maktab Quran archives).
20. Moftizadeh, Ahmad. Letter from Evin Prison to followers. December 27, 1991 (Persian Language, Maktab Quran archives).
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid.
23. Moftizadeh, Ahmad. Letter from Evin Prison to followers. July 21, 1990 (Persian Language, Maktab Quran archives).

24. Moftizadeh, Ahmad. Letter from Evin Prison to followers. October 8, 1991 (Persian Language, Maktab Quran archives).
25. Shortly after his release into house arrest, an amateur video was taken of him speaking to his followers in a large room in Kurdish. It is cited here as Ahmad Moftizadeh: Video Speaking to Followers in Kurdish, December 26, 1992.
26. Mardokh-Rohani, Fuad Interviews.
27. Mardokh-Rohani, Fuad Interviews
28. Mardokh-Rohani, Fuad interviews.
29. Moftizadeh, Ahmad. Letter from Evin Prison to followers. July 7, 1990 (Persian Language, Maktab Quran archives).
30. Mardokh-Rohani, Fuad interviews.
31. Moftizadeh, Ahmad. Letter from Evin Prison to followers. July 7, 1990 (Persian Language, Maktab Quran archives).
32. Moftizadeh, Ahmad. Letter from Evin Prison to followers. October 3, 1990 (Persian Language, Maktab Quran archives).
33. Arabic, signifying a form of transgression when worshiping something other than God.
34. Moftizadeh, Ahmad. Letter from Evin Prison to followers. January 27, 1991 (Persian Language, Maktab Quran archives).
35. Moftizadeh, Ahmad. Letter from Evin Prison to followers. January 27, 1991 (Persian Language, Maktab Quran archives). He goes on after these statements to relate a story of one of his followers who was killed.
36. Moftizadeh, Ahmad. Letter from Evin Prison to followers. December 27, 1991 (Persian Language, Maktab Quran archives).
37. Moftizadeh, Ahmad. Letter from Evin Prison to followers. October 3, 1990 (Persian Language, Maktab Quran archives).
38. Rohani, Foad Interviews and others to remain anonymous.
39. Moftizadeh, Ahmad. Letter from Evin Prison to followers. October 3, 1990 (Persian Language, Maktab Quran archives)
40. Moftizadeh, Ahmad. Letter from Evin Prison to followers. October 8, 1991 (Persian Language, Maktab Quran archives).
41. Moftizadeh, Ahmad. Letter from Evin Prison to followers. July 21, 1990 (Persian Language, Maktab Quran archives).
42. Ibid.
43. Moftizadeh, Ahmad. Letter from Evin Prison to followers. October 3, 1990 (Persian Language, Maktab Quran archives).
44. Moftizadeh, Ahmad. Letter from Evin Prison to followers. February 11, 1991 (Persian Language, Maktab Quran archives).
45. Ibid. Here, he is referencing a biblical verse that has been interpreted to mean that a woman is made from a man, and also from a "bent" part of a man's anatomy, indicating in such an interpretation both beholdenness to that man and an inferiority to him.

46. Moftizadeh, Ahmad. Letter from Evin Prison to followers. October 8, 1991 (Persian Language, Maktab Quran archives).
47. Moftizadeh, Ahmad. Letter from Evin Prison to followers. October 3, 1990 (Persian Language, Maktab Quran archives).
48. Ibid.
49. As with much of Moftizadeh's rulings, understanding the context of the Kurdistan of his era (and today) is an important factor in understanding the articulation of some of his instructions. Here, it seems clear that Moftizadeh assumes that a woman will have been disadvantaged by having stayed at home to tend to the marital property.
50. Moftizadeh, Ahmad. Letter from Evin Prison to followers. March 29, 1991 (Persian Language, Maktab Quran archives).
51. Ibid.
52. Moftizadeh, Ahmad. Letter from Evin Prison to followers. December 27, 1991 (Persian Language, Maktab Quran archives).
53. Moftizadeh, Ahmad. Letter from Evin Prison to followers. May 13, 1991 (Persian Language, Maktab Quran archives).
54. Ibid.
55. Moftizadeh, Ahmad. Letter from Evin Prison to followers. January 20, 1992 (Persian Language, Maktab Quran archives).
56. Ibid. Here, he does distinguish Kurdish dancing by saying that technically *halparka* (Kurdish line dancing) is its own word, separate from the word dance, which to him indicates that it was always meant to be a cultural group activity. This seems more of a reflection of his pride in Kurdishness than a meaningful distinction between dance and halparka.
57. Ibid.
58. Moftizadeh, Ahmad. Letter from Evin Prison to followers. October 8, 1991 (Persian Language, Maktab Quran archives).
59. Moftizadeh, Ahmad. Letter from Evin Prison to followers. March 29, 1991 (Persian Language, Maktab Quran archives).
60. In one letter, for example, Moftizadeh states that it is a man's obligation to defend the home. This might be considered a misogynist statement. While Moftizadeh was highly progressive in his views, not all of his ideas would comport with those of a modern-day feminist.
61. Moftizadeh, Ahmad. Letter from Evin Prison to followers. December 27, 1991 (Persian Language, Maktab Quran archives).
62. Ibid.
63. The furthest Moftizadeh went in this regard was to describe the Islamic Republic as "un-Islamic," practically much less significant than attributing the non-believer or infidel label to his opponents.
64. Narration of Moftizadeh statement by Mardokh-Rohani, Fuad.

65. Moftizadeh, Ahmad. Letter from Evin Prison to followers. May 13, 1991 (Persian Language, Maktab Quran archives).
66. Ibid.
67. Ibid.
68. Ibid.
69. Moftizadeh, Ahmad. Letter from Evin Prison to followers. October 3, 1990 (Persian Language, Maktab Quran archives).
70. Ibid.
71. Moftizadeh, Ahmad. Letter from Evin Prison to followers. December 27, 1991 (Persian Language, Maktab Quran archives).
72. Ibid.
73. Moftizadeh, Ahmad. Letter from Evin Prison to followers. October 27, 1988 (Persian Language, Maktab Quran archives).
74. Moftizadeh, Ahmad. Letter from Evin Prison to followers. October 3, 1990 (Persian Language, Maktab Quran archives)
75. Ahmad Moftizadeh: Video Speaking to Followers in Kurdish, December 26, 1992.
76. Moftizadeh, Ahmad. Letter from Evin Prison to followers. December 27, 1991 (Persian Language, Maktab Quran archives)].
77. Moftizadeh, Ahmad. Letter from Evin Prison to followers. December 27, 1991 (Persian Language, Maktab Quran archives).
78. Moftizadeh, Ahmad. Letter from Evin Prison to followers. October 3, 1990 (Persian Language, Maktab Quran archives).
79. Moftizadeh, Ahmad. Letter from Evin Prison to followers. December 27, 1991 (Persian Language, Maktab Quran archives)].
80. Ahmad Moftizadeh: Video Speaking to Followers in Kurdish, December 26, 1992.
81. Ibid.
82. Moftizadeh, Ahmad. Letter from Evin Prison to followers. July 21, 1992 (Persian Language, Maktab Quran archives) and Moftizadeh, Ahmad. Letter from Evin Prison to followers. December 27, 1991 (Persian Language, Maktab Quran archives).
83. Ahmad Moftizadeh: Video Speaking to Followers in Kurdish, December 26, 1992.
84. Moftizadeh, Ahmad. Letter from Evin Prison to followers. October 27, 1988 (Persian Language, Maktab Quran archives).
85. Moftizadeh, Ahmad. Letter from Evin Prison to followers. July 21, 1990 (Persian Language, Maktab Quran archives).
86. Rohani, Majed Interviews.
87. Maktab Quran video archives. Date labeled as December 26, 1992.
88. Mofti, Mohammad Interview.

89. Anonymous anecdote from a follower.
90. Rohani, Majed Interviews.
91. All of Abdul Rahman Ghassemlou, Sheikh Ezzedin, and Abdullah Mohtadi left Iran for Europe as de facto fugitives. Ghassemlou, for his part, was eventually assassinated, allegedly by Islamic Republic agents during negotiations with the regime.
92. Maktab Quran engages in the practice of *da'wa*, or invitation. This is the Islamic act of religious outreach to society. For Maktab Quran, it is not intended to convert individuals to Islam, but build brotherhood and sisterhood with other Kurds and Muslims in the hopes of increasing unity, and, in turn, exposure to spirituality and God.
93. Mardokh-Rohani, Fuad Interviews.
94. Rohani, Majed Interviews.
95. Mardokh-Rohani, Fuad Interviews. Moftizadeh notes both Fuad Mardokh-Rohani and Majed Rohani as two of his most trusted friends in a letter from prison when individuals ask who they can trust to be an arbiter on small disputes.
96. Mardokh-Rohani, Fuad Interviews.
97. Ibid.
98. When seeking to engage in conversations about Moftizadeh while in Kurdistan, one is often met with suspicion. Despite trying to take basic encryption and security precautions in electronic conversations with individuals in Iran about Moftizadeh, many conversations with Maktab Quran members for this book were clearly monitored and would have been impossible without the risk of arrest. Some of those spoken to for this book have been harassed subsequently.
99. The Persian language would perhaps be the most appropriate language for a text/book of this nature because of the fact that Moftizadeh wrote mostly in Persian, most of Maktab Quran's literature remains in Persian, and most Iranian Kurds only read Persian. For more information on this anomaly, please see our discussion on Moftizadeh's time in Iraq in Chapter 3 of this book.
100. In the eyes of one person who actually broke with Maktab Quran, this lack of reference to Moftizadeh is a result of inter-Kurdish rivalry, above else. "Other Kurdish groups would like him to be erased from history … because he was a trendsetter for them. He had more courage and foresight about the brutality of the Shah's regime than they did at a time when their leaders had not yet taken a stand. And despite his also being late to the game in realizing the Islamic regime's duplicity, they don't want his entire history to be known." Rohani, Majed Interviews.
101. Of course, interpretations linking Moftizadeh to militant Islamic groups are partially the inevitable result of his having led an Islamically motivated

group in the modern era. Further, the attempt to highlight the oppression of the Sunni minority through his story also muddles the water where little is known about a man and his movement. But this analysis is not only shortsighted and unhelpful but also a major disservice to the conversation on Islam and its place in the world.

102. See generally subchapter *No Compulsion in Religion*.
103. Moftizadeh, Ahmad. Letter from Evin Prison to followers. October 3, 1990 (Persian Language, Maktab Quran archives) and Moftizadeh, Ahmad. Letter from Evin Prison to followers. July 21, 1990 (Persian Language, Maktab Quran archives).

PART III

CHAPTER 7

Ethnic and Religious Implications in the Greater Middle East

Introduction

The "Islamic State" is in its third year of existence. It has now lasted many times longer than the Mahabad Republic did.

In January 2014, President Obama made one of his first public analyses of the nature of Islamic State, likening it to a junior varsity basketball team.[1] The notion of a caliphate rising out of the rubble of Sunni Iraq was an easy one to dismiss. Even with a weak Iraqi army north of Baghdad, no militant group had yet held a significant portion of land for a prolonged period, and the familiar, seemingly comparable groups to ISIL like Al-Qaeda had not made governance or establishment of a state a priority. Before the summer of 2014 arrived, however, the Islamic State overran Mosul, one of Iraq's most significant cultural and economic cities. In doing this, as the US government called for a coordinated response to take back the city (that never came), ISIL militants reportedly came across a cache of American weapons abandoned by the Iraqi army that transformed them into one of the best armed militias in the Middle East.[2] The Iraqi army was dealt defeat after defeat at the hands of ISIL in the subsequent summer of 2015.

By July, Islamic State militants were knocking on the door of Kurdistan, the only part of Iraq that escaped the chaos and violence of the previous 12 years. American policy publicly remained the maintenance of Iraq's "territorial integrity," which is the preservation of Iraq's historic borders and a strong central government. This meant that despite close ties to

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the Kurdish north which developed in decades prior, the USA had not invested heavily in Kurdistan's independent military infrastructure. Kurdish *peshmerga* fighters found themselves at a great disadvantage against the Islamic State militants and their advanced (ironically, American) weaponry. President Obama authorized airstrikes to ensure that ISIL did not threaten the Kurdish region, as well as to defend Iraq's Yazidi population that was being targeted by the Islamic State on the periphery of Kurdistan. In doing so, the president stated that America would prevent ISIL from "creat[ing] some caliphate through Syria and Iraq."[3] By the middle of September, however, President Obama was forming a "coalition" to combat what appeared to be just that—a contiguous and autonomous ISIL presence across Iraq and Syria.[4] Soon, airstrikes in Syria, as well as training to the Iraqi army and limited weapons to the Kurdish forces, would come. And before long, at the end of October 2015, the president would announce the presence of American troops in Syria. Numerous news items in the interim period, such as the failure and annulment of America's "train and equip" program to "moderate Syrian rebels," would dominate headlines.

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As a university student in the years preceding September 11, 2001, the author observed students of Muslim and Middle Eastern origin contemplate what political change should look like in the region. Most of these students had origins from countries with dysfunctional and authoritarian secular regimes. For many of the devoutly religious, in an era where words like *sharia* were not yet taboo, religious government seemed a natural replacement to the dysfunction of these regimes. 9/11 drove the somewhat elemental conversation about religion and society out of the public space in Muslim communities in the West. Those communities sensed American intolerance with notions of political Islam, and saw the USA go to war with a Taliban regime that purported to be an Islamic state in Afghanistan—a war most Muslims in America supported. The community's prosperity and integration in American society were real and important, and mitigated against the insistence on a conversation regarding this issue in the midst of national fervor that grew vis-à-vis the "war on terror."

Meanwhile, abroad, the 2003 invasion of Iraq and its aftermath seemed to bolster those same ideas of Islam as a panacea to the region's dysfunction. From Morocco to Iraq, Islamist parties that disavowed the traditional monarchical or pseudo-secular dictatorships grew in their popularity. The "Arab Spring" of 2011 created room for many of these parties

to maneuver and participate formally in the political process, but in most of these countries, brief periods of hope were dashed by chaos and civil war. A massive disconnect between the perception of Islam and politics in the West and the reality on the ground in the Middle East was playing out as a sort of war of ideas, where "moderate" Muslims were victimized by both sides.

In the Muslim world, a fight for the mantle of Islam, polluted by the vestiges of a complex post-colonial history, is still underway. But a bitter pill the West must swallow is the following: the nature of the region's grievances was partially sabotaged by the invasion of Iraq, hastening the evolution of Al-Qaeda-type groups to the so-called Islamic State. The recruitment of the young, prone to violence, and disaffected into the more radical and violent of the Islamist groups is not surprising when you consider the narrative these groups promote: that they wage God's war against those that steal the region's wealth, that the West has killed many times more Muslims than the reverse, and that Muslims are unfairly treated in Europe and America. This argument of half-truths discards historical context while exploiting a superficial examination of the West's mistakes. It also ignores the reality that not through violence, but through systems that adequately represent the region's many ethnicities, religions, and ideas, will prosperity be possible. Nonetheless, the argument is powerful for those young, prone to violence, and disaffected.

ISIL's prominence is at least as much a reflection of Sunni Iraq's collective dissatisfaction with the post-2003 Iraqi order as the ideological zeal of a new brand of Islamists. The world may eventually "degrade and destroy" the Islamic State, to borrow from President Obama's language, perhaps driving the group underground and transforming it into a popular terrorist group and brand instead of a state. But the information age and small-arms proliferation has changed notions of power and influence permanently, and the Islamic State's existence and popularity among even small segments of the Muslim world will constitute a much longer-term battle with the group's fundamental ethos and its implementation in the West's major cities. Besides outlining weaknesses in approaches thus far, this book does not attempt to deal in any significant detail with the origins and causes of the rise of ISIL, or the integration of Islam with public life. Further, this chapter does not offer a solution to the region's array of complex problems. It focuses on the implications of the theories we have developed from the history outlined prior, explaining what Kurdistan's role can be in helping manage regional conflict with the support of the

international community. Conclusions drawn here are premised on the basic notion that while diplomacy requires that we engage all parties whether or not they are allies, our chosen partners should ideally espouse values that we establish for our own populations in the West.

Of course, no terrorist group or state has of yet threatened the borders of the USA or any other Western country. However, one of the major aims of Islam-focused terrorism is to provide a violent catalyst to degrade the enemy's will and value system. In that sense, it can be argued that Islamic militants, in their continued growth and prominence, and in the West's variable and unpopular policies in the Muslim world over the course of many decades, are succeeding. The West, and in particular the US' involvement in a conflict, tends to play into the Islamists' narrative of a war against Islam, weakening America's standing in the "battle of ideas" while enhancing that of the Islamists. It is therefore essential, as a number of American policymakers have emphasized, that the fight against Islamic extremism be waged by those in the region themselves.

In the wake of a burgeoning rapprochement between Iran and the USA, much has been touted of a natural alliance between Shia Muslim Iran and the West in their respective fights against ISIL. But there are a number of deficiencies in the idea of Shia militias constituting the coveted domestic Muslim fighting force against the Islamic State. Firstly, none of the area controlled by ISIL borders the contiguous "Shia heartland" that begins in Southern Iraq and stretches through Iran. Shias are not practically well-placed to fight ISIL, and this is the main reason why ISIL so easily swept through swaths of Iraq without much resistance from the Shia-dominated Iraqi government. More importantly, though, a reliance on Shia militias has the likelihood of worsening intra-Islamic sectarian conflict while improving Islamic State recruitment efforts within Iraq in particular. In the long term, it would be no more effective than the West waging the battle on its own, while trading one set of extremists for perhaps a more rational group of extremists. So while Iran and Shia militias do have an increasingly important role to play in certain facets of the fight against ISIL and the stability of the region, cooperating with these entities at the moment carries enormous risk. Given all of this, Kurds sit atop the lonely list of regional Muslims fit to partake in an evolving battle of this nature.

There are inherent ideological preferences in this chapter that are best identified early. One is that some form of democracy is always preferable to religious government. This does not mean that certain elements of

religious law should play no role in any country's political or legal system. However, that role should not be the result of religious interpretation and forced ideological integration, but rather democratic preference and, subject to change. Another preference inherent to the arguments set out in this chapter relate to the limits of cultural relativism in the modern era. Insofar as a cultural or religious practice encroaches on the personal freedom or preference of the individual, it is inadequate for imposition on society as a whole, even if it is a fundamental feature of a particular culture or religion. If only for these two principles alone—regardless of how the media may unfairly cover the entity or how the group might moderate over time—we must accept that the Islamic State is a negative development for humanity.

One conclusion that may incorrectly be interpreted from this chapter is a preference for ethnic nationalisms. In fact, ethnic nationalism, including Kurdish nationalism, has its own significant drawbacks. But it is often a natural product of a region's history and development, and so this chapter will treat at least democratic forms of nationalism with a dose of practicality, demonstrating its preference to exclusionary forms of political Islam.

Kurdistan as a "Natural Ally"

As a population with no consistent regional ally, an ideological impediment to Islamism, and increasingly shared social values with the West, Kurds are likely to remain a stalwart long-term partner in the Middle East region.

Modern Middle Eastern history has provided rough evidence that groups with shared rivalries tend to make consistent allies. Syria's alliance with Iran during the Iran–Iraq war was made possible by Hafez al-Assad's rivalry with Saddam Hussein. Kurdish militias often sided with governments that were waging war on other Kurds across the border, in hopes of finding synergies in the battle against their own host government. This rivalry-based alliance structure is part of the reason why the most significant (yet minority) non-Arab nations in the Middle East—the Israelis, the Kurds, and the Turks—have been reliable allies to the West.

But where religion is both a major vehicle of conflict, as well as the shared trait of all the region's diverse groups, calculation of loyalty and alliance is decidedly more difficult. Almost every country in the Middle East—Algeria, Libya, Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Turkey, and Iran the most notable among them—is either enduring or has recently endured

domestic strife where a major party is an Islamist one. Not all of these Islamist movements can be painted with the same brush. They each have their own complex origins and compositions, such as degree of preference for democracy. But in each case, their presence complicates the delicate foreign policy balance between supporting democratic institutions, encouraging normative (moderate) Islam, and delegitimizing extremist interpretations of Islam. Kurdistan's indisposition to Islamism is particularly valuable in this era where extremist religious ideology is a primary cause of instability.

For the reasons outlined in this book, significant political movements based on Islam are not likely to develop in Kurdistan today or in the near future. Ahmad Moftizadeh's story is part of an ideological evolution in Kurdistan which establishes the limits of political Islam in Kurdish society.[5] The broader Kurdish community has been funneled down a path of conflict with pan-Islamism and political Islam, obstinate to ideas that discount its cultural distinctness. Historically, the only militant Islamist movements associated with Kurdistan have been small, and mostly fostered outside of Kurdistan. Kurdish support for such groups is insignificant, and is likely to continue to be immaterial. Since the only official Kurdish government, the KRG, is a proper democratic "system" (that is not susceptible to the sway of religious extremism), support for it presents little risk of giving the impression that a foreign entity is taking sides in a domestic ideological dispute. The low likelihood that Kurdistan's political systems will trend toward an entrenched religious dogma suggests that Kurds will not seek to distance themselves from Western allies for ideological reasons.

Finally, all parts of Kurdistan have demonstrated an expanding appreciation for democratic values and open society. From Turkey, to Syria, through Northern Iraq, to Iran, Kurdish political parties have consistently (even if imperfectly) made Kurdish nationalism, an idea enabled by an appreciation of self-determination, the core of their relatively democratic movements. Supporting movements that comply with the values by which the West defines itself is the hallmark of responsible foreign policy. It is also the most likely approach to bolster the continuity of long-term allies. Democratic communities have a natural tendency to view democracies favorably, putting the West at an advantage over other actors who seek to exercise influence in the Kurdish region. Ensuring the survival and stability of Kurdish parties and institutions in each of the aforementioned countries has a strong likelihood of promoting a reliable, rational interlocutor in the Middle East for the world's democracies going forward.

Kurdistan as an Effective Force for Peace

The more important factor for the West's long-term interests is actually not whether our foreign policy will establish durable allies, but rather whether groups and polities will be effective in advancing peace and stability. Support for Kurdish groups is one of the few foreign policy pursuits with a likelihood of contributing to a sustainable status quo in the region.

Kurdistan is primarily Sunni Muslim, as are the most turbulent centers of conflict in the Middle East today (Sunni Iraq and Syria). Despite an intolerance for political Islam in Kurdistan, most Kurdish nationalists still consider themselves normative Muslims. This is why ISIL's (and before ISIL, Al-Qaeda's) propaganda machine originally targeted Kurdistan aggressively, with the failed hope of turning it into a new domain of support for its brand of extremism. Its lack of success in propagating its ideas, and Kurdistan's relative prosperity, is why Kurdistan has now become one of ISIL's primary regional enemies.

A successful Iraqi Kurdistan, the only portion of Kurdistan that is officially autonomous, will eventually serve as an example of tragedy to triumph for the rest of the region's low to middle-income population. The Kurdistan region had the highest poverty rates in Iraq at the time of the first gulf war; today it has the lowest.[6] The region's GDP per capita today is many times what it was 20 years ago in real terms, and nearly three times the rest of the country. The source of one of the world's largest refugee exoduses just 25 years ago, Iraqi Kurdistan is now sheltering thousands of Arab refugees seeking to flee the chaos of their countries for stability and tranquility, as well as a destination for thousands of businessmen who see Kurdistan as one of the few acceptable investment enterprises left in the region.

The Kurdish region is also setting an example of democracy, both inside and outside of Iraq. In Iraqi Kurdistan, a number of elections have been held since autonomy was established, with numerous opposition parties participating freely in them.[7] Civil society institutions are open and active there, making it a truer, more functional democracy than any of the Arab states surrounding it (as well as Iran). The rest of the Kurdish region is similarly on a path of democratic evolution. In the part of Syria that is controlled by Kurdish militias, direct democracy has been established as the governing mechanism by Kurdish guerilla forces. With ISIL's governing brutality just miles away, Kurdish commanders have delegated deci-

sion making locally and evenly, with aims of achieving a representative governing system.[8] In Turkey, likewise, the main Kurdish party has recently achieved electoral upsets on a platform of inclusiveness and progressivism. Reports from the battlefield in Syria through 2015, where female *peshmerga* fought alongside men, returned stories of ISIL militants often on the back foot. Everywhere you look in the region, Kurdistan truly represents the anti-ISIL in the world of Islam, with its shared trait of Sunni Islam resonating symbolically.

If ISIL seeks to paint Kurds as non-believers in an attempt to delegitimize their alternative worldview, it runs the risk of alienating other non-Arab populations—the vast majority of Muslims—that it wishes to coalesce with. In this sense, the sort of ideas espoused by Ahmad Moftizadeh and other moderate Muslims are inevitably dangerous to extremist Islamic ideology either in their ability to garner support against extremism or in exposing extremists as divisive. Local Muslim populations with a more open and prosperous set of values, not only serving as boots on the ground but brains on the ground, are essential. Winning the battle of ideas is not a zero-sum game. It will not be won, but perhaps lost, with bombs and bullets. We must reluctantly accept that violence in the region and terrorism in the West will likely increase in the interim. But a long-term grassroots campaign to delegitimize the extremism of the Islamic State can be waged and won locally, and Kurdistan is one essential piece of such an approach.

Implications for Turkey (and Syria) in Uncertain Times

The common narrative in Western media today is secular Turkey's descent into authoritarianism under a divisive, Islamist leader. The more accurate view is that the Turkish republic has gone from a secular military autocracy, to an autocratic, conservative state. The secular Turkish republic led for decades by the party of Mustafa Kemal "Atatürk" (the Republican People's Party, or CHP) was never a secular democracy in the Western mold. With heavy-handed and continual political intervention by the military, Turkey's government has traditionally been hostile to the ideas of freedom of expression and organization. To give an example, the "Press Freedom Index" published by Reporters Without Borders the year Turkey's Islamist Justice and Development Party (AKP) was elected ranked the country 99th, behind countries like Algeria, Kuwait, and the

Congo. Kurdish journalists and politicians have been a main target of the government's repressive apparatus, with thousands among them jailed, tortured, and killed in the last four decades.

Turkey's history books describe the tumultuous founding of the country when Atatürk consolidated the Anatolian peninsula from the greedy colonial powers who sought to deprive the Turks of a homeland when the Ottoman Empire dissolved. The untold part of this story is that Ataturk's impressive feat annulled the Treaty of Sevres (1920), where the Allied Powers guaranteed Kurds the right of self-determination. For the last 100 years, Turkey has embarked instead on a failed policy of forced integration of its Kurdish minority, often with the West's implicit support. Turkey's constitution does not formally recognize the existence of ethnic minorities within its borders. During the Turkish republic's early history, Kurds were referred to as "mountain Turks," despite a history, culture, and language that distinguishes Kurds from their Turkish neighbors. This myopic view of Turkish society, an extension of the turbulent early history of the republic, translates into a hardened ethno-centric posture from Turkey's main parties. The advancement of any minority group that advocates for greater social, cultural, or political liberties, then, is viewed as a threat by Turkey's traditional parties (and it must be said, many nationalist Turks). But such advancement is inevitable.

As discussed prior, like Iranian Kurdistan, Kurdish society in Turkey shifted from a tribe focused ideological structure to a nationalist one over the course of the twentieth century. In the late 1970s, Turkish Kurdistan found a unified voice in the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), a Marxist-nationalist group which embarked on an often violent war of secession in the last quarter of the twentieth century. The PKK grew to be widely popular in Kurdistan, and widely despised and feared in the rest of Turkey. To this day, the PKK remains the primary "boogeyman" of the Turkish state, whose post-Ottoman sense of regional betrayal still colors much of its political narrative.[9] While the PKK was militarily defeated in the late 1990s, the movement only strengthened nationalist sentiments among Kurds in Turkey. Targeting Kurdistan's tribal confederations during the civil war, who it saw as inhibitors of its Marxist and nationalist platform, the PKK created the recipe for a broad base of support which survives today.[10] Meanwhile, its political agenda developed progressively underground, influenced positively by Kurdistan's democratic experiment in Iraq.

Turkey's main Kurdish political party today (The People's Democratic Party, or HDP) can be described as the PKK's modern political wing. The party has evolved from its origins as a group advocating for the independence of Kurdistan into Turkey's primary progressive party of the left.[11] Under its young leader Selahattin Demirtaş, it has adopted a broad, highly progressive agenda. It expressly rejects violence as a means to advance political aims and is also described as the "party of women" and other minorities, establishing quotas for women and the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Community (LGBT) community in its leadership. HDP is often accused of remaining loyal to and maintaining ties with the imprisoned founder of the PKK, Abdullah Ocalan. But even if this is the case, Ocalan himself has renounced separatism from his Turkish island-prison, and now advocates for the reformed values of greater rights for Kurds within the Turkish state. In back to back elections in 2015, despite widely believed foul play by the ruling AKP party that sought to prevent such a result, the HDP established itself as one of Turkey's most popular political forces by gaining entry into Turkey's parliament.[12]

Turkey's important role in NATO, as well as Turkish lobbies in the West's capitals, has successfully dissuaded the world's democracies from taking a balanced approach on the Kurdish issue in Turkey.[13] As a result, the conventional wisdom for policy toward Turkey's treatment of minorities is to characterize the issue as a "domestic" one—the equivalent of turning a blind eye to mistreatment—in order to preserve the important bilateral relationship and the regional interests that flow from it. But the Turkish state being increasingly held to account by a popular domestic party with a progressive political message is a positive development for Turkey and the West, not a negative one. Importantly, unlike other minority groups that have been deprived basic rights in the region, Kurds in Turkey have aligned behind inclusive and democratic, and not Islamist and irredentist, principles and politicians. Far from jeopardizing the West's relationship with Turkey, even a subtle change in the West's policy vis-à-vis the Kurds there could bring a much needed counterweight to the untenable and increasingly detrimental path that Turkish policymakers are pursuing both inside and outside of the Turkish republic. For the world to hold Turkey to a modern standard of human rights domestically would serve as a check on the authoritarian impulses of its government, and a boon for pluralism in the greater region (more on this below).

Kurdish Guerrillas on the Turkish–Syrian Border and the Front Lines of History

Meanwhile, having declared a ceasefire some years prior with the Turkish state amid negotiations with the country's new leadership, the PKK's armed wing took up residence in Northern Iraq. In conjunction with the KRG, its sister party in Syria (The Democratic Union Party, or PYD), as well as other *peshmerga* that joined the battle from other regions of Kurdistan (including Iran), the PKK became heavily engaged in the emerging battle against the Islamic State.[14] When this battle engulfed Kurdish villages on the Syrian, Iraqi, and Turkish border region, PKK guerillas became a central fighting force to defend those villages from an ISIL takeover.[15]

Turkey's position evolved over time with regard to the Syrian civil war and the conflict with the Islamic State, and much of this had to do with factors relating to Kurdistan. After a brief period of apparent support for Syria's leader, followed by apparent neutrality, the Turkish government finally declared in late 2011 that President Bashar al-Assad had to go. Soon after, Turkey's ruling AKP party began facing allegations that it was supporting hardline Islamist extremists against the Syrian president, which was not what the world had bargained for when hoping that the Middle East's model democracy would take the side of the Syrian people. Meanwhile, Turkey took note as Kurdish forces successfully defended most of their territory and began to carve out their own autonomy across the border in parts of Syria. It quite literally observed one of the most publicized battles in the regional fight against the Islamic State in Kobane. There, as journalists looked on from the Turkish side of the border with Syria, Kurdish militias waged a battle for the city against a determined ISIL contingent.[16] The Turkish government, citing neutrality, denied basic forms of support to the Kurdish militias fighting ISIL, and even prevented sympathetic guerillas from passing through the border to help the Kurds. It described American support to Kurdish guerillas as "wrong."[17] Finally bowing to strong international pressure, Turkey reluctantly allowed the passage of a small number of Iraqi *peshmerga* reinforcements to Kobane; soon, the Islamic State was dealt its first highly publicized defeat.[18] The Kurds began to be perceived as the silver lining to the region's turmoil in the Western media.

Shortly thereafter, during Turkey's parliamentary elections of June 2015, the Kurdish vote that was once an important demographic for AKP instead mobilized in support of the HDP. This had the result of denying President Recep Tayyip Erdogan the majority he achieved in successive

previous elections. Anti-Kurdish rhetoric from the Turkish state increased as it geared up for a controversial re-election, and soon, a fragile ceasefire with the PKK was broken by the Turkish army.[19] So when Turkey declared itself formally engaged in the fight against ISIL just over a month later in the summer of 2015, many viewed the move with suspicion. If Turkey were to pursue this policy change earnestly, it would find itself in an indirect alliance of interests with the group it viewed as the primary threat to Turkish security and unity, the PKK.[20] Long suspected of having enabled and even cooperated with Islamic State militants, it was left to be seen how Turkey would balance its new pledge to support NATO allies with its long-standing commitment to prevent the establishment of an autonomous Kurdish region in Syria.[21] Indeed, when Turkey did mobilize in its purported battle against the Islamic State, it was the PKK in Northern Iraq that bore the brunt of Turkey's aerial bombardment.[22] As this book went to press, the jailing and assassination of prominent Kurdish activists in Turkey as well as Turkey's attacks on PKK guerillas in Northern Iraq were ongoing.

Implications in Syria (and Turkey)

The civil war in Syria remains a moving picture, constantly transforming in style and substance in the direction further violence and tragedy. As this book went to press, the majority of Syria was controlled by groups other than the "central government" of Bashar al-Assad. Virtually all of the rebel forces with control of any significant stretch of Syrian territory are conservative Islamist groups. The only exception is the Kurdish region.

In Northeastern Syria, approximately two million Kurds made up a large chunk of Syria's many disenfranchised citizens under the Assad family's reign. The weight of oppression suffered by Syria's Kurds can be described as being one level less severe than those of Turkey. While forced assimilation and the denial of the Kurdish population's existence was not present in Syria (as it was for many years in Turkey), official use or formal instruction in the Kurdish language was not allowed, among other things.[23]

Syrian Kurdistan's predicament is fundamentally joined with the larger question of the international community's relationship with Turkey. Since the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire[24] Syria's Kurds have generally been under the sphere of influence of Turkey's much larger Kurdish population. Turkey's societal trends in the subsequent destruction of the tribal unit and

dissemination of Kurdish nationalist sentiment heavily influenced Syria's Kurds. From the time of the PKK's armed rebellion against the Turkish state, recruitment efforts among Syria's Kurds were an important part of the rebel group's strategy. The PKK was officially based and active in Syria during its armed insurrection in Southeast Turkey, and was more or less openly supported by the Assad regime as a counterweight to Turkey (with which the Ba'ath regime had certain resource disputes). This was until the Adana Agreement was signed between Syria and the Turkish government in October 1998, ending Syrian support for the PKK and leading to the expulsion of its leader Abdullah Ocalan from Syrian territory. Soon after the PKK was driven underground in Syria, an offshoot organization which remained friendly to it, the PYD, was formed (circa 2003).[25] This organization remained in close communication with the PKK, pledging loyalty to its imprisoned leader Ocalan.

When mass protests against President Bashar al-Assad and the Ba'ath regime began in Syria in 2011, the Kurdish population was generally supportive of the intention and direction of the movement. When protests degenerated into civil war, however, the Kurdish rebellion took a decidedly different undertone than did that of Sunni Arab opposition to President Assad. Unlike the other main militias vying for power in Syria—ISIL, Al-Qaeda-affiliated groups, and other domestic Syrian Arab opposition to Assad (such as the Free Syrian Army)—the PYD is strictly secular. Like with other parts of Kurdistan, Kurdish nationalist sentiment grew in Syria as neighboring forms of nationalisms began to form and become the primary vehicles for political movements. As this Kurdish nationalism grew, reliance on Islam as the composition of a Kurdish political movement faded away. Today, Syria's Kurds are structurally unlikely to adopt Islamism as the foundation of a movement. As a result of the ideas and stories we have explored in the previous chapters, the West's limited support for Kurdish rebels in Syria has paid remarkable dividends in the fight against ISIL, especially when compared with support to other groups.

There remains an ongoing threat to this success, however. The West has taken an inconsistent approach vis-à-vis the PYD and its sister organization, the PKK. The PKK has been on the US Department of State's list of foreign terrorist organizations (FTOs) since 1997, as well as the European Union's "terrorist list." This is despite it being virtually indistinguishable from the PYD in terms of history, loyalties, and ideology. Given the PKK's predominant role in the fight against the ISIL, this policy threatens to debilitate local cooperation against the Islamic State going forward.

Regardless of the merit of designating the PKK a terrorist organization during the Turkish civil war that ended in the late 1990s, the organization's existence on these terrorist lists today has garnered criticism.[26] Those critics underline the PKK's reformed military and political agenda, as well as its indispensability to battling ISIL on the ground in Iraq and Syria. The Turkish government, the main proponent of the PKK's terrorist distinction, has itself negotiated with the PKK's imprisoned leader, and for the last decade, the group has renounced separatism and declared unilateral ceasefires on a number of occasions. It was the PKK that was on the front lines in the Iraqi city of Sinjar, rescuing Iraqi Yazidis and protecting other non-Muslim minorities from ISIL terror. In light of the PKK's non-civilian focused and reduced armed activity in Turkey, its abandonment of a separatist agenda, and its involvement in the battle against the Islamic State, it is time that its designation be re-evaluated.[27]

Given that the PKK and the PYD are two branches of the same group, support for the PYD by the USA is rendered much more precarious if the PKK carries the same terrorist distinction as groups like ISIL and Al-Qaeda. When considering the successful cooperation that is taking place between these Kurdish organizations and the international community, this arrangement is flagrantly inconsistent. Turkey's own willingness to entertain the idea of greater Kurdish rights since AKP's rise to power has seemed to move in lockstep with the amount of Kurdish constituents that vote for the party; partially for this reason, but also for purposes of the terrorist lists' own ongoing perceived utility and relevance, the Turkish government's stance should not determine the world's evaluation of the PKK. Turkey's continual effort in painting the PKK as a terrorist group is a disingenuous attempt at generating moral equivalence with the republic's poor human rights record, facilitating Turkey's destruction of Kurdish political enterprise wherever it is able. For the West going forward, neither the traditional preservation of interests calculation nor a moral assessment of this policy advises continuity.

PKK entities, despite all of their defaults, are reformed, relatively progressive, and largely democratic groups that are essential to fighting ISIL. Like other polities, though, there is a diversity of opinion among Kurds and the PKK itself on paths forward. More extreme elements among these groups will surely advocate that a return to arms is called for in the face of heightened aggression from the Turkish government. These ideas must be extinguished, and a policy that supports the pacifist

elements among the Kurds is an effective manner of encouraging the victory of this camp.

Perhaps just as importantly, Kurdish ascendance through an internationally accepted political movement is a presence not just against ISIL, but against the increasingly unilateral and unchecked behavior of the Turkish republic. Through a policy that does more harm than good, countries that tow the Turkish party line vis-à-vis the Kurds enable Turkey's problematic domestic and foreign policies for no tangible benefit. Turkey has not proven itself a reliable buffer or remedy to either Islamic extremism or Russia. To the contrary, the world's enabling of reckless Turkish policy has served to exacerbate tensions in both of these arenas. Helping tilt the balance of power toward the Turkish republic's people are not likely to affect the core relationship between Turkey and its NATO allies if this policy change is pursued genuinely and consistently. And it may serve to add democratic, and not ideological color to the Turkish republic's domestic and foreign policies.

This is an opportune moment for the international community to reconsider who its allies and its terrorists are de novo. While acknowledging that the ascent of HDP is a positive development for Turkish democracy, and cooperating with a secular, democratic PYD enterprise in Syria, can the West maintain that the PYD's mother group is a terrorist one? Can it do so even though this clearly undermines its own number one foreign policy commitment to undermine the Islamic State? Will doing so solidify the existing reputation of short-term opportunism in the West's foreign policies, and what is the long-term effect if so? Given the importance of Turkey's role in the region and its symbolism as a successful Muslim democracy, these questions are not easy ones. But if policy in the region remains in its current form, the battle against ISIL and Islamic extremism in the long term, at the very least, is partially abandoned at its inception.

Implications in Kurdistan, Northern Iraq

The victims of genocide and fratricide, few would have placed their money on Iraq's Kurds ever being a beacon of stability and prosperity in the Middle East.[28] In the 1970s, a large scale Kurdish insurrection in Iraq was crushed brutally by the Iraqi Ba'ath regime after being abandoned by the international community. In the 1980s, hundreds of thousands of Kurds were killed in Northern Iraq through various wars and crackdowns by the central government. Just less than thirty years ago, there was hardly a more dire human rights predicament than Iraqi Kurdistan anywhere in

the world. But despite this, with the imposition of the oft-cited Iraqi no-fly zones that allowed Iraq's Kurds to establish an autonomous enclave in the north of the country, Kurdistan has been on an uphill trajectory since 1992. Today, it is a relatively democratic and prosperous oasis in an otherwise chaotic region. It has also been a loyal ally of the USA in particular, and an area that has escaped the Islamist fervor that has engulfed each of its neighbors to a significant degree.

Iraqi Kurdistan's history has overlap with that of Iranian Kurdistan. Sharing the Sorani and Gorani Kurdish dialects with most of Iran's Kurds, cultural and political ties between the two regions have always been close. The Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iraq, currently led by Iraqi Kurdistan's president Massoud Barzani, is an offshoot of the Iranian KDPI that founded the Mahabad Republic. Massoud Barzani's father, Mustafa, led the Mahabad Republic's core armed forces across the border during the republic's short life.[29] Iraqi Kurdistan, the only part of Kurdistan that is officially autonomous, continues to bear the flag and national anthem of the fallen Mahabad Republic.

Like the rest of Kurdistan, even if Northern Iraq has only recently established itself as consistently democratic, the "secular" Islamism of the sheikhs has faded there as a political force for many generations. Kurdish nationalism is the primary political idea embraced by Iraq's Kurds, even if tribal and family allegiances continue to play a role there to a more significant degree than in Eastern or Northern Kurdistan. This is why the Iraqi Kurdish *peshmerga*, the "army" of Northern Iraq and perhaps the most effective army force in the country as a whole, has mobilized so effectively in the fight against the Islamic State. Close cooperation with American military consultants and "coalition airstrikes" have helped the Iraqi *peshmerga* protect Kurdish land from a better equipped Islamic State. Notably, the *peshmerga* have also taken the coveted city of Kirkuk, which was deserted by the Iraqi army as ISIL militants approached.[30] The oil-rich city is one of Iraq's most controversial regions in terms of governance rights.

The KRG of Northern Iraq plays a delicate balancing act when asserting its sovereignty. While it has gained significant favor with the armed forces of the USA, a weak public relations apparatus as well as strong Turkish and Arab lobbies in Washington have tempered the West's willingness to entertain a change in Iraq's political status quo. Even with the practical failings of a "one Iraq" policy manifestly evident, the USA and most of the West still support a unified Iraq much in the mold of the one envi-

sioned at the time of the 2003 invasion. Iraqi Kurdistan's president has formally declared that he is not seeking independence as of yet. But with a referendum showing that almost all Kurds support such an eventuality, his statements have not allayed American fears of Kurdish separation from the rest of Iraq. Perhaps as a result, the Kurds have failed to secure the sorts of tactical, material, and logistical support that the Iraqi central government has received from the USA. Turkey also has important interests linked to events across the border in Iraqi Kurdistan. While it has established amicable relations with the KRG, Turkey is concerned about the precedent an independent or autonomous Kurdish region sets for Turkey's own Kurdish population. The KRG has sought to ease Ankara's anxiety by allowing the Turkish government to launch attacks against PKK rebels on Iraqi Kurdistan's soil, much to the disappointment of your average Kurd.

This all paints the picture of an Iraqi Kurdish government that, while increasingly modern and interest-driven, is crippled by its position between more powerful actors. In today's wars of small arms and ideas, however, Kurdistan is not totally powerless. It can be argued that the West needs Kurdistan as much as Kurdistan needs the West. Northern Iraq is the West's only saving grace after almost 15 years of "war on terror." It has proven to be an indispensable tool in punishing ISIL and setting it back on the periphery of its territory. While *peshmerga* have not been mobilized deep within ISIL territory, Kurdistan is one of the few brick walls that ISIL has run into.[31] From a Sunni Muslim autonomous region, such a return on investment is inimitable.

Despite a number of shortcomings (some of which are discussed below), the KRG of Northern Iraq has galvanized the rest of Kurdistan politically, and fortified Kurdish identity and a democratic form of nationalism across the Kurdish region. Northern Iraq can be a trendsetter not only for Kurds but for the rest of the Sunni Muslim region. The KRG is surrounded by failed states and authoritarian governments—a bad neighborhood to be sure. But one clean and prosperous unit increases value and the likelihood that the rest of the neighborhood gentrifies. A successful Sunni Muslim polity, despite being a landlocked and surrounded by foes, will set an example for the region in the long term. Given the likelihood of militant interpretations of Islam being a factor in the rest of the region's conflicts going forward, permanent and powerful Kurdish autonomy in Northern Iraq is all the more important. It should be enabled.

An Essential, Democratic KRG

Part of Northern Iraq's effectiveness as a presence against the Islamic State and other forms of Islamic extremism is its ability to manage stable and democratic growth. While Kurdistan has demonstrated a collective will against the Islamic State, it remains a community of diverse ideas and democratic preferences. Despite the relative popularity of President Barzani, public dissatisfaction with the nepotism and corruption prevalent in Iraqi Kurdistan has increased in recent years. Much of this is a result of a KRG political system that is dominated by the KDP and the PUK.

This discontent spawned a new party in 2009, *Gorran* (Change), dedicated to bringing a more diverse voice to the Kurdish government. *Gorran* had surprising success in the 2009 and 2010 Kurdish and Iraqi elections, leading to the appointment of a number of government ministers from the party. This set the stage for planned presidential elections in Kurdistan in 2013, where it was hoped by many that someone outside of the main political parties could stand and win. But with the instability brought about by the rise of the Islamic State, the planned 2013 (and then 2015) president elections were delayed. When protests and boycotts were called by *Gorran*, the KRG government led by the KDP reacted angrily by preventing *Gorran* ministers' entry into parliament and replacing certain key positions with loyalists. This was a bad result not only for *Gorran*, but for the Kurdistan region. It is also a bad result for Kurdistan's allies.

The nature of Iraqi Kurdistan's dependence on its major parties is a debilitating factor, and when push comes to shove, the main Kurdish parties need to demonstrate that they value Kurdistan's long-term democratic health more than the prosperity of their respective parties. The USA in particular has an essential role to play in mitigating disputes between Kurdish parties with the hope of encouraging the continued democratic nature of the Kurdistan region. Supporting a stable and strong Kurdish leadership to help fight the Islamic State is reasonable, but not at the expense of the Kurdish region's pluralism. This could ultimately contribute to a more catastrophic unraveling of the region's stability in the long term. A "friendly authoritarian" foreign policy will fail in Kurdistan, as it has tended to do elsewhere in the medium term, merely putting a bandage on underlying grievances and the lack of a democratic process. Today, the disputes in Iraqi Kurdistan are relatively minor. Strong diplomacy is neces-

sary to alleviate them before they become a set of insurmountable rivalries between Kurdistan's parties.

Iranian Kurdistan: Implications, 20 Years after Moftizadeh

Iran's various Kurdish guerilla groups were contained and eventually defeated by the Islamic Republic's army after the revolution. But Kurdish nationalist sentiment, and a desire for greater Kurdish rights in Iran, obviously remained. The Maktab Quran group is perhaps the most significant group that defines itself by a religion in the entire Kurdish region. As we have discussed, however, it is no longer an "Islamist" group. It does not see Islamic governance as the solution to Iran's or Kurdistan's problems. In fact, it does not purport to have a national governance agenda at all today. Its criticisms of the Islamic Republic come down to the Iranian government's open discrimination against the Sunni and Kurdish minority in Iran, and in that sense, its agenda is one of self-determination. Like all groups which maintain sympathies in Iranian Kurdistan today—the KDPI, Komala, and others, Maktab Quran defines itself through the central government' suppression of liberty.

Unlike the region's other Muslim groups, it also defines itself as a nonviolent one. The many Maktab Quran members and religious Kurds consulted for this manuscript felt obliged to describe their ideas through express and emphatic distinction from militant political groups. The Kurdistan in which Ahmad Moftizadeh lived was one where he was a popular religious leader. He continues to be popular among many there. But like during the prerevolutionary era, political Islam today is feeble in Iranian Kurdistan. Where the rest of Iran was captivated by the idea of Islamic democracy or other forms of political Islam in 1979, Kurdistan was mostly unwilling to accept those ideas, even from its well-respected leaders. Today's Iranian Kurdistan is further along that trajectory, highly unlikely to resort to the political or militant Islam of its neighbors.

Post-colonial Middle Eastern history is one defined by the pendulum. The most devoutly secular countries at one time seem to have spawned the most Islamist-leaning populations. The region's "Islamic" countries are inhabited by the some region's most progressive activists, battling to reform religion out of government. And while Iranian Kurdistan

gave birth to the Mahabad Republic, numerous secular Kurdish parties, and one of modern history's most progressive Islamist leaders, Iranian Kurdistan is not currently an active fault line for political activity. But since Kurdish nationalist sentiment is strong among Iran's population, and the Islamic Republic of Iran is not likely to pursue a democratic initiative in Kurdistan soon, it is only a matter of time before Iranian Kurdistan erupts again. When it does, such movement(s) will be composed of the familiar elements of broader Kurdistan's other movements. They may be imperfect, but they will likely be Kurdish nationalist, pro-Western, and focused on the self-determination of the Kurdish people.

A Truly Modern Iran

Unlike many Middle Eastern countries, whose recent upheavals underlined the domestic popularity of Islamist-leaning political groups, the Islamic Republic of Iran has rather consistently seen its most reformist and progressive parties prevail in elections. Partially as a result of this, a consensus has formed in most Western circles concerned with such questions that a majority of Iranians are in favor of a more traditional separation of church and state, and secular government. But this image of an Iranian populace that is post-Islamism in its politics, and hence modern, conceals certain realities about Iran's political maturity.

During the government of Mohammad Reza Khatami, the first so-called reformist president of the Islamic Republic, the author was an intern for Iran's premier private consulting firm in Tehran. The firm's management was educated and or raised in the West, while the majority of its employees had similar backgrounds, or came from a segment of Iran's middle class that was educated and relatively progressive in its values. Headscarves were promptly removed in the office, flirting was common among the young employees, and everyone but the valet sipped tea throughout the day during the month of Ramadan. Even though most of these individuals voted for reformist candidates in the Islamic Republic's elections, they disavowed allegiance to the system, and did not believe religion should play a role in government. For them, "reformism" ideally meant reforming Iran into a modern, Western-style secular country.

For these elite in Tehran—the vanguard of those advocating for change in the Islamic Republic and the soul of a future "modern Iran"—notions of autonomy and civil rights for Iran's ethnic minorities were limited. While they were in favor of free and fair elections, they were not willing to

accept in principle that a primary language other than Persian be taught in Iran's schools. While they were in favor of equal rights for women and the principle that the government should not interfere in the private lives of citizens, they were not willing to accept that a minority population that wanted to govern itself should have right to, even in a contiguous Iran. When pushed, almost all of them would advocate for use of force by the central government to prevent these things from happening. The lack of coverage vis-à-vis minority issues in recent Iranian elections and in domestic and foreign Iranian press confirms that this is the general posture of Iran's Shia majority regarding these questions. Unfortunately, the Iranian community in the West is no more evolved on the issue of ethnic diversity within Iran.

For Iran's minorities, such as the Kurds, the oft-dreamed of modern Iran of the secular Shia majority is in large part a continuation of the current regime. To the Kurdish nationalists in Iran whose numbers are in the millions, this future Iran is the continuation of a system that ultimately fails them, and will be neither stable nor prosperous. Such latent defects in Iran's fabric are hidden by the Islamic Republic's immediate term flaws, such as its nuclear program. But much like in more prosperous Turkey, or even further developed Spain, ethnic tensions will threaten Iran's security and well-being, as well as its standing in the international community of nations, in the medium- to long term. Were Iran to ultimately graduate into the league of modern representative democracies that are accepted by the international community, its domestic maturity on the important questions of ethnicity and diversity would not necessarily comport with modernity. One can speculate that it would only be as far along as some of its dysfunctional neighbors on these issues—replete with shortcomings.

As part of their multi-pronged criticisms of Iran's regime, Western governments are quick to condemn the Islamic Republic for an array of missteps. But one area where Iran receives relatively little criticism is in its treatment of minorities. This is perhaps understandable to some degree, given the level of Iranian involvement in regional issues that are more palpable to Western policymakers. But if countries like the USA want to encourage reform in Iran, and tap the potential of the great nation that Iran is, maneuvering for the elimination of the Islamic Republic alone does not achieve this.

The international community can begin to encourage a truly modern Iran now in a number of ways. Firstly, it can apply pressure to Iranian civil society and lobby groups in the diaspora to adopt a formal platform of

rights for Iran's ethnic minorities. Simply supporting these organizations, like the National Iranian American Council (NIAC), without constructive criticism, will do little to foster democratic ideals in a future Iran. These well-meaning groups, whose political platform already advocates for rapprochement with Iran, should be encouraged to adopt statements of principles that encourage other accepted notions of human rights and self-determination.

Second, as the world's relationship with Iran evolves in the coming years, it must apply pressure in the form of limited sanctions and economic disadvantages, even if mostly symbolic, for Iran's treatment of its minorities. Success with Iran is not achieved simply because Iran has abandoned its purported nuclear weapons program. Success will not be achieved if we find common ground with Iran in Syria and Iraq. Success will be achieved when Iran is a stable, contributing member of the international community, with a government that serves all of its people. And this is only possible when Iran has accepted the rights of its minorities. Without this, Iran is at best temporarily a boon. In time, it will continue to cost itself and the world dearly.

Conclusion: Toward a Pluralistic Middle East

The threat of ISIL is not an existential one. It is a threat within the West and among its values. Consider that many of the state actors in the Syrian conflict, including "allies," are less democratic than they were two decades ago. Civil liberties have deteriorated in many Western countries in response to terrorism. Reactionary political parties are ascendant. There has been no collective approach in the post 9/11 period to see Western democracy through a period of turmoil. A contributing factor to this disorder is the lack of principled vision in foreign policy decision making.

In line with trends in the Kurdistan region's relationship with Islamism and its disposition to democratic government, it is uniquely positioned to be a regional counterweight to groups like ISIL and Al-Qaeda. Diplomacy requires engagement with governments we like and do not like. But our alliances should have mutual interests *and* values—those adhered to in our own societies—at their core. If Western policymakers want to help advance not only their short-term, but long-term interests in the region, they are advised to help relieve impediments to many of Kurdistan's ambitions.

The ideas set out in this chapter will be interpreted as unrealistic and in ignorance of broader strategy. The dissatisfaction of certain "key allies"

and "fundamental interests" will be cited as reasons why some of these ideas are unworkable. Governments who believe their interests are at risk by a rise in Kurdish fortunes, while seeking to sabotage any attempt to change the status quo, will manipulate events to argue that Kurdistan's ability to assume a leadership role is unreliable. These arguments are at their core anti-pluralistic, and specious. The balance of power between the Kurds and their neighbors has been heavily tipped in the latter's favor for a century now, with no moral or realpolitik justification. With either of these two standards as a measure of effectiveness, current policy has been detrimental: It has enabled ideologically motivated and reactionary parties among "allied" countries, undermined the self-determination of the region's various communities, all while facilitating the rise of extremism. It may be argued that a policy change that destabilizes Turkey domestically strengthens the hands of a real existential threat in Russia; this is overly simplistic, and assumes that more vocal public support and increased pressure on a NATO ally needs to be an all-at-once approach, which it does not. There is much leeway to calibrate the current lopsided balance of power in the direction of a reliable ally, the Kurds. This will pay dividends in Turkey and Iraq domestically, and in the region more generally.

Foreign policy in the information age is not what it was yesterday. New approaches are necessary. In the Middle East, preserving status quos to the detriment of populations that espouse modern values are only likely to contribute to long-term instability. Many of our old ideas for the region have been rejected or proven ineffective. The earlier we update our operating system to reflect this, the better.

Notes

1. Sinha, Shreeya. "Obama's Evolution on ISIL." The New York Times, June 9, 2015.
2. Al-Salhy, Suadad, and Tim Arango. "Sunni Militants Drive Iraqi Army Out of Mosul." The New York Times, June 10, 2014.
3. Sinha, Shreeya. "Obama's Evolution on ISIL."
4. Ibid.
5. The word "evolution" is purposefully used here. For such trends to be reversed would actually be an unlikely "devolution," involving a significantly different political environment in Kurdistan and in its neighborhood, over a prolonged period of time. One contrary political leader or movement would not suffice, as the "geneology" for Islamism does not exist in Kurdistan as it did elsewhere.

6. Republic of Iraq, Ministry of Planning, Central Statistics Organization: Welfare Indicators Report, 2013.
7. See, for example, Dagher, Sam. "Iraqi Kurds come out to vote in high numbers." *The San Francisco Chronicle*. July 26, 2009.
8. See, for example, Ross, Carne. "The Kurds' Democratic Experiment." *The New York Times*, September 30, 2015.
9. See generally, Olson, Robert W. *The Kurdish Nationalist Movement in the 1990s: Its Impact on Turkey and the Middle East*. Lexington, Ky.: University Press of Kentucky, 1996.
10. McDowall, David. A Modern History of the Kurds. London: I.B. Tauris, 1996. 421.
11. For all intents and purposes, the PKK has abandoned Marxism as an essential ingredient of its political ethos.
12. In Turkey's parliamentary system, a 10 % minimum electoral tally is required for a party to have representation in parliament. This was the first time a Kurdish party succeeded in meeting this threshold. See The Editorial Board. "Mr. Erdogan's War Against the Kurds." The New York Times, August 31, 2015, for a background of events leading up to the November 2015 elections.
13. See, for example, Loveluck, Louisa. "Turkey Hires Ex-CIA Director to Lobby US Congress." *The Telegraph*. May 12, 2015. Accessed November 27, 2015.
14. See "Turkey Bombing Kurdish PKK Militia Confusing U.S. Allies and Foes in ISIL Fight." CBSNews. July 25, 2015. Accessed November 16, 2015, and CAKAN, SEYHMUS and Perry, Tom. "Syrian Kurds Battle Islamic State for Town at Turkish Border." Reuters. June 14, 2015. Accessed November 16, 2015.
15. Ibid.
16. "Iraqi Kurds Set to Send Fresh Troops to Kobane." Hürriyet Daily News. December 1, 2014. Accessed November 16, 2015.
17. Loveluck, Louisa. "Turkey Hires Ex-CIA Director to Lobby US Congress."
18. "Iraqi Kurds Set to Send Fresh Troops to Kobane." Hürriyet Daily News.
19. Citing an inability to form a coalition with other minority parties, the AKP President called for elections to be reconvened.
20. Pamuk, Humeyra, and Nick Tattersall. "Exclusive: Turkish Intelligence Helped Ship Arms to Syrian Islamist Rebel Areas." Reuters. May 21, 2015. Accessed November 16, 2015.
21. See Cohen, Roher. "Turkey's Troubling ISIL Game." *The New York Times*. November 7, 2015, for an example of such suspicions.
22. Almukhtar, Sarah, and Tim Wallace. "Why Turkey Is Fighting the Kurds Who Are Fighting ISIL." *The New York Times*. August 11, 2015.

23. For a detailed background on Syria's Kurds, see Gorgas, Jordi. *La Question Kurde Passé Et Présent*. Bibliothèque De L'iReMMO. Paris: L'Harmattan, 2014.
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid.
26. See, for example, Harris, Malcolm. "ISIL's Toughest Enemy Should Be Taken Off America's Terrorist List." Newrepublic.com. June 19, 2015. Accessed November 18, 2015.
27. There are a number of examples of controversial groups being removed from the FTO after purported reform. The MKO Organization, one that is arguably far less deserving than the PKK, is one such example.
28. See GENOCIDE IN IRAQ: The Anfal Campaign Against the Kurds. A Middle East Watch Report, Human Rights Watch. July 1993.
29. "Mullah" Mustafa Barzani, as he is affectionately called, was not a religious scholar at all as his name suggests. The story of the Barzani clan in Iran is briefly covered in other parts of this book.
30. The *peshmerga* have also resisted numerous attempts by ISIL to gain control of Kirkuk since that time.
31. It is not advised here that Kurdish guerillas be mobilized as an army to fight ISIL outside of Kurdistan. Such action has the potential to bode negatively for Kurds' long-term reputation among their neighbors. While Kurdish guerillas can be used to fight ISIL on Kurdistan's periphery, the focus should be to support Kurds in attempts at democratic autonomy within historic "Kurdistan."

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