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THESIS

**THE UNITED STATES AND THE KURDS:
CASE STUDIES IN UNITED STATES ENGAGEMENT**

by

Peter J. Lambert

December, 1997

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**THE UNITED STATES AND THE KURDS:
CASE STUDIES IN UNITED STATES ENGAGEMENT**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS IN NATIONAL SECURITY AFFAIRS

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ABSTRACT

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The United States faces a variety of issues in its dealings with the Kurds. Foremost is the issue of autonomy for the Kurdish nation, and its impact on the territorial integrity of the states in the region. Secondly, is the lack of Kurdish unity, and its impact on any American initiative regarding an end to the regional repression of the Kurds. The United States has the ability to move the primary countries with Kurdish populations in the direction necessary for some sort of settlement of the Kurdish situation. The result of not pursuing this matter could lead to further turmoil in a region which can ill-afford it.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The United States in its foreign policy has traditionally advocated the maintenance of the status quo, particularly with regards to respecting the territorial integrity of another nation. This has most recently been highlighted by American support for Kuwait after its invasion by Iraq. Therefore, this status quo approach should dictate that the United States should not encourage stateless nations such as the Kurds in their goal towards autonomy or independence. So why has the United States, in the timeframe covered by the case studies in this thesis, supported the Kurds, thereby creating de facto autonomy?

To understand the present day dilemma of American policy towards the Kurds, one must look at the historical evolution of United States' policy vis-à-vis the Kurds in the context of American foreign policy towards the Middle East. Woodrow Wilson took the first steps towards American interests in the Middle East when he advocated his Fourteen Points at the Paris Peace Conference. His ideal of self-determination was picked up by the newly freed nations of the Ottoman Empire, particularly the Kurds and Armenians as justification for the creation of states for these stateless peoples. The Treaty of Sevres incorporated just this notion, only to be overturned by the political realities of a newly formed Turkish state, whose interests were opposed to the creation of a Kurdish state, particularly in Anatolia. In order for a peace to be secured in the region, the Great Powers, including the United States, appeased Turkey, and downgraded the Kurdish issue to one to be dealt with by the newly created states of the region, rather than as a Great Power issue.

The period between 1969-1975 saw the United States re-emerge as a significant player regarding the Kurdish issue. The Nixon Doctrine supported the Shah of Iran and his quest to become the regional hegemon. In this regard, the Kurds were utilized via proxy, by Iran and Israel, as a tool to destabilize the Iraqi regime, whose growing friendship with the Soviet Union ran counter to American interests. Despite American pledges of support to the Kurds, the Shah's interests overrode support to the Kurds, resulting in their defeat by the Iraqi army.

The period between 1990-1996 saw the conflict arise between the United States led coalition and Iraq, resulting in the establishment of a safe-haven for the Kurds in northern Iraq. The de facto establishment of autonomy within northern Iraq under the military umbrella of an American led multi-national task force in Turkey, gave rise to a democratically elected Kurdish parliament. However, Kurdish rivalries and regional state intervention overcame American attempts to maintain the peace, resulting in the invitation to the Iraqi army by a Kurdish faction to restore the status quo in Iraqi Kurdistan. The result was a collapse of American involvement, and the consequential evacuation of Kurds aligned with American governmental and non-governmental organizations.

Presently a number of policy options have been articulated regarding the Kurds, ranging from statehood, to again maintaining the status quo. However, the United States can ill-afford to assume the latter position, due to the potential repercussions continued fighting might bring to the region. This paper advocates stronger American pressure on Turkey to review its Kurdish policies, as well as bringing American pressure to bear on

rival Kurdish factions to cease hostilities, and work upon an already established framework of autonomy within northern Iraq.

I. INTRODUCTION

The United States has maintained an unusual relationship with the Kurds. After the Treaty of Sevres failed to achieve a state for the Kurds, the United States policy towards the Kurds has traditionally been a process which has supported regional American allies, much of the time to the detriment of the Kurds. A remarkably similar pattern of events has arisen since the 1930s that still remains as a cornerstone of American policy in the Middle East. Yet despite our concern for supporting our allies in the region, the United States has on a number of occasions, for short-term regional policy goals, engaged the Kurds with military, economic, and political support. What this paper will address are two major exercises in United States' engagement with the Kurds: the period between 1969-1975, and the period from 1990-1996. What this paper will demonstrate is that both periods of engagement resulted in a calamity for the Kurds, due to events initially under American control that eventually eluded the United States' grasp, as well as due to Kurdish inability to overcome their own inter-Kurdish rivalries.

During the period from 1969-1975 the United States supported the Shah of Iran as a facet of the Nixon Doctrine. Likewise, the United States engaged the Kurds primarily via proxy, with Israel and Iran as the primary conduits for support. However, Iranian interests overcame American promises of support to the Kurds, and resulted in the Algiers Accords in 1975. A product of the accords resulted in the cutting off of aid to the Kurds which brought about the finalization of their defeat by Iraqi military forces.

Additionally, the Kurdish leader, Mulla Mustafa Barzani, was able to maintain his powerbase as long as the conflict between the Kurds and Iraq was perpetuated.

Therefore, it was not in Barzani's interests to seek an immediate peace.

During the period between 1990-1996 the conflict arose between the United States led coalition and Iraq, resulting in the establishment of a safe-haven for the Kurds in northern Iraq. The de facto establishment of autonomy within northern Iraq under the military umbrella of an American led Combined Task Force in Turkey, gave rise to a democratically elected Kurdish parliament. However, Kurdish rivalries and regional state intervention overcame American attempts to maintain the peace, and resulted in the invitation by a Kurdish faction to the Iraqi army to restore the status quo in Iraqi Kurdistan. The result was the collapse of American involvement and the consequential evacuation of Kurds aligned with American governmental and non-governmental organizations.

To understand the present American policy towards the Kurds, a close look at United States historical involvement with the Kurdish problem should be undertaken. To date much has been written regarding the Kurds and their quest for autonomy.

Throughout much of this literature, historians trace the present Kurdish dilemma to the diplomacy immediately following World War I. Moreover, it is frequently noted that internal Kurdish politics hindered Kurdish political development, yet the external politics played an equally, if not more important role. The following chapter will concentrate on the post-World War I diplomacy focusing on the Kurds, and American interests vis-à-vis

the Kurds.

A. WOODROW WILSON AND THE FOURTEEN POINTS

The conclusion of World War I and the consequential defeat of the Ottoman Empire hastened an acceleration of diplomatic activity directed at carving up the defeated Ottoman regime. The United States found itself amid the planning for the creation of the Mandate System in the Middle East.

Prior to the conclusion of the war, President Woodrow Wilson established a “think-tank” devoted to examining the United States’ post war aims. This group dubbed *The Inquiry*, established by Colonel House (advisor and confidant of President Wilson) drafted what would become American policy proposals dealing with the territories of the defeated wartime powers: Austria-Hungary, Germany, and the Ottomans.¹

The Inquiry’s report to the President was divided into two sections. The first section dealt with general principles and goals aimed at Germany. The second section concerned itself with the United States’ stance on territories of “Belgium, Northern France, Alsace-Lorraine, the Italian Frontiers, the Balkans, Poland, Austria-Hungary, and Turkey.”²

Here were developed the origins of the Wilsonian principles that would ultimately

¹ Derek Heater, *National Self Determination: Woodrow Wilson and his Legacy*, (New York: St. Martin’s Press. 1994), 40-41.

² Charles Seymour, *Intimate Papers of Colonel House: Into the World War*, Vol. III, (New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1928), 321.

be espoused in Wilson's Fourteen Points. Wilson was quite aware of Great Britain and France's aims on the remains of the Ottoman Empire through its partition. Wilson's opposition to the Sykes-Picot Treaty and the Treaty of St. Jean de Maurienne (secret wartime treaties), concluded in 1916 and 1917 respectively, was well known, and consequently drove the planning for the American position that would be espoused in the post-war peace conferences. Colonel House notes in a meeting with Wilson on 13 October 1917, that "I [House] added that it should be stated that Turkey must not be partitioned away by the belligerents, but must become autonomous in its several parts according to racial lines. He [Wilson] accepted this."³

Wilson would develop this Turkish policy further prior to the 8 January 1918 Fourteen Points speech. Commenting in a cable to Colonel House, "The Turkish portions of the present Turkish Empire must be assured a secure sovereignty and the other nationalities which are now under Turkish rule must be assured full opportunity of autonomous development."⁴

This policy regarding Turkey did not change significantly when Wilson gave his speech on 8 January 1918 to a joint session of Congress. In the speech, regarding the Ottoman Empire, Wilson stated in point XII, "The Turkish portions of the present Ottoman Empire should be assured a secure sovereignty, but the other nationalities which

³ Ibid., 323.

⁴ Ibid., 324.

are now under Turkish rule should be assured an undoubted security of life and an absolutely unmolested opportunity of autonomous development.”⁵

From this point forward, Wilson’s speech would associate him with the idea of national self-determination, and would ultimately be seized upon by the nationalities within the Ottoman Empire (to include the Kurds). However, self-determination in the post-WWI era “had little to do with the demands of the peoples concerned, unless those demands were consistent with the geopolitical and strategic interests of the Great Powers.”⁶ Furthermore, Wilson tied the idea of self-determination with the ideal of democracy, which in this particular part of the world, was not a tested method of governance. Lenin also promoted the concept of self-determination in the context of the class struggle. Secessionist tendencies were seen as a tool to fight the “oppressing” nation or state, yet this concept was barred from its application by the minorities within the Soviet Union, which also had a small Kurdish minority in the Caucasus.⁷ The idea of self-determination in the post-WWI era would not be universally applied to those who sought it, as the Kurds would soon come to appreciate.

Wilson’s Fourteen Points would be well received by the diplomats at the Paris Peace Conference. However shortly after their release, these points would be elaborated

⁵ Heater, 41.

⁶ Hurst Hannum, *Autonomy, Sovereignty, and Self-Determination: The Accommodation of Conflicting Rights*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1990), 28.

⁷ Ibid., 32-33.

upon by the United States to refine the ambiguous wording. This elaboration, particularly upon Point XII, was amended to incorporate the idea of mandatory control by the European powers. No details regarding independence for Ottoman minorities were put forth.⁸

These modifications were based more on realpolitik than a change of heart by the Wilson administration. The disintegration of the Ottoman Empire from within and the series of secret wartime agreements would play a greater role in defining the post-war era than Wilson would have liked.

The idea regarding mandatory areas would eventually include the United States. In a cable from Colonel House to Wilson in March 1919, House stated, “In discussing the dismemberment of the Turkish Empire, both Clemenceau and George expressed the wish that we accept mandatories for Armenia and Constantinople. I [House] thought the US would be willing when the proposal was brought before them.”⁹

Up to this point, Kurdish aspirations had not manifested themselves in the diplomatic language of the Paris Peace Conference. From the United States perspective, the first primary mention of the Kurds in relation to the soon to be created mandates comes only in conjunction with the creation of a Mesopotamian state. “The

⁸ Heater, 46. (Also see Charles Seymour, “Official American Commentary on the Fourteen Points”, October 1918, Vol. IV, 199. Regarding Pt XII: lays out who should control the mandatory areas. Briefly describes provisions for minorities through an “open door”.

⁹ Seymour, Vol. IV, 358-359.

Mesopotamian state is a racial unit. There is an Arab linguistic unit south of a line drawn from Alexandretta to the Persian border. Above this line live Arabs, Armenians, Turks, Kurds, and Assyrians...”¹⁰ Ironically, the same document makes mention of Kurdistan, as part of the newly delineated state of Mesopotamia, but no mention of autonomy per se.

Once more, in August 1919, the Kurds are noted in American diplomatic traffic, but this time in a demarche to the Turkish government condemning their activities against the Armenians.

President Wilson notifies the Turkish government that if immediate measures are not taken to prohibit all violences or massacres on the part of the Turks, Kurds, or other Mussulmans against the Armenians in the Caucasus or elsewhere, the President will withdraw Article 12 from the Peace conditions...¹¹

It is clear up to this point that United States’ interests regarding minorities within Anatolia had been explicitly devoted towards developing the Armenian rights issue over the Kurds, however, the US position would soon evolve to examine Kurdish rights as an autonomous people within the collapsed Ottoman Empire.

¹⁰ “Tentative Recommendations for President Wilson by the Intelligence Section of the American Delegation to the Peace Conference.” 21 January 1919. From David Hunter Miller, *My Diary of the Conference of Paris*. NY, 1924, 254.

¹¹ U.S. Department of State, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States*, The Paris Peace Conference 1919, Vol. VII, 1946, 858. (Translated from a Telegram from the French High Commissioner at Constantinople on the Actions of Admiral Bristol.)

B. THE KING-CRANE COMMISSION

Despite the apparently harsh overtones of the diplomatic note to the Turkish government, the Kurdish issue was not ignored, and would be pursued further at the behest of the King-Crane Commission's report to President Wilson, which was conducted in 1919 to explore the United States' role in mandatory control within Anatolia.

Accordingly, the King-Crane Commission report forwarded the proposition that in the remainder of Anatolia not yet reapportioned (outside of the proposed Armenia and Constantinople mandates), the only "advisable" course of action in regards to autonomy for any particular minority group would be the creation of Kurdistan.¹²

The Commission suggested the creation of an autonomous region between the Armenian mandate and the Mesopotamian mandate, with Persian frontiers as the eastern border and the land between the Tigris and Euphrates river as the western border. Politically, closer association with a mandatory power was suggested with the proposal for either "ultimate independence or for federation with neighboring areas in a larger self-governing union."¹³

The Commission further suggested that due to the proposed Kurdish autonomous region's concentration of population in the southern portion of Kurdistan, closer to Mesopotamia than Armenia, that the mandatory power for Mesopotamia would be

¹² U.S. Department of State, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States*, The Paris Peace Conference 1919, Vol. XII, 1947, 836.

¹³ Ibid.

considered the appropriate supervisory power.

In the Commission's final report, the idea of a Kurdish autonomous region is stated clearly, albeit with an additional provision "with the clear understanding that the rights of the Syrians, Chaldean, and Nestorian Christian minorities in the whole region shall be carefully guarded."¹⁴

C. THE PARIS PEACE CONFERENCE

Although stateless, and without official representation at the Paris Peace Conference, the Kurds were not without a voice. Prominent Kurds who had been living in exile during World War I had come together to promote Kurdish rights to the victorious allied powers. The culmination of these claims was undertaken by Sheikh Sharif Pasha, who was allowed to voice Kurdish aspirations at the Peace Conference in 1918. However, the divisiveness of Kurdish leaders worked against a unified Kurdish proposal and ultimately moved the competing factions away from one another politically and ideologically.

Despite the efforts of a few Kurdish expatriates, political realities on the ground were moving the Kurdish movement for autonomy in a number of different and contradictory directions. The Ottoman government, under siege by the Greeks and Italians, was promoting Muslim solidarity against the invading Christian armies, which

¹⁴ Ibid., 842.

included the British in Mesopotamia. The effect of the propaganda was very effective in eclipsing Kurdish nationalistic movements with the looming threat of supposed atrocities committed by the invading Christian armies.¹⁵ Mustafa Kemal, as commander of the Ottoman armies in Eastern Anatolia, was in May 1919, appointed to ensure Kurdish cooperation with the Ottoman government in its drive to repel the invading armies. Kemal continued the anti-Christian rhetoric, thereby prompting the British government to demand his recall to Istanbul. Kemal subsequently resigned and established a Turkish nationalist movement aimed at expelling the invading European armies. Eventually Kemal would succeed in suppressing any secessionist movement by the Kurds in Anatolia, and secure Turkish territorial claims through military and diplomatic means by 1923.

The British, however, were looking for the potential of a Kurdistan, preferably under an association with one of the regionally controlled mandates, to serve as a buffer between the Armenian mandate and the Mesopotamian mandate, and likewise serving as a buffer with the Turkish state. Britain's interests in a Kurdistan also centered on maintaining a life-line to Colonial India, as well as cementing control over northern Mesopotamia, which included the vilayet of Mosul. This region would later prove to be endowed with oil deposits.

¹⁵ David McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), 125-126.

D. ARMENIAN-KURDISH DECLARATION OF 1919

British interest in Kurdistan became more acute when it was understood that the United States would not be able to undertake mandatory control of Armenia and Constantinople due to domestic political constraints in the United States. These constraints were manifested ultimately in June 1920, when the United States Senate rejected the idea of an American mandate over Armenia.¹⁶ With the foreknowledge of the American withdrawal for the Armenian mandate, the British moved to encourage dialogue between the Kurdish representative in Paris, Sharif Pasha, with the Armenian representative, Boghos Nubar Pasha. Nubar Pasha was concerned with the increasingly hostile Kemalist surge against non-Muslim minorities in Anatolia, and therefore decided to deal with the Kurds as a potential counter-balance to the growing strength of the Turkish state, which could ultimately threaten the viability of the Armenian mandate.

By 20 November 1919, Sharif Pasha and Nubar Pasha issued a joint declaration stating

We are in complete agreement in jointly seeking from the [Peace] Conference the constitution, in accordance with the principles of nationalities of a united and independent Armenia and an independent Kurdistan, with the assistance of a Great Power.... We confirm moreover our complete agreement to respect the legitimate rights of the minorities in the two states.¹⁷

This declaration satisfied the Great Power's desire for protection of the

¹⁶ Heater, 93.

¹⁷ McDowall, 131. Excerpted from British Foreign Office dispatch 371/4193 File 44/156272, 28 Nov 1919.

Armenians, the idea of protection of minority rights within the confines of these two proposed entities, and the potential for a buffer state between Armenia and Mesopotamia.

E. COMPETING KURDISH CLAIMS

Despite the Armenian-Kurdish declaration, there were still competing claims for offering Kurds autonomy. These competing claims became more poignant in the light of a rumor of Kurdistan's partition by the French and British, which had already been settled between the two powers as outlined in the Sykes-Picot Treaty.

Damad Farid Pasha, an ex-official of the Ottoman government offered various Kurdish tribes autonomy for their support against Mustafa Kemal in Eastern Anatolia. Kurdish tribal leaders balked without assurances of a safety net by Britain from the Kemalists if the plan failed.

Additionally, a faction of the Kurdish intelligentsia centered in Istanbul, the self-proclaimed "Young Kurds", confronted Sharif Pasha with a plan to side with the Ottoman government, which promised the Kurds autonomy and participation in the Turkish parliament. This option was viewed by many Kurds as preferable than partition amongst a number of newly created non-Kurdish states.

Abd al Qadir, a leading Kurdish notable of the Istanbul "Kurdish Club", threw his support behind a plan for a united Kurdistan, preferably under the protection of the British. However, he did not rule out the option of an autonomous Kurdistan under

Turkish rule, and wholeheartedly rejected any association with the Armenians.¹⁸

This factionalism amongst the leading Kurdish notables provided a significant hurdle to overcome in order to move forward the prospect of Kurdish independence. This factionalism was increased further when Sharif Pasha's deal with the Armenians in Paris came to light.

Whatever division had existed prior to the announcement of the Kurdish-Armenian declaration was only driven deeper after the announcement's public release. Those notables who had harbored reservations concerning breaking off from Turkey soon backed down completely from disassociation with Turkey. Likewise, those notables who sought complete autonomy felt that the Armenian proposal did not concede enough sovereignty to the Kurds. The uproar caused by the release of the joint statement forced Sharif Pasha to retract his statement, claiming that Armenia had over-reached its territorial claims. Subsequently Sharif Pasha proceeded to lay out Kurdistan's Wilsonian right of self-determination.¹⁹

The ensuing chaos in the political circles of the Kurdish notables induced Sharif Pasha to step down as the Kurdish representative to the British ambassador in the Paris Peace talks. Consequently, this action left the Kurds unrepresented in the British delegation at the Conference, close to its conclusion. The Great Powers, whose interests

¹⁸ Ibid., 132.

¹⁹ Ibid., 133.

did not necessarily reflect those of the Kurds, would decide the Kurdish cause.²⁰

F. THE TREATY OF SEVRES - 10 AUGUST 1920

The Treaty of Sevres was brought to bear after the agreement between France and Britain over the delineation of the mandates from the former Ottoman territories. With the United States' withdrawal from participation in any mandate system, the security of the territory north of Mesopotamia was no longer assured. With the Kemalists gaining in strength, Britain and France decided to pursue their own immediate objectives in Kurdistan based on the Sykes-Picot agreement. However, militarily the French were in no position to challenge the Kemalists who had already pushed the French out of Marash in Southeastern Turkey by February 1920. The Turks would ultimately defeat the French in Anatolia by May.²¹

British interests with Kurdistan, in spite of France's inability to secure French interests in Anatolia, were not uniform within the Foreign Office. Proposals ranged from giving the Turks the Mosul vilayet, to ardently defending the idea of a Kurdish state, albeit loyal to Britain. Added to the Foreign Office confusion, prospects for the settlement of a treaty based solely on Britain's interests were fading as the treaty was

²⁰ For an alternative view of the Kurdish situation between 1919-1921, see Kendal's essay in *People Without A Country: The Kurds and Kurdistan*, (London: Zed Press, 1980), 38-39.

²¹ McDowall, 134.

reaching its final stages. Prospects such as the possibility of an American led Armenian mandate, and the likelihood of a compliant Turkish government were amongst the initial goals during the War, which now were certainly not in the realm of possibility. The United States' withdrawal, the rise of the Kemalists, and the failure of a unified Kurdish political voice, all entered into the equation as the British signed the treaty, most likely with the knowledge that political realities would dictate another outcome.

Based on these aforementioned realities, the Treaty of Sevres encapsulated the provisions for the creation of a Kurdistan, albeit on paper. Regarding the Kurds, the Treaty laid out the provisions regarding Kurdish autonomy in Section III, Articles 62-64. Article 62 established the framework from which to create an autonomous Kurdish area:

A Commission sitting at Constantinople and composed of three members appointed by the British, French and Italian governments respectively shall draft into force of the present Treaty a scheme of local autonomy for the predominantly Kurdish areas lying east of the Euphrates, south of the southern boundary of Armenia as it may be hereafter determined, and north of the frontier of Turkey with Syria and Mesopotamia...²²

Article 62 additionally established provisions for minority rights, which had been an important issue during the Paris Peace Conference, particularly in view of the United States' concern over Kurdish participation in the Armenian atrocities in eastern Anatolia.

²² J.C. Hurewitz, *Diplomacy in the Near and Middle East: A Documentary Record: 1914-1956*, Vol.2 (New York: van Nostrand, 1956), 82. Excerpted from "Political Clauses of the Treaty of Sevres, 10 Aug 1920, from Great Britain, Parliamentary Papers, 1920.

Article 63 is interesting in the sense of the codification of Turkish obligations in ensuring Turkish acceptance of the new Kurdish entity. Notably, the Turkish government that was a signatory to the treaty was under the *de jure* control of the British in allied occupied Constantinople. Additionally, the Kemalists were in the ascendancy in eastern Anatolia, and would not hold themselves to the actions of the allied controlled Turkish government, particularly concerning the idea of a Kurdish state in an area Turkish nationalists considered to be their own.

Article 64, arguably the most important for the Kurds, placed the burden of unity on the Kurds as a people as a precursor to autonomy. The article states:

If from within one year from the coming into force of the present Treaty the Kurdish peoples within the areas defined in Article 62 shall address themselves to the Council of the League of Nations in such a manner as to show that a majority of the population of these areas desires independence from Turkey, and if the Council then considers that these peoples are capable of such independence and recommends that it should be granted to them, Turkey hereby agrees to execute such a recommendation, and to renounce all rights and title over these areas.²³

Further guidance would allow for the incorporation of the vilayet of Mosul into the Kurdish state in the future if the Kurdish population of the area so desired. The provisions in Article 64, despite their outward appearance, were surely worded so as to defeat any attempts by the Kurds to reach a state of independence. British dealings with the various Kurdish political and tribal leaders more than likely established a pattern of

²³ Ibid.

internal division that would likely hinder any unified Kurdish plea to the League of Nations, and therefore would likely come under the British sphere of influence regardless of Kurdish nationalist expectations.

What is striking about the Treaty of Sevres is the language surrounding the Kurdish and Armenian situations. The relatively ambiguous wording surrounding the Kurdish state is in stark contrast to the wording regarding the establishment of the Armenian state in Article 88. “Turkey, in accordance with the action already taken by the Allied Powers, hereby recognizes Armenia as a free and independent state.”²⁴ Again, the distinct wording of Armenian interests reflected their status as a Christian minority; a notion that would resurface later at the Lausanne Conference, where the Kurds as a Muslim minority would not be treated in the same light.

G. THE RISE OF MUSTAFA KEMAL

The idea of an independent Kurdistan as promulgated in the Treaty of Sevres would never reach fruition. As mentioned earlier, political realities in Anatolia were moving against the idea of autonomy for the Kurds. Kemal, during the months preceding the Treaty of Sevres, through his nationalist movement, was waging his own campaign aimed at the territory demarcated by the Treaty to the Kurds and the Armenians. As early as 28 January 1920, the Turkish National Pact was issued, defining the goals of the

²⁴ Ibid., 83.

Turkish nationalist movement. In the Pact, Article 2 states that “We accept that in the case of the three [Kurdish] Sandjaks which united themselves by a general vote to the mother country when they first were free, recourse should again be had, if necessary, to a free popular vote.”²⁵ To possibly appease the interests of the allied powers, Article 5 stated “the rights of minorities as defined in the treaties...shall be confirmed and assured by us.”²⁶

The Kemalists, up to and through the signing of the Treaty of Sevres, were engaged in militarily forcing out the invading armies. Up to this point, this meant engaging the French, Armenians, and a number of rebellious Kurdish tribes. Likewise, it should be noted that the propaganda campaign that Kemal initiated in 1919, aimed at gaining Kurdish support in fighting against the invading Christian armies, achieved enough success to allow for Kurdish assistance to the Turkish nationalist in combating the Greek army in western Anatolia.²⁷ Politically, Mustafa Kemal had set up the Grand National Assembly by April 1920 in Ankara, with himself as President of the assembly. This effectively focused all resistance activities under the control of the Ankara regime.

For the signatories to the Treaty of Sevres, events in Anatolia surrounding the conclusion of the Treaty should have indicated its demise. The Ankara government had

²⁵ Ibid., 75.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Kemal Kirisci and Gareth M. Winrow, *The Kurdish Question and Turkey: An Example of a Trans-State Ethnic Conflict*, (London: Frank Cass, 1997), 70.

gained politically and militarily within Anatolia, to the point that by October 1920, the Armenians “renounced all claims to Anatolian territory and accepted a borderline that...still stands.”²⁸

Despite the failure of the Treaty of Sevres, the British did not give up the hope of establishing a Kurdish buffer zone. British promotion of Kurdish interests was seen as a means to secure a friendly buffer state against the increasingly powerful Turkish government in Ankara. In this light, the British recognized the futility of clinging to the Treaty of Sevres and invited the Turks back to London. Here the British presented a modified version of the same treaty, which incorporated changes to Articles 62-64. The Turks from the Ankara government, demanded that any option dealing with Kurds should be conducted in the context of including them as an integral part of Turkey. Furthermore, the Turkish delegation claimed that the majority of the Kurds would not want their independence from a Muslim Turkish state, and that only a vocal minority espoused independence and were not representational of the Kurds as a whole.²⁹ In this regard, the Turks rejected outright the British modifications, which eventually ushered in the Treaty of Lausanne.

It was clear to the British that the Kemalist statements regarding the incorporation

²⁸ Martin van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State*, (London: Zed Books, 1992), 273.

²⁹ Briton Cooper Busch, *Mudros to Lausanne: Britain's Frontier in West Asia, 1918-1923*, (Albany: SUNY Press, 1976), 242.

of Kurdish territories into Turkey, were intended to include the vilayet of Mosul (southern Kurdistan). In reaction to Turkish designs, the British attempted a solution for southern Kurdistan in relationship to the Mesopotamian mandate (Iraq). The British, in 1921, felt northern Iraq did not necessarily have to come under Arab jurisdiction under King Faisal of Iraq. Options for dealing with the Kurds in northern Iraq were contemplated in this regard. One option would opt for British mandatory control over northern Iraq, distinct from Iraq as a whole, until such time that the Kurds themselves would move to be incorporated into Iraq. Further options along this line were contemplated during 1921. One of which was to offer Mustafa Kemal a portion of the Mosul vilayet, not to include the oil producing regions. This option was discarded, for it was felt this would not satisfy Kemal's claim on the vilayet as a whole. The second option would have Kemal and King Faisal reach an arrangement amongst themselves. This option too, was discarded for it was felt that Faisal would surely lose control of the vilayet to Kemal if it came to a military showdown.³⁰

Ironically, King Faisal preferred to have the Kurds within the Iraqi state, to counter the influence of the Shia majority, over his Sunni minority.³¹ However, Britain did not want to cede to Faisal the ability to harass Kemal, for it was felt that if this was to happen, again Faisal would find that he would not be able to counter the Turkish military

³⁰ Ibid., 372. *Excerpted from details from the Cairo Conference Report, 15 March 1921-31 May 1921.*

³¹ Ibid., 373.

forces. A compromise was reached on 10 October 1922, with a treaty between Britain and Iraq, granting Faisal the power to negotiate with neighboring states. Southern Kurdistan was not mentioned in the text of the treaty, however, the Mosul vilayet was to formally become part of the Iraqi state. Additionally, certain rights were granted to all inhabitants within Iraq. Article III of the treaty stated,

This organic law shall ensure to all complete freedom of conscience and the free exercise of all forms of worship...It shall provide that no discrimination of any kind shall be made between the inhabitants of Iraq on the ground of race, religion or language, and shall secure that right of each community to maintain its own schools.³²

The implication of this clause for the Kurds: Faisal would at least allow the Kurds to maintain cultural and social aspects of their communities, while incorporating them into the Iraqi state.

The diplomatic effort during the interlude between the Treaty of Sevres and the Treaty of Lausanne bypassed the Kurds, in relation to their importance vis-à-vis the negotiating powers. This plight can be linked to the following reasons: Mustafa Kemal had secured the upper hand in Anatolia, particularly after the defeat of the Armenians, French and Greek forces; many Kurds within Anatolia had been co-opted by Kemalist propaganda to join the Turks against the Christian invaders; the provisions of Sevres, with regards to a Kurdish state, had no chance of being pursued as long as Britain was

³² Hurewitz, 112. *From the Treaty of Alliance: Great Britain and Iraq, 10 October 1922.*

unable to secure the eastern portion of Anatolia; and possibly most significantly was the continued lack of Kurdish unity, even within the enclave of the Mosul vilayet.

Additionally, prior to the signing of the Treaty of Lausanne, Britain was very concerned with maintaining its hold on Iraq (to include Mosul), while staving off any threat from the north, to include the Turks and the Soviets. In this context, the Lausanne Conference was convened to settle the post-war issues that Sevres could not.

H. THE TREATY OF LAUSANNE

The Lausanne Conference was convened after the Kemalists had succeeded in forcing all foreign troops from Anatolia, with the exception of a residual allied force in Istanbul. The Kemalists followed this success with the abolition of the Sultanate by 1 November 1922, and declared that the Ottoman government no longer had any authority. Thus, the new Turkish regime, now firmly under Kemal's guidance, carried the ideas established in the National Pact of 1920 to the diplomatic bargaining table in Lausanne.³³ Furthermore, the new Turkish regime viewed the negotiations at Sevres null and void, and would attempt to regain concessions made at Sevres, to include the abolition of language directed at a Kurdish or Armenian state in eastern Anatolia.

The United States opted to stay out of the Lausanne Conference, yet maintained

³³ Hurewitz, 120. The Nationalists accepted the idea of non-Turkish portions of the Empire being separated, but were steadfast in maintaining territorial integrity of Anatolia, to include the predominantly Kurdish areas in Eastern Anatolia.

observer status. The Americans stated in a formal memorandum to the allied powers on 30 October 1922, “The United States was neither at war with Turkey nor a party to the Armistice of 1918 and does not desire to participate in the final peace negotiations or to assume responsibility for the political and territorial adjustments which may be effected.”³⁴

The only reference within the United States’ official position regarding minorities, outlined in the same memorandum to the allies, was a brief statement that there be “Suitable provision for the protection of minorities.”³⁵ A great deal of the language regarding the American position was geared towards the freedom of opportunity for commercial dealings within the new Turkish state, and not losing out on any potential windfall from the negotiations. This language is in stark contrast to the idealistic position that came from Wilson’s Fourteen Points.

Secretary of State Charles Evans Hughes issued further guidance to American observers to the Lausanne Conference on 30 October 1922. In the guidance, Hughes outlined United States’ policy towards minorities in Turkey. Again there was no mention of non-Christian minorities, such as the Kurds.

The British, with the greatest influence over southern Kurdistan going into the negotiations, were determined to maintain their grip on the Mosul vilayet. The British

³⁴ Ibid., 122.

³⁵ Ibid.

held that Turkish sovereignty over eastern Anatolia (as long as it did not threaten Mosul) was a far better alternative to any potentially unstable Kurdish state to the north of Iraq.³⁶ In this spirit, the British sought to utilize the conference to reach reconciliation with the new Kemalist regime. One of the motivations for the reconciliation was the fear of rising Soviet influence with Kemal, and the implications of a potential Turko-Soviet alliance north of Iraq, which did not align with British policy of containing the Soviets. Churchill suggested that peace with Turkey would have a dual purpose: first, it would reduce the need to maintain large numbers of troops in northern Iraq; secondly, it would serve to contain the Soviets.³⁷

All parties concerned signed the Treaty on 24 July 1923, including the Turks. Notably absent from mention in the Treaty were the Kurds as a minority group, or any language from Sevres regarding a Kurdish state. Articles 37-44 within the Lausanne Treaty talked of minority rights (particularly non-Muslim), yet Turkish pressure carried the day regarding ascertaining any rights for the Kurds. The British hoped that by dropping any language regarding Kurdish independence or autonomy, they would allay Turkish fears regarding British designs on a buffer state in eastern Anatolia.³⁸

³⁶ van Bruissenen, 274. Also see Mehrdad Izady, *A Concise Handbook: The Kurds*, (Washington DC, Taylor and Francis, Inc., 1992), 61.

³⁷ Othman Ali, "The Kurds and the Lausanne Peace Negotiations," *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 33, No. 3, (London: Frank Cass, July 1997), 523.

³⁸ Hurewitz, 122-123, also Ali, 524.

I. THE MOSUL VILAYET:

The only unresolved issue emerging from the Conference was control over the Mosul vilayet. Both Turkey and Great Britain were unable to reach agreement over the oil-rich province (with a majority Kurdish population.)³⁹ Resulting from this problematic area, both Turkey and Great Britain resolved to let the League of Nations arbitrate over its final status if both parties could not come to a mutually favorable resolution.⁴⁰

Ironically, there was a great deal of debate between Lord Curzon, the British head of delegation to the Conference, and Ismet Inonu, Curzon's Turkish counterpart, over the Kurdish issue within the Mosul vilayet. The irony lies in the nature of the discussion that focused on what exactly did it mean to be a Kurd. Both parties to the conversation had no Kurds amongst their respective delegations, and were speaking strictly on behalf of what would support their respective arguments in relation to the Mosul question. Inonu's position argued that "the inhabitants [Kurds] of the vilayet urgently demand that they be restored to Turkey."⁴¹ As well as "Those who know Anatolia are aware that as regards

³⁹ A League of Nations Commission was set up after Lausanne to look at the Mosul question. A census taken by the new Iraqi government taken in 1922-24 established that Mosul had 494,007 Kurds, 166,941 Arabs, 38,652 Turks, 61,336 Christians, 11,897 Jews, 26,257 Yezidis. This census was called into question by some of the other minorities who carried out their own population surveys, which disputed the Iraq survey. Henry A. Foster, *The Making of Modern Iraq*, (New York: Russell and Russell, 1935/1972), 161.

⁴⁰ McDowall, 142.

⁴¹ Foster, 145.

manners, usage and customs the Kurds do not differ in any respect from the Turks.”

Furthermore he continued that “the Kurdish people...are ready to endure any sacrifice in order to prevent such a separation.”⁴²

Curzon argued that the Turks and the Kurds were so unlike each other that “I would undertake to pick out a Kurd from a Turk any day in the week, and I could not unless I were blind possibly confuse the two.”⁴³

The argument would not be settled between these two statesmen, but would be referred back to the League of Nations, who on 16 December 1925 adopted a resolution that settled the border dispute in favor of Great Britain and established the Mosul vilayet in Iraq. Paragraph 3 of the resolution did mention the Kurdish problem by stating, “The British government as mandatory power was invited to lay before the Council the administrative measures which would be taken with a view to securing for the Kurdish populations mentioned in the report of the Commission in its final conclusions.”⁴⁴

These conclusions included the following regarding the Kurds: “Regard must be paid to the desires expressed by the Kurds that officials of the Kurdish race should be appointed for the administration of their country, the dispensation of justice, and teaching in the schools, and that Kurdish should be the official language of all these services.”⁴⁵

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 173.

⁴⁵ McDowall, 145-146. Taken from League of Nations: Report Submitted to the Council by the Commission instituted by the Council Resolution of Sept 30, 1924.

Following this resolution, the dimensions of the Kurdish question were once again refocused. Whereas preceding the Treaty of Sevres the diplomatic language centered on the creation of a Kurdish state in eastern Anatolia, with the potential of securing Mosul vilayet in the future, the debate now concerned itself in diplomatic language as solely focusing on autonomy for the Kurds in Mosul vilayet as part of the Iraqi state. Clearly, the dimension of the Kurdish problem had diminished in relation to how the major regional actors perceived the Kurds' significance. The Kurds, however, would have to deal with the consequences of the treaties, whereby they would be divided amongst the newly created states of the Middle East.

The Turks found the resolution problematic in the sense that a potential Kurdish autonomous region would border Turkey's predominantly Kurdish areas at a time when the Turks would be pursuing Turkification of the area. Furthermore, Kemal argued that sooner or later Mosul would be part of Turkey, possibly by force of arms.

J. THE FRONTIER TREATY OF IRAQ AND TURKEY:

Ultimately, Turkey opted for a diplomatic solution over the Mosul vilayet. On 5 June 1926, the Frontier Treaty of the United Kingdom and Iraq and Turkey was signed. The Treaty formally recognized the boundary between Iraq and Turkey, incorporating the Mosul vilayet into Iraq. To compensate for Turkey's perceived territorial loss, Article 14

(Geneva, 1925).

created an arrangement whereby Iraq would pay Turkey a ten- percent commission from the oil revenue generated within the vilayet for the next twenty-five years.⁴⁶

Once again, the Kurds were not mentioned by name in the Treaty. However, Articles 6-8 alluded to the Kurds, and stipulated that all parties involved with the treaty would “oppose by all means in their power any preparations made by one or more armed individuals with the object of committing acts of pillage or brigandage in the neighboring frontier zone and to prevent them from crossing the frontier.”⁴⁷

Article 12 likewise alluded to the Kurds and talked of both Turkey and Iraq refraining from agitation of “chiefs, sheikhs, or other members of tribes...”⁴⁸ in either state.

The conclusion of the Frontier Treaty in 1926 settled the borders between Turkey and Iraq, effectively nullified any immediate aspirations for creation of a Kurdish state in either eastern Anatolia or northern Iraq, and set the Kurds back politically for years to come. As stated here earlier, a lack of unity of purpose amongst the tribes within northern Iraq allowed Britain and Iraq to effectively preclude the Kurds from any promotion of autonomy. A united front, particularly during the diplomacy surrounding the fate of the Mosul vilayet, could have assisted the Kurds in achieving a solid foundation for autonomy within Iraq. However, Kurdish independence movements

⁴⁶ Hurewitz, 146.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 145.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

would have to wait until after World War II to realize (albeit short-lived) their dream of a Kurdish state.

Following the diplomatic effort in the late 1920s, the West, in particular France and Great Britain, worked towards establishing more friendly relations with Turkey. This new association was recognized with a treaty on 17 October 1939.⁴⁹ The treaty signaled the demise of any potential for Kurdish aspirations for statehood in the Middle East. Not only had state boundaries been settled diplomatically, but also the animosities between the major regional actors (Great Britain, France, Turkey, Iraq and Persia) had been tempered. The status quo would preclude any Kurdish group from receiving the support required to overcome the new political geography of the region.

K. WORLD WAR II

The advent of WWII brought new international players into the Kurdish dialogue: Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, both of which would spur the United States' involvement in the area. Iran also would also emerge as a focal point for the Kurdish movement for autonomy, in light of wartime developments, ultimately finding its culmination in the short-lived Mahabad Republic. American interests would manifest themselves through United States' declarations of support for Iran in the face of Soviet expansionism.

After the Soviet and British occupation of Iran in August 1941, which forced Reza

⁴⁹ Hurewitz, 226-228.

Shah to abdicate, the Kurdish population in northwest Iran found themselves in a political vacuum, albeit within the Soviet sphere of influence. Both the British and Soviets had formalized their occupation of Iran with a Treaty of Alliance on 29 January 1942. The Treaty stipulated in article five that “The forces of the Allied Powers shall be withdrawn from Iranian territory not later than six months after all hostilities between the Allied Powers and Germany...have been suspended....”⁵⁰ A year later, the United States, on invitation from the British, moved forces into Iran, and likewise issued a declaration stating that the United States would abide by the 1942 Treaty with Iran stating it would respect “the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Iran.”⁵¹

Concurrent with the Allied occupation of Iran, the Kurds in northwest Iran had established a political party in the town of Mahabad, named the Komala. By 1944, the Komala had spread outside of Mahabad and extended its activities into the Soviet occupation zone. Additionally, the Komala had established contacts with leading Kurdish figures in Turkey and Iraq.⁵²

⁵⁰ Ibid., 233-34. The British were anxious to secure this withdrawal date for fear, later to be justified through Soviet intransigence, of the Soviets not withdrawing from Iran.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² William Eagleton Jr., *The Kurdish Republic of 1946*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963), 34-36. Komala was the short name for the Komala I Zhian I Kurdistan – The Committee of the Resurrection of Kurdistan.

L. THE MAHABAD REPUBLIC

The rise in Kurdish political activity in Mahabad coincided with Soviet moves in Iranian Azerbaijan to create an autonomous Azerbaijani state in Iranian territory. Soviet political officers working in Iranian Azerbaijan expressed solidarity with Kurdish aspirations for autonomy, and moved to support the Komala in an effort to secure Kurdish state that like Iranian Azerbaijan, could be brought into the Soviet sphere.⁵³

The Soviets invited the leader of the Komala, Qazi Muhammed, to Baku, to discuss ideas for Kurdish autonomy. After initial gestures by the Soviets for Kurdish participation in the Azerbaijan autonomous area, the Kurds pushed for a distinct region, thereby gaining the Soviet concession that “as long as the Soviet Union exists, the Kurds will have their independence.”⁵⁴ Coinciding with this visit to Baku, Mulla Mustafa Barzani, who had been leading the Kurdish revolt in northern Iraq, moved his forces to Mahabad, after fleeing an Iraqi military offensive.

On 22 January 1946, Qazi Muhammed declared the Mahabad Republic, with himself as President. Barzani would become a General in the fledgling republic’s armed forces.

Soviet forces still occupied northwest Iran upon the expiration of the 1942 treaty that required all forces to withdraw six months after cessation of hostilities. The United States expressed its concern to the Soviets through a series of diplomatic exchanges.

⁵³ Ibid., 41-42.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 44-45.

President Truman is on record as referring to an ultimatum he gave to the Soviets, declaring to the Soviets “to get out of Persia.”⁵⁵

In light of increasing American pressure on the Soviets to withdraw, the Soviets announced that all troops would be withdrawn by 6 May, in exchange for an Iranian oil concession agreement, which was drafted on 4 April 1946.⁵⁶

This new arrangement based on the Soviet withdrawal sealed the Kurdish republic’s fate, without the Kurds’ foreknowledge. However, in spite of the Soviet withdrawal from Iran in May, the Kurds continued to maintain their position in the face of initial Iranian efforts to seek the republic’s demise.

However, by November 1946, in a telegram from the American ambassador to the Secretary of State, the United States’ position in relation to the separatist republics became clear:

The announced intention of the Iranian government to send its security forces into all parts of Iran, including any areas of Iran where such forces are not present in control, for the maintenance of order in connection with the elections, seems to me an entirely normal and proper decision.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ US Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States: 1946*, Vol. VII, Near East and Africa, (Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, 1969), 348. According to the State Dept., no official record exists of Truman’s ultimatum, except for Truman’s own recollection of the events.

⁵⁶ Hurewitz, 263. Iran played its cards masterfully in these negotiations. Iranian law prohibited the concession of any oil agreements to a foreign power, unbeknownst to the Soviets, who summarily withdrew, and were unable to capitalize on the concession once withdrawn.

⁵⁷ *Foreign Relations of the United States: 1946*, 548.

In the face of impending Iranian military operations against the breakaway republics, the Soviets informed the Iranian government that if troops were employed against the Kurdish republic, it might trigger a Soviet military response. In this light, the American Secretary of State informed the Iranian government that not only did the United States approve of Iranian intentions to move against the secessionist republics, but if the Iranians had reason to believe that the Soviets were actively interfering, the government of the United States

will be prepared to pursue matter energetically. You can assure Qavam [Iranian Prime Minister] that this government will give its unqualified support to Iran or to any other power the integrity and independence of which may be threatened by external forces...⁵⁸

Without implicit Soviet support, the breakaway republics were living on borrowed time. On 11 December 1946, the Iranian Azerbaijan Republic collapsed, and by 15 December, Qazi Muhammed surrendered to Iranian forces. Barzani would be quoted as having stated “The Kurds have not been defeated by the Iranian army; rather it was the Soviet Union that was defeated by the United States and Great Britain.”⁵⁹

Barzani managed to extricate his forces from Mahabad to Iraq, in order to escape Iranian plans for resettlement within Iran. However, fearing persecution within Iraq, Barzani and a band of 500-800 followers, escaped through Turkey and Iran into the

⁵⁸ Ibid., 552.

⁵⁹ Eagleton, 114.

Soviet Union, where they remained for the next eleven years.

In an interesting postscript to the United States-Soviet showdown in northwest Iran, complementing Barzani's statement suggesting an American victory over the Soviet Union, the United States' ambassador to the USSR mentioned in a memo to the Secretary of State in December 1946 that "The Soviet Union for a complex of external and internal reasons is not willing on ground which is not well prepared to face at present a showdown with the USA."⁶⁰

Once again, Kurdish aspirations for an independent state were subjugated to the interests of external actors, namely the Soviet Union and the United States. For the United States, post-WWII diplomacy in this area would ultimately center on supporting the status-quo powers (Iran and Turkey) at the expense of Kurdish nationalism. Both Iran and Turkey would be looked at as outposts in the cold war confrontation with the Soviet Union, and likewise, both countries would be able to quell Kurdish nationalist movements with the tacit consent of the United States, as long as these policies did not destabilize the regimes' ability to act in the role delegated by the United States.

⁶⁰ *Foreign Relations of the United States: 1946*, 566.

II. CASE STUDY 1: 1969-1975

The period between 1969-1975 marks a significant turning point in United States-Kurdish engagement. US diplomatic efforts from post-WWI centered on working with the states in the region, particularly Turkey, creating a policy that worked against Kurdish nationalist aspirations. The period from 1969-1975 now saw the United States utilizing the Kurds to further American interests in this area, mainly via proxies (Iran and Israel), and de facto allowing Kurdish nationalism to come to the fore.

The United States' interests with the Kurds during this period can be categorized into two main areas: supporting the Shah of Iran's leading role in the Middle East, to include attempts at destabilizing the Iraqi regime through utilizing the Iraqi Kurds; and supporting Israel in its stand against its Arab adversaries also with same modus operandi, and the same aims of destabilizing the Ba'athist regime in Iraq.

A. BACKGROUND OF UNITED STATES, ISRAELI, AND IRANIAN SUPPORT - PRE-1969

Through the course of the Iraqi Kurds' conflict with the Iraq during the 1960s, Mulla Mustafa Barzani, leader of the KDP, had enlisted the active support of the two primary American allies in the region—Israel and Iran.⁶¹ The United States may also have

⁶¹ The KDP split in January 1966, when Jalal Talabani (future leader of the PUK) and his faction within the KDP split from Barzani over ideological differences, leading to conflict between the two groups.

had contacts with the KDP during this time period, although official documentation of such activities would not be noted until 1972.⁶² Barzani had made overtures to the United States via American reporters traveling through the region. As early as 1962 Barzani stated, “Let the Americans give us military help, openly or secretly, so that we can become truly autonomous, and we will become your loyal partners in the Middle East.”⁶³

However, the United States was knowledgeable of Iranian and Israeli activities, possibly even funding such operations, through CIA ties with Mossad, and Iran’s State Intelligence and Security Organization (SAVAK).⁶⁴ The United States had established working relationships with Mossad as early as 1951, and would utilize this relationship to work with other intelligence services in the region. Ultimately, both CIA and Mossad (as well as Britain’s MI6) would work extensively in developing SAVAK for the Shah of Iran. Additionally, with American and British encouragement, Israel was urged to establish formal links with SAVAK and Turkey’s National Security Service (TVSS). By

⁶² Edmund Ghareeb, *The Kurdish Question in Iraq*. (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1981), 138-139. Ghareeb notes anecdotal evidence supporting CIA activity with the Kurds as early as 1960.

⁶³ Dana Adams Schmidt, “The Kurdish Insurgency,” *Strategic Review*, (Washington DC: United States Strategic Institute, Summer 1974), 56.

⁶⁴ According to Israeli intelligence officers, at a minimum, Henry Kissinger had been kept informed of Israeli and Iranian operations prior to 1972. Jonathan C. Randal, *With Such Knowledge, What Forgiveness? My Encounters with Kurdistan*, (New York: Farrar, Strouss, Geroux, 1997), 147-148. SAVAK is the acronym for the Farsi, Sazmani-Amniyat Va Kisvar.

1958, these three agencies formalized a pact called the Trident Group, which would prove useful in coordinating American, Israeli, and Iranian aid to the Iraqi Kurds.⁶⁵

Iran's animosity towards Iraq was not only rooted in the monarchy's enmity with the Ba'athist regime, but was also found in historical quarrels between the two types of government (non-Arab monarchy vs. Arab nationalist government); and disputes over borders dating back to WWI. However, Iraq's flirtation with Nasserism and Pan-Arabism, particularly during the emergence of the Egyptian-Syrian United Arab Republic, and Iraq's gestures of joining this unified Arab republic put Iran on the defensive. Thus, Iran began to utilize the Kurds to add an element of instability in Iraq, limiting Baghdad's ability to secure its own territory in the north.⁶⁶

Iran proved to be of immense value to the KDP's efforts in its quest for autonomy from the Iraqi state prior to 1969. This value was demonstrated by allowing cross border access to the KDP peshmerga, supplying Barzani's forces with weapons, and assisting Iran in controlling Iran's problematic Kurdish population by sealing the Iraqi border to stem the flow of Iranian Kurds.⁶⁷

After Britain announced its withdrawal from the Gulf region in 1968, the United States opted to fill this gap, by proxy, through Iran, this later would be identified with the

⁶⁵ Dan Raviv, and Yossi Melman, *Every Spy a Prince: A Complete History of Israel's Intelligence Community*. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1990), 80-83.

⁶⁶ Ghareeb, 135-136.

⁶⁷ McDowall, 320.

Nixon Doctrine. The Nixon doctrine stated that the United States would “furnish military and economic assistance when requested and as appropriate. But we shall look to the nation directly threatened to assume the primary responsibility of providing the manpower for its defense.”⁶⁸ Years later, Henry Kissinger would remark, “Iran, under the Shah, in short, was one of America’s best, most important, and most loyal friends in the world.”⁶⁹

Israel likewise had been actively supporting Barzani since 1965 with weapons and financial aid to destabilize the Iraq regime.⁷⁰ Israel had also utilized Kurdish assistance in moving Iraqi Jews out of Iraq (Operation Carpet) to Israel.⁷¹ Israel’s aim in supporting the Kurds, ostensibly were to create a sufficient amount of turmoil within Iraq to deter Iraq from committing forces in any future Arab-Israeli conflict. This support may be evidenced by a Barzani offensive in 1967 timed to coincide with the war in Israel, evidently with the intent to tie down Iraqi units that might otherwise be sent to support the Arab armies against Israel.⁷²

⁶⁸ George Lencowski, *American Presidents and the Middle East*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990), 116-117.

⁶⁹ Henry Kissinger, *White House Years*, (Boston: Little and Brown, 1979), 1262.

⁷⁰ “Israel Sent Arms to Kurds,” *Times of London*, 30 September 1980, p. 6. These controversial remarks made in a speech by Begin, Israel’s Prime Minister, which did not please Mossad for publicly revealing its involvement with the Kurds. Also see *Every Spy a Prince*, 82.

⁷¹ Michael M. Gunter, *The Kurds of Iraq: Tragedy and Hope*, (New York: St. Martins Press, 1992), 30. This was also noted by the Iraqis by 1972, see Ghareeb, 124.

⁷² Ghareeb, 142. Iraq did not sign an armistice with Israel following the 1948-49

Israel had first approached Barzani in 1963 through its intelligence service Mossad. This initial contact spurred the movement of funds and weapons from Israel (and other Western sources) to the Iraqi Kurds.⁷³ Israel utilized its friendly diplomatic relations with Iran to move the money and arms to Barzani. This inflow eventually included “weapons, ammunition, military advisors, training, an Israeli cabinet minister, agricultural experts...and a field hospital,”⁷⁴ allowing Barzani to continue his fight.

Israel also helped the Kurds in training and intelligence collection. It is widely believed that the Israelis helped form Parastin, the KDP’s first formal intelligence organization. Likewise, Kurdish soldiers were flown into Haifa, Israel, for weapons training and tactics development. These visits to Israel included visits from Barzani himself to meet with Israeli political, military and other governmental leaders.⁷⁵

This behind the scenes aid, leading up to 1969, was not without its consequences. The support of Barzani by Israel, Iran, and the United States, may have given the KDP a false sense of security, leading Barzani to undertake particular courses of action that he may not have otherwise undertaken. Additionally, this external support for the Iraqi

War. Egypt, Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon had all signed agreements with Israel, however, Iraq opted not to sign its own.

⁷³ Randal, 189-190. Randal’s interviews with Menachem Nevot, former Deputy Director of Mossad in October 1991.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 190.

⁷⁵ Ghareeb, 142. The information regarding Barzani’s visits to Israel comes from Ghareeb’s interviews with Kurdish leaders who worked with Barzani at the time.

Kurds may have prompted Iraq to seek greater dependence on Soviet aid in light of increasing western support for destabilizing the Iraqi regime. These two consequences would manifest themselves within six years to have adverse repercussions on the Iraqi Kurds.

B. KURDISH REVOLT OF 1969

Shortly after the Ba'athist coup in the summer of 1968, the new regime was on an ideological collision course with the KDP, in spite of the new regimes initial overtures to the Kurds. These overtures, many of which were related to the implementation of the 29 June 1966 Twelve Point Program, or Bazaaz Declaration, would not be implemented in their entirety.⁷⁶ Ideologically, the Ba'ath recognized northern Iraq as Arab land, thereby negating any potential for Kurdish autonomy or self-determination in that area.⁷⁷

The Bazaaz declaration had been an offer that would have granted the Kurds the most extensive autonomous arrangement worked out between the Kurds and any ruling government in Iraq. However, due to political posturing and delays, compounded by the problem of changes in leadership in Baghdad, these ideas were never completely implemented.

The Kurdish revolt in 1969 can be traced to both the government coup of 1968

⁷⁶ See Edgar O'Ballance, *The Kurdish Revolt: 1961-1970*, (London: Faber and Faber LTD, 1973), 179-180, for full details of the Twelve Point Program for Kurdish autonomy.

⁷⁷ McDowall, 327.

and its initial failures to implement the Bazaaz declaration. However, relating to the Kurds, the initial goals of the new regime were conciliatory on paper. These new goals detailed the “reconciliation between the party [Ba’ath] and other progressive forces through the adoption of the united front strategy to include the Kurdish and Communist parties...” and “the resolution of the Kurdish question in a peaceful manner.”⁷⁸ As mentioned earlier, any peaceful resolution offered by the Iraqi regime would have to include peace under a unified Arab/Ba’athist regime.

Upon consolidation of power, the new Iraqi government moved to co-opt the Kurds in the politics of the new government, while still holding out the stick and carrot of the Bazaaz declaration. Concurrent with the previously mentioned policy, the Ba’athists effectively centered on the rift between the Barzani faction and Talabani faction, both of which represented a significant portion of the Kurdish population. The Ba’athists found Talabani more willing to deal and thereby moved to circumvent Barzani as leader of the Kurdish movement in Iraq.

Talabani also saw this as an opportunity to eclipse Barzani as nominal leader of the Iraqi Kurds. In this light, the Ba’athists allotted a military stipend to Talabani’s faction, and allowed them to publish a newspaper (al Nur) in Baghdad. In return, Talabani endorsed the new regime’s policy vis-à-vis the Kurds.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Ghareeb, 70-73.

⁷⁹ McDowall, 325.

After the regime's overtures to the Talabani faction, Barzani launched a series of attacks on Talabani's forces in the fall of 1968, demonstrating that Barzani's KDP forces were in fact in control of Kurdish areas, and pointed out the ineffectiveness of Talabani's forces. Talabani's military and territorial losses prompted the government to intervene on behalf of Talabani, ultimately using the Iraqi Air Force to bombard Barzani held villages. Barzani appealed to the United Nations for mediation. Alongside the airstrikes, the Iraqi government claimed that Israel and the United States, through the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO), were behind the Kurdish unrest, and ultimately aimed for the overthrow of the government.⁸⁰

At the onset of 1969, with the assistance of the Talabani fighters, Iraq had moved upwards of 60,000 troops into Kurdish areas around Sulaimaniya. However, winter weather would force a halt to operations by the beginning of February. During this halt in operations the Iraqi government unilaterally announced contrary to reality that it had successfully implemented the Bazaaz declaration. The Iraqi government said "We are looking forward to seeing an increasing number of our Kurdish brothers believe in a peaceful settlement as a result of the course of the progressive government is taking."⁸¹

During the winter of 1969, the Iraqi government continued to link Kurdish unrest

⁸⁰ O'Ballance, 151. Also Paul Martin, "Iraq Air Raids on Kurdish Rebels," *Times of London*, 19 December 1968, 7.

⁸¹ O'Ballance, 151-152. Also "Iraqis Announce Firm Oil Policy," *New York Times*, 8 February 1969, 31.

with the United States, Israel, and Iran. In January during the government's 'spy' trials, the government charged "Nineteen people, including eight Jews...on charges of spying for Israel" and concluded that "the accused attempted to form a political organization connected with CENTO...with close US support." The group's goals were to "stir up trouble with dissident Kurdish tribesmen in the north of Iraq...."⁸²

On 1 March 1969, Barzani launched his counteroffensive, touching off the conflict that would last for almost a year. Barzani was successful in driving back government and Talabani troops, allowing Barzani to shell the Kirkuk oil fields, hoping to divert government troops from the Iranian border, in order to reestablish his logistic lines with Iran.⁸³ In a somewhat prophetic statement by Barzani to an American reporter on 29 March, Barzani stated that he "might be condemned by the Baghdad regime and Arab public opinion as having been responsible for diverting Iraqi military strength away from the battle with Israel."⁸⁴ This same sentiment would be alluded to by Secretary of State Henry Kissinger years later, as anecdotal evidence of Kurdish utility in pinning down Iraqi forces, and preventing Iraq from focusing its entire military against Israel in the 1973 war.

Iraqi military operations during this conflict, with a primary aim of sealing the

⁸² Dana Adams Schmidt, "19, Including 8 Jews, Awaiting Sentence in Iraq as Israeli Spies," *New York Times*, 19 January 1969, 22.

⁸³ O'Ballance, 152.

⁸⁴ "Kurdish Unrest Unabated in Iraq," *New York Times*, 30 March 1969, 10.

Iranian border, was a conscious act of recognition of Iran's ties to the KDP. Iraq was "apprehensive of Iran's growing regional domination, and correctly moved to stem its influence with the Kurds."⁸⁵

Iran further heightened the tensions on 19 April 1969, by reneging on the 1937 boundary treaty demarcating the Shatt-al-Arab waterway, in declaring it an international body of water. Furthermore, both Iran and Iraq condemned one another for abetting Kurdish rebels on either side of the border. Fighting would continue to escalate between the KDP and government/Talabani forces throughout 1969, with increasing reports of Iranian and US support for the KDP.⁸⁶ These reports of United States, Israeli, and Iranian complicity with the KDP were tied with the regime consolidating its power and utilizing flamboyant trials in Baghdad, claiming to have caught spies of the United States and Israel. Yet these trials were nothing more than cover as a means to rid the regime of its opposition. By late May, the government had executed 36 such 'spies', and furthermore asked its citizens to "be on the lookout for the agents of the United States Central Intelligence Agency and the Shah of Iran...."⁸⁷

Again in June, the government accused the United States as the conspirator

⁸⁵ McDowall, 326.

⁸⁶ "Iran Voids Border Pact, Charging Iraqi Violations," *New York Times*, 20 April 1969, 32. Also see Ghareeb, 78, for extent of Iranian arms support for the KDP in 1969. Also alleges CIA support, supposedly confessed to by the former mayor of Baghdad who had been arrested on charges of spying for the CIA.

⁸⁷ Dana Adams Schmidt, "Iraq Halts Compensation for Expropriated Lands," *New York Times*, 24 May 1969, 5.

responsible for most of its troubles, “fomenting unrest among the Kurdish minority in the north...”⁸⁸ The accusations, anecdotal at best, looked to paint the United States as the root of Iraq’s internal problems, and gave the Ba’athists an easy scapegoat in the face of an increasingly likely stalemate in the Kurdish held areas in northern Iraq.

By September, the Iraqis claimed that it had engaged Iranian troops who had been assisting Barzani forces, killing thirty Iranians in the battle. Iraqi government radio alleged that the soldiers “belonged to a special contingent set up to support General Barzani’s forces” who were “instruments of US and Israeli intelligence.”⁸⁹ The escalation of the conflict inevitably gave rise to stronger evidence of foreign involvement. However, the extent of the involvement would not be clear for a number of years.

C. PEACE OF 1970

Iraq quickly realized that in order to stem foreign influence with the KDP, it would have to negotiate directly with Barzani. Likewise, the government was under the assumption that by politically defusing the situation in the north, it would free up its forces in the event that hostilities with Israel were imminent. Therefore, they decided not to continue to support the rising toll in manpower and equipment stationed in

⁸⁸ Raymond H. Anderson, “U.S., an ‘Octopus’, Ridiculed in Iraq,” *New York Times*, 10 June 1969, 8.

⁸⁹ “Iraq Reports Clash with Iran’s Troops and Capture 14,” *New York Times*, 15 September 1969, 13.

northern Iraq.⁹⁰ Thus, formal negotiations began between Barzani and the Ba'ath. As a precursor to talks, Barzani forced the regime to cease its support for the Talabani led faction, thereby solidifying his position as the Kurdish leader vis-à-vis the government.

As a forerunner to negotiations, on 25 January 1970, Baghdad announced an amnesty to any Kurd who had fought in northern Iraq since 1961. However, Barzani was concerned about disarming, particularly with previous governments' habits on renegeing on such agreements. The culmination of negotiations, entered into by Saddam Hussein and Barzani, resulted in the 11 March 1970 Peace accords, which eclipsed the Bazaaz declaration in its generous terms for the Kurds. Saddam Hussein would boast that not only had he agreed to a cease-fire with the Kurds, but "a total and final settlement of the Kurdish situation."⁹¹

The degree to which tensions had defused between the KDP and the government could best be characterized by the concluding remarks of the peace accords, "History will bear witness that you [Kurds] did not have and never will have as sincere a brother and dependable [an] ally as the Arab people."⁹² Barzani's previous concerns regarding disarmament were honored however, by allowing the Kurds to maintain 10,000 armed

⁹⁰ For scope of Iraqi commitments in northern Iraq, see Dana Adams Schmidt, "Iraqi Army Renews its Offensive Against Kurds," *New York Times*, 12 October 1969, 2, also see "Iraq Seeking Talks with Rebel Kurds," *New York Times*, 30 December 1969, 4.

⁹¹ "Amnesty for Kurds Reported in Iraq," *New York Times*, 26 January 1970, 8. Also Dana Adams Schmidt, "Iraq Recognizes Kurdish Autonomy," *New York Times*, 12 March 1970, 8. See McDowall, 327-328 for details of 11 March 1970 accords.

⁹² McDowall, 326-328.

fighters while the negotiations were finalized.

Despite the apparent gestures of goodwill shown by both sides over the signing of the peace accords, it is questionable if either side would have abided by its guidelines. The KDP needed a break from the mounting casualties and the toll it was taking on the psyche of the Kurdish population. The government, on the other hand, needed to neutralize the Kurdish insurgency in the north in order to strengthen its position in Baghdad. Also, by some estimates, it had expended over \$1 billion combating the Kurds, without achieving military supremacy; hence a political solution was deemed at the time more likely to succeed.⁹³

It was soon clear by the posturing of both the Kurds and the government through 1970 and into 1971 that the peace accords would never be fully implemented. Iraq complained of continuing Iranian interference of military assistance to Barzani's forces.⁹⁴ The Kurds countered that the government was stalling the full implementation in order to upset the demographics in northern Iraq in favor of the Arabs in particularly contested regions such as the oil rich province of Kirkuk.

Barzani had made known his unease with the peace accords as early as August 1970, by stating to an American reporter that the Iraqis had been delaying the full implementation of the March accords. He added that he feared new wording in the Iraqi

⁹³ Dana Adams Schmidt, "Rulers of Iraq Place Priority on Consolidating Their Power," *New York Times*, 13 March 1970, 3.

⁹⁴ See Gunter, 18 for list of Iraqi grievances vis-à-vis Iran.

constitution which indicated that Kurdish areas were part of the Arab world.⁹⁵

D. UNEASY PEACE: 1971-1973

The early 1970s saw the rise of American military assistance to Iran in its new role as the major regional power. Posturing by Iran in 1970 towards its role as regional hegemon were indicated by Iranian Foreign Minister Ardeshir Zahedi in April. He stated that Iran was the strongest nation in the Persian Gulf, “but as far as defense is concerned only two countries are important, Saudi Arabia and Iran...and we must carry the burden.”⁹⁶ This line of reasoning was clearly in line with Nixon and Kissinger’s view of developing a regional power to pursue American objectives, i.e. developing a stalwart against Communism and Soviet influence in the region.

By 1972, the tenuous peace of 1970 had all but fallen apart. By publicly forging agreements with the USSR, Iraq earned the antipathy of the both Iran and the United States, who for the first time would be an overt figure in the Kurdish saga in Iraq. Iraq was also publicly charging the Kurds by November 1972 of increasing its Iranian ties, rather than terminating ties as called for in the March 1970 accords.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ Dana Adams Schmidt, “Iraq-Kurd Accord is Said to Falter,” *New York Times*, 17 August 1970, 7.

⁹⁶ Dana Adams Schmidt, “Key Role for Iran Seen in Gulf Area,” *New York Times*, 26 April 1970, 9.

⁹⁷ Ghareeb, 124.

American involvement from 1972 to 1975 was to have been a covert operation, possibly along the same lines as the anecdotal evidence of United States and Israeli support for the Kurds in the years prior to 1972. However, American support came to public attention through the release of the Pike Papers.⁹⁸ From the released documents, it was apparent that the Shah had made overtures to Kissinger and Nixon upon their state visit to Iran in May 1972, regarding support for the Kurds. This support was requested in response to Iraq's move into a series of pacts with the Soviets, primarily in the military sphere for aid and assistance to Iraq's military. According to the Pike Report, Kurdish aid would be constrained:

The President, Dr. Kissinger, [the Shah] hoped our clients would not prevail. They preferred instead that the insurgents simply continue a level of hostilities sufficient to sap the resources of our ally's neighboring country [Iraq]. This policy was not imparted to our clients, who were encouraged to continue fighting. Even in this context of covert action, ours was a cynical enterprise.⁹⁹

The United States would later pledge \$16 million in support, which was more a show of support for Iran, than for the Kurds, due to the much larger amount of money being spent on the Kurds by the Shah. Again, the Pike Report indicated the impact of the

⁹⁸ The Pike Papers were documents leaked from the House Select Committee for Intelligence (HSCI), chaired by Rep Otis Pike. The report, completed on Jan 19, 1976, looked into a number of covert operations, including US aid to the Kurds through Iran.

⁹⁹ Aaron Latham, "The CIA Report the President Doesn't Want You to Read: The Pike Papers," *The Village Voice*, 16 February 1976, 71. The Shah's overtures were confirmed by Kissinger in *White House Years*, 1265.

support, “Documents made available to the committee [HSCI] indicate that the US acted in effect as a guarantor that the insurgent group would not be summarily dropped by the foreign head of state [Shah].¹⁰⁰

Despite the aid program, the United States’ ambassador to Iran was against the operation, stating in a CIA cable to the Director, Central Intelligence (DCI), “My reaction is against giving financial support to this operation...” Furthermore it was clear that separatism was not to be encouraged, “we do not wish to become involved, even indirectly, in operations which would have the effect of prolonging the insurgency, thereby encouraging separatist aspirations and possibly providing the Soviet Union an opportunity to create difficulties for [two other US allies].”¹⁰¹ This line of reasoning was consistent with previous American responses to Kurdish overtures in 1971 and March 1972, both of which were rejected by Kissinger. Clearly the United States at this juncture had contemplated the potential spillover effect that Iraqi Kurdish separatism might have in neighboring Turkey, as well as in Iran itself.

Barzani, on the other hand, was gratified to learn of the formal pledge of American assistance. Barzani felt uneasy relying completely on the Shah. Barzani would later comment, “We wanted American guarantees. We never trusted the Shah. Without American promises we couldn’t have acted the way we did. We knew Iran could not do

¹⁰⁰ Latham, 85.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 87.

it all on its own. We accepted American aid in what we believed was the interest of the Kurdish people.”¹⁰²

Additionally, as an impetus behind the American support of the Kurds, Kissinger saw growing Soviet influence in the Mid East: 15,000 troops in Egypt; the 9 April 1972 Treaty with Iraq, providing for military assistance; and Soviet military assistance to Syria. All of which favored providing an increased amount of military aid to Iran. Kissinger would later comment, “To have failed to match the influx of Soviet arms into neighboring countries would have accelerated the demoralization of moderate forces in the Middle East and speeded up the radicalization of the area, including Iran’s.”¹⁰³

Activity by Iraq would hasten American backing of Iranian support for the Kurds. Mainly, the political gesturing towards the USSR culminated in the 9 April Iraqi-Soviet treaty and the 1 June 1972 nationalization of the Iraqi Petroleum Company, of which American companies had a significant interest. The increased oil revenue would allow the regime to increase its buildup of advanced weaponry and to enlarge its army, much to the dismay of Israel, Iran, and the United States.¹⁰⁴

Additional evidence supporting American involvement with the Kurds during this period comes from the Shah of Iran’s top advisor, Asadollah Alam. Alam recalled in his diary from that period that on 17 July 1972, he had personally had

¹⁰² Ghareeb, 140. From Ghareeb’s interview with Barzani in 1976.

¹⁰³ Kissinger, 1263-1264.

¹⁰⁴ Ghareeb, 132.

Discussions with a certain Englishman, an expert on Iraq and Kurdistan. Together we have come up with a well thought out plan to topple the present regime in Baghdad by bringing together the Kurds and the Iraqi opposition in exile. We are working closely with the British and Americans on this but must wait and see whether anything comes of it.¹⁰⁵

Ultimately Kissinger would tout American support for the Kurds during the period from 1972-1975, as well worth the investment. Years later he commented, “The benefit of Nixon’s Kurdish decision was apparent in just over a year: Only one Iraqi division was available to participate in the October 1973 Middle East war.”¹⁰⁶ However, the causal relationship between the Kurd’s activities in 1973 and Kissinger’s statement are tenuous at best.

By 1973, Barzani was threatening the Iraqi government with full-scale warfare unless the government withdrew forces from Kurdish areas. This was coupled with Barzani’s fear of losing Kurdish rights to the oil concessions in the north. Along these lines, Barzani was quoted as saying that if American “support were strong enough, we could control Kirkuk and give it to an American company to operate.”¹⁰⁷

However, Soviet military aid was rapidly advancing Iraqi military capabilities. By July 1973, it was estimated that Iraq had taken receipt of up to 300 Soviet made

¹⁰⁵ Asadollah Alam, *The Shah and I: The Confidential Diary of Iran’s Royal Court, 1969-1977*, (London: I.B. Taurus and Co., Ltd., 1991), 230.

¹⁰⁶ Kissinger, 1265.

¹⁰⁷ Ghareeb, 126.

fighter aircraft along with hundreds of tanks. The military aid was combined with significant economic aid packages particularly focused on the Iraqi oil economy, and developing its infrastructure without Western assistance.¹⁰⁸

E. 1973 YOM KIPPUR WAR AND THE KURDS

American influence with the Kurds is probably most clear at this juncture, albeit controversial. Israel, in 1973 was still anecdotally involved with supplying and training the Kurds as a potential second front against the Iraqi army, in the event of war with Israel.¹⁰⁹ Moreover, Israel had suggested to Barzani in 1973 that the Kurds stage an offensive to coincide with Arab hostilities against Israel. As noted in the Pike report,

It is particularly ironic that despite President Nixon's and Dr. Kissinger's encouragement of hostilities to keep the target country off-balance, the US personally restrained the insurgents from an all-out offensive on one occasion when such an attack might have been successful because other events were occupying the neighboring country.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ Juan de Onis, "Iraqi Says He'd Welcome Better Relations with the US," *New York Times*, 15 July 1973, 1.

¹⁰⁹ See Lee Dinsmore, "The Forgotten Kurds," *The Progressive*, April 1977, 38-39. Dinsmore, a former United States Foreign Service officer offers a critical view of American policy towards the Kurds.

¹¹⁰ Latham, 85. To bolster this argument, Kissinger imparted to the DCI to draft a memo to the Kurds stating "We do not repeat not consider it advisable for you to undertake the offensive military action that [another government] has suggested to you." *Ibid.*, 87.

The ability for the Kurds to have achieved success as postulated by the Pike Report is spurious at best. Kissinger, in his memoirs relates the same sense of lack of ability on behalf of the Kurds, “the decision to discourage the Kurds from launching a diversionary offensive during the October 1973 war was based on the unanimous view...that the Kurds would be defeated.”¹¹¹ Likewise, the Shah was in agreement with the United States regarding the Kurds’ chances for victory. In response to the American ambassador’s objections over the Israeli suggestion for a Kurdish offensive, the Shah was noted as having said “I’m entirely in agreement,” further noting “and in any case I’ve no desire to have the Kurds branded as mere henchmen of Israel and the USA.”¹¹²

F. THE ROAD TO CONFLICT, 1973-1974

Iraqi government-KDP relations saw a turning point in 1973. In their attempts to consolidate power in Baghdad, the regime made a number of overtures to the KDP for participation in a National Front, along with the Ba’ath party, as well as restarting dialogue aimed at working out Kurdish autonomy issues. In this spirit, the government sought to avoid a direct conflict with Barzani.

Barzani, emboldened by American and Iranian support, opted not to deal with the Iraqi government, and countered Baghdad’s autonomy offer with one of his own. Barzani

¹¹¹ Kissinger, 1265.

¹¹² Alam, 327.

felt that the new Iraqi proposal was not in conformity with the 11 March 1970 plan, which he signaled as the basis for any future discussions.¹¹³ Barzani's move to strike out on his own course would prove to be a costly one. For as early as 1972, the CIA had information that indicated the Shah would drop the Kurds if he could reach an amicable arrangement with Iraq: "[An ally] has apparently used [another government's] Foreign Minister to pass word to [his enemy] that he would be willing to allow peace to prevail [in the area] if [his enemy] would publicly agree to abrogate [a previous treaty concerning their respective borders]."¹¹⁴

The Iraqis, who saw in its wording a far greater move towards secession rather than autonomy, rejected the KDP proposal. As an Iraqi official stated, "The Kurds don't want self-rule, but a state above the state..."¹¹⁵

Nevertheless, the government still attempted to deal with the KDP while simultaneously dealing with other Kurdish political factions. The government position was firm: If the KDP did not accept the regime's autonomy plan, it would implement it with the assistance of other Kurdish groups. The regime declared that 11 March 1974 would be the deadline by which the KDP was to work out an arrangement.

KDP intransigence with the government caused several prominent KDP members to break with Barzani, and ally themselves with the regime, to include Barzani's son,

¹¹³ "Iraq Presses Kurds on Self-Rule Plan," *New York Times*, 13 March 1974, 4.

¹¹⁴ Latham, 87.

¹¹⁵ Ghareeb, 151.

Ubaidullah. These rifts developed out of what was perceived as a power play by Barzani to strengthen his own personal position, rather than working on behalf of the Kurds.¹¹⁶

On 11 March, the Iraqi government declared its version of autonomy for the Kurds to be in effect. The following day the KDP response rejected the government move and called on the Kurds to counter the government through force if necessary. Fighting broke out as early as 14 March. The KDP controlled Voice of Kurdistan called for Kurds to “take up arms and join the Kurdish army.”¹¹⁷

In interviews on 29 March, Barzani would sound out reporters for increased aid in his new fight against the government, stating that he was prepared to accept aid “from any place to remove the persecution of the Kurdish people.” However he added that he would prefer Western aid. Barzani also commented, “A drowning man stretches his hand for everything, whether a stone, a piece of food or a piece of grass.”¹¹⁸ Barzani further claimed that the current level of foreign assistance was insufficient.

Barzani would later note after the conclusion of the fighting in 1975, “Without American promises, we would not have acted the way we did. Were it not for the American promises, we would never have become trapped and involved to such an extent.”¹¹⁹ The same sentiment would be noted in a letter from Barzani to President

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 154-55.

¹¹⁷ “Iraqis Reported Battling Kurds,” *New York Times*, 15 March 1974, 11.

¹¹⁸ Robert Gwynne, “Kurdish Leader, Facing Possible Civil War, Looks to West for Support,” *New York Times*, 1 April 1974, 14.

¹¹⁹ Ghareeb, 159. Ghareeb’s interview with Barzani, 13 September 1976.

Carter, where Barzani made clear that his decision to “disregard this alternative [government autonomy proposal]” and to take up arms was due to his belief of American support for his decision.¹²⁰

Nevertheless, the KDP opted to engage the Iraqis in combat. Anecdotal evidence from leading Kurdish political figures account for American military advisors on the Iranian border assisting the Kurds with tactics and planning, as well as CIA officers working near KDP headquarters. These same reports also account for Israeli advisors working alongside the Americans.¹²¹

The level of fighting by April prompted the KDP to send a delegation to Washington to ask for assistance, in particular for heavy weapons to counter the well-armed Iraqis. It remains unclear what was promised to the Kurds. The Kurds claim the United States promised military aid as well as financial aid, however, the official American position was that no deal had been struck. A congressional inquiry into these visits revealed that in fact the United States refused to meet with the Kurdish delegation at any significant level within the State Department. Working level discussion however did take place. This policy was in force because of the “obvious implications for the problem of respecting the domestic affairs of a sovereign nation.”¹²² This remark is in

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid., 159-160.

¹²² Statement by the Honorable Alfred L. Atherton, Jr., Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs. *The Middle East, 1974: New Hopes, New Challenges*. Hearings Before the Subcommittee on the Near East and South Asia of

line with the information released in the Pike Report, that the State Department was not informed as to the activities initiated by Kissinger, carried out by the CIA in conjunction with the Shah.

By September, Barzani had conceded in an interview that “it was possible his guerrillas could be so decisively defeated in the next few weeks that Baghdad would gain control of more of Kurdish Iraq than it had in 13 years of intermittent war.”¹²³

Despite Kurdish efforts the Iraqi forces managed to push the Kurds from the low-lying terrain into the mountains prior to the onset of winter. Iraqi success can be directly attributed to the acquisition of more advanced weaponry and new tactics developed with the assistance of foreign advisors.

The rapid Iraqi advances moved Iran to escalate its aid to the Kurds; amounting to the movement of Iranian divisions to the border of Iraq. The close proximity of the two standing armies resulted in artillery exchanges between Iran and Iraq. The Shah had hoped that if the Iraqis could not achieve a victory prior to winter, the regime might collapse due to the lack of results and the mounting costs on the Iraqi army. The Kurds also acknowledged the increased aid from the Iranians, claiming in September that they

the Committee on Foreign Affairs, US House of Representatives, 2nd Session. (Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, 1974), 140-141. As an addendum to the hearing, the State Dept. submitted for the record that in fact a meeting occurred between the Iraqi desk officer and the KDP on 27 June 1974.

¹²³ James F. Clarity, “Iraqi Force Seizes Most Kurdish Towns,” *New York Times*, 27 September 1974, 4.

had received rifles, artillery, and ammunition, but no tanks or other heavy weaponry. They also alleged that Israel had donated artillery, but that they had run out of ammunition for the Israeli systems.¹²⁴ Unlike previous Iraqi military campaigns, in which the Iraqi army would halt operations in the winter to retreat from the mountainous terrain back to the plains to garrison, the Iraqis continued to hold their ground through the winter months.

Concurrent with Iraqi military operations were political talks between Iran and Iraq, aimed at defusing the border problems that had resurfaced in 1969, which were moving dangerously close towards open armed conflict between Iran and Iraq. However, Iran would demand that Iraq renounce its ties with the USSR, and expel the Shah's opponents who were residing in Iraq. Iraq in turn demanded a halt to Iranian support for the Kurds.¹²⁵ Furthermore, the Iraqi government was also pursuing political engagement with the Kurds not aligned with KDP. Saddam Hussein was appointed to head the High Committee for Northern Affairs, which was responsible for creating policies in northern Iraq that would not alienate the Kurds. These policies included allowing the Kurds to join the armed forces; as well as fostering economic development and inputting financial aid in the war torn areas of Iraqi Kurdistan.¹²⁶

¹²⁴ James F. Clarity, "Kurds say Iran Arms Them, and that Soviets Sends Advisers to Iraq," *New York Times*, 29 September 1974, 2.

¹²⁵ Juan de Onis, Juan, "Iraq Said to Seek Arab Talks on Iran," *New York Times*, 11 February 1975, 7.

¹²⁶ Ghareeb, 165-169.

G. 1975 - CONCLUSION OF FIGHTING

In an unprecedented move, the Iraqi army opted for concluding the conflict with the Kurds during the winter months. Government estimates placed the remaining number of Kurdish guerrillas on the Iraqi side of the Iranian border at approximately 5-6,000. The Kurds only respite from an all out Iraqi offensive was Iranian long-range artillery providing the Kurds sufficient cover to keep the Iraqi's at bay.¹²⁷

In an escalation of the level of foreign involvement, the Iranians shot down Iraqi aircraft inside Iraq with American HAWK surface-to-air missiles in December 1974.¹²⁸ However, this would prove to be the last major escalation. Characterizing the level of dependence the Kurds had on outside assistance, the Iraqi Chief of Staff stated, "Now it all depends on the Iranians. If they withdraw their support, we can finish the rebels off within a week. If the Iranians increase their support, I suppose there could be a war between our two countries..."¹²⁹

Despite the military hostilities, behind the scenes diplomacy had been conducted by both King Hussein of Jordan and President Sadat of Egypt, later to be joined by the Algerians. The culmination of these talks was an agreement on 6 March 1975, between

¹²⁷ Ibid., 169-170.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 170.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

the Shah and Saddam Hussein at the OPEC conference in Algiers to settle all outstanding claims between the two countries. The statement released at the conference talked of “a definitive and durable solution to all problems” between the two countries, and both agreed to keep the Persian Gulf “free of all foreign influence.”¹³⁰

Both Iran and Iraq gained from the agreement. Iran gained Iraqi acceptance of the border region along the Shatt-al-Arab; while also gaining Iraqi promises to cease its support of Baluchi and Arab secessionists in Iran. Iraq gained in the deal through Iranian guarantees of a halt to all forms of assistance to the Iraqi Kurds.

It has been postulated that Iran’s change of heart in accepting an agreement stemmed from a number of factors: realization that the Kurdish struggle had changed due to Iraq’s superiority over the Kurds in weaponry and tactics, and that the Kurds defeat was only a matter of time; the possibility that the war could escalate to put Iranian oil refineries in harm’s way; the possible closure of the Persian Gulf and spread of the conflict to neighboring countries, thereby destabilizing the oil market; and the possibility of a combination of any of the above escalating even further into a United States-USSR confrontation.¹³¹

The Kurds were taken aback by the sudden change of events. The KDP sent urgent messages to both the CIA and directly to Secretary of State Kissinger, looking for

¹³⁰ “Iran and Iraq Sign Accord to Settle Border Conflict,” *New York Times*, March 1975, 1.

¹³¹ Ghareeb, 171-173.

explanations to the abrupt change of policy. In a message to the CIA, the KDP appealed for American intervention: “We appeal you [sic] and USG intervene according to your promises and not letting down ally [sic]...”¹³² The appeal is repeated in the letter to Kissinger: “Our movement and people are being destroyed in an unbelievable way with silence from everyone. We feel your Excellency that the US has a moral and political responsibility toward our people who have committed themselves to your country’s policies.”¹³³

However, by 9 March, Iraqi troops began their final advance towards the Kurds with the knowledge that Iran would not interfere with or provide support to the Kurdish rebels due to the agreement reached in Algiers. Israel voiced its concern to the United States over the unexpected shift in the Shah’s position vis-à-vis the Kurds and Iran’s relationship with Iraq. Moreover, Israel, who looked to Iran for oil, expressed reservations to Kissinger over whether Iran’s new alliance with Iraq, one of Israel’s most vociferous enemies, would endanger Israel’s arrangement with Iran.¹³⁴

American newspapers talked of the betrayal of the Kurds, suggesting, as did the New York Times that “Realpolitik, it would seem, has won another cruel victory in international diplomacy.”¹³⁵ While other equally poignant editorials repeated similar

¹³² Latham, 87.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Bernard Gwertzman, “Kissinger Meets Israelis and then Flies to Turkey,” *New York Times*, 11 March 1975, 1.

¹³⁵ “...Kurds Betrayed?” *New York Times*, 12 March 1975, 38.

sentiments, suggesting “Nothing is more annoying than to be obscurely hanged, and it is this fate...that has just overtaken the rebellious Kurds of Iraq...”¹³⁶

Despite the sense of outrage from the foreign press, the Kurds still maintained their presence in northern Iraq. Appeals were sent to the United States for assistance. It was hoped that an agreement for some sort of assistance could be concluded prior to the announced April Iraqi offensive, which aimed at driving out the remaining Kurds from Kurdistan if they had not accepted the government offer of amnesty.

The initial press releases from the Kurds after the Algiers agreement suggested that the Kurds would forego foreign support if they had to in order to continue their fight against the Iraqi regime, stating,

The Iranian government has stopped military supplies to the Kurdish revolution suddenly and without prior warning on March 5, 1975. We hope that humanitarian aid will continue.

The KDP of Iraq wishes to state that the Kurdish revolution under the leadership of General Mustafa-al-Barzani is fighting for two aims: autonomy for Kurdistan and democracy for Iraq. The revolution will continue its struggle until those two aims are realized.

We wish to state further that the settlement of international border disputes will in no way diminish the will of the revolution to continue the struggle. The revolution began and was sustained by the determination and sacrifice of our heroic people. Our valiant people will continue to support and sustain their fighters until final victory is achieved.¹³⁷

¹³⁶ C.L. Sulzberger, “To Be Obscurely Hanged,” *New York Times*, 12 March 1975, 39.

¹³⁷ “Kurds Lacking Iran’s Aid, Shift to Guerrilla Tactics,” *New York Times*, 12 March 1975, 3.

However, by 22 March, shortly after Baghdad rejected the last offer from the KDP to negotiate, Barzani himself conceded prophetically, “the fighting is over” and that “we are at alone with no friends. The Americans have not provided any help or protections. I think dark times are coming.”¹³⁸ Barzani would conclude this episode of fighting by withdrawing to Iran, ordering his followers to cease fighting and likewise withdraw to Iran. Barzani ironically would seek and be granted asylum in the United States, only to die of cancer in exile on 1 March 1979.

The Shah, when asked about his support for the Iraqi Kurds and their quest for achieving autonomy, remarked “Moonshine from the very beginning.” The Shah concluded “They’ve [Kurds] suffered defeat after defeat. Without our support they wouldn’t last ten days against the Iraqis.” Additionally, regarding previous Iraqi peace overtures to the Kurds over the previous years, he replied “Both sides knew that Iraq had no serious intention of honoring her promise. It was more a cheap gimmick than a promise.”¹³⁹

H. CONCLUSIONS

American involvement or lack thereof, was not, as many would suggest, the

¹³⁸ Eric Pace, “Leader of Kurdish Revolt Says that Fighting in Iraq in Ended,” *New York Times*, 23 March 1975, 1.

¹³⁹ Alam, 417-418.

causal factor in the Kurds defeat in 1975. Instead, a confluence of circumstances can be discerned that brought about the Kurds demise.

The Iraqi government, which for years had been unable to politically control events in the north, had been consolidated under strong political leadership under the Ba'ath party. Concurrently, the Iraqi military, through a massive influx of new weaponry and tactics was able to sustain the military gains, that in years past would have been relinquished due to adverse winter weather.

The Kurds, however, failed to realize the role they were playing in the international realpolitik of the Israelis, Iranians and the Americans. Also the lack of a unified political front for all the Kurdish tribes in northern Iraq enabled the Iraqi regime to capitalize on political schisms within the KDP, and with other minor Kurdish political organizations.

An often-overlooked facet of the period between 1973-75 is the repercussions that an autonomy arrangement would have brought to the Kurds. It has been argued that the continual state of warfare between the Kurds and the ruling party in Iraq was the only tool Barzani could utilize to maintain his control over the disparate Kurdish tribes, who had coalesced under his leadership to fight a common enemy. As Tariq Aziz would state at a later date, " The Kurdish leadership wanted the March manifesto to be a stage for something else they didn't even dare tell the Iranians: secession. Barzani can not retain his leadership unless there is separation or disorder and anarchy in Iraq. To have self-rule

succeed limits his authority and activity.”¹⁴⁰

Kissinger maintains in his memoirs that it would have taken over \$300 million to save the Kurds from disaster in March 1975. However, for the Ford administration, which was facing the collapse of the South Vietnamese government in Asia, as well as other geopolitical crises, the likelihood of getting a hostile Congress to ante up the money would have been unrealistic. Kissinger’s caustic remark that “Covert action should not be confused with missionary work,” although blunt, ultimately quantified the lengths to which the United States would go to sustain the Kurdish movement during this era.

¹⁴⁰ Ghareeb, 135.

III. CASE STUDY II: 1990-1996

The United States, as victor of the Gulf War with Iraq, found itself deeply embroiled with the Kurds of northern Iraq upon the war's conclusion in 1991. To understand the United States' predicament in 1991, it is vital to examine the background of Kurdish political and organizational evolution prior to 1991.

A. 1980S

During the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s, the United States had sent signals to Saddam Hussein's regime indicating that the United States wished to see a strong Iraq to counter Iran, for fear of the potential effects of an Iranian victory in the Persian Gulf. Thus the United States provided significant assistance to Iraq in its fight against Iran. To halt American assistance to Iraq during the war would have jeopardized large trade agreements with Iraq, largely in the agricultural sector. In testimony to a Senate committee, the figure of over \$1 billion in exports to Iraq in 1989 alone, with a further \$500 million in credits extended to Iraq into 1990, was divulged. The Bush administration defended these agreements by stating "Based on past experience, we do not believe that legislating unilateral trade and economic sanctions would help us to achieve US goals with Iraq."¹⁴¹ By disallowing American exporters to trade with Iraq, it

¹⁴¹ "US Policy Toward Iraq: Human Rights, Weapons Proliferation, and International Law," Hearing Before the Committee on Foreign Relations, US Senate, 101st Congress, 2nd Session, (Washington: US Government Printing Office, 15 June

would deny “US exporters the ability to compete with foreign exporters who continue to benefit....” The effects of this support to the Iraqi government allowed the regime of Saddam Hussein to strengthen its position towards the Kurds of northern Iraq, without fear of international repercussions.

As a result of this diplomatic green light, the Iraqi government against the Kurds perpetrated a series of chemical attacks and forced resettlement initiatives. The disparate Kurdish political organizations within Iraq overcame their traditional hostilities in the face of these policies, coalesced, and created the Kurdistan National Front in May 1987.¹⁴²

The United States Senate’s Committee on Foreign Relations had brought up the matter of Iraqi chemical attacks against the Kurds throughout the course of the late 1980s. Even as late as June 1990, the Committee noted that “Iraq is engaged in numerous human rights violations including the depopulation of the Iraqi Kurdistan, the summary execution of tens of thousands of its citizens, use of chemical weapons on its own people....” The Committee further stated that “The Reagan administration opposed my [Senator Clairborne Pell] efforts to sanction Iraq for its use of chemical weapons against its Kurdish minority.”¹⁴³

1990), 7-8.

¹⁴² McDowall, 352. The two main political organizations were Barzani’s KDP and Talabani’s PUK. See Izady, 212-213 for analysis of these organizations evolution since the Kurdish defeat in 1975.

¹⁴³ “US Policy Toward Iraq: Human Rights, Weapons Proliferation, and

In related testimony to the Committee on Foreign Affairs, Assistant Secretary of State Kelley, defended the Bush administration's policy, and went out on a limb to redress previous Iraqi actions on the eve of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. Kelley stated "Iraq was discussing a new constitution which would potentially provide greater recognition of human rights." ¹⁴⁴

B. IRAQI INVASION OF KUWAIT

The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait altered the military situation in Iraq. The move into Kuwait allowed Kurdish peshmerga units to re-establish themselves in northern Iraq due to the Iraqi redeployment of troops to the Kuwaiti front. Saddam Hussein, wary of neglecting the Kurdish issue, attempted to appease the Kurdish Front with peace overtures in October 1990. The Kurds for fear of openly siding with an internationally condemned regime rejected these olive branches.

Prior to the onset of American led war against Iraq, the Kurdish Front was cognizant of not repeating past mistakes. This included not demanding independence, as Mulla Mustafa Barzani had been striving for in deeds if not in words. Autonomy within

International Law," 1. In September 1988, in response to Iraqi chemical attacks against the Kurds, Senator Pell introduced the "Prevention of Genocide Act of 1988" which would have imposed a total trade embargo, and cut off loans, credits and guarantees to Iraq. The Act passed unanimously in the Senate, however it was opposed by the Reagan administration and was summarily defeated in the House. Ibid., 42-43.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 5.

the framework of an Iraqi state became the desired objective. To pursue anything beyond autonomy within a unified Iraq might provoke similar sentiments within the Turkish, Syrian, and Iranian Kurdish communities, thereby prompting those states to intervene to deny the Iraqi Kurds their self-rule.¹⁴⁵

Prior to the commencement of hostilities between the American led coalition forces and Iraq, Kurdish political leaders were cautious of casting their lot with the West. Jalal Talabani, leader of the PUK commented in November 1990 that “the most important thing is that we are not used by anybody in the Gulf crisis, that we do not become helpers of one or the other side.”¹⁴⁶

Despite feelers sent out by Talabani while on a visit to Washington, the Allied coalition was hesitant to offer overt support to the Kurds before or during the conflict for fear of presaging the breakup of Iraq, which was contrary to the desires of the Coalition. A unified Iraq was viewed as a preventive measure in assuring that internal Iraqi disputes, such as the Kurdish question, would not spill across the Iraqi border. A unified Iraq was also viewed as preventing the possibility of neighboring states intervening in Iraqi territory, thereby altering the regional balance of power.

The Kurdish concern of not wanting to anger Iraq’s neighbors was justified in

¹⁴⁵ “The Kurds: Waiting for Saddam’s Exit,” *The Economist*, 9 February 1991, 25, LEXIS-NEXIS.

¹⁴⁶ “Kurdish Leader Discusses Anti-Saddam Groups,” *Vienna Die Presse* in German (8 Nov 90, p. 5), FBIS-NES-90-218, 9 November 1990, 23.

comments by Turkey's President Turgut Ozal, who noted that Turkey, Iran and Syria would not countenance the emergence of an autonomous Kurdistan in Iraq upon the conclusion of the war. However, Ozal simultaneously conducted talks with Talabani, in the event that such an autonomous entity was created, hoping to secure some sort of control over such an entity by establishing dialogue early.¹⁴⁷

C. THE KURDISH UPRISING OF 1991

Upon the defeat of Iraqi forces, Shi'ite rebels in the south of Iraq rose up against the Iraqi regime, prompting Saddam Hussein to divert a great deal of his remaining military forces to put down the rebellion. With the movement of most troops out of Iraqi Kurdistan, Kurdish forces mounted increasing attacks on the remaining Iraqi troops loyal to the government. These sporadic attacks increased throughout Kurdistan, which culminated in the capture of Kirkuk by the Kurdish Front on 19 March 1991.¹⁴⁸

Concurrent with the rise of Kurdish military activity in March within northern Iraq was the sentiment held by leading members of the Kurdish Front. These ideas concluded that the Coalition's war against Saddam Hussein would result in his overthrow. Talabani had been quoted numerous times in early March predicting Saddam's demise. As late as 13 March, Talabani noted that "I expect his [Saddam

¹⁴⁷ McDowall, 371.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 371-372.

Hussein's] downfall soon, in a matter of weeks.”¹⁴⁹

However, the Kurdish rebellion in the north would prove to be short-lived. After defeating the Shi'ite rebels in the south, Saddam Hussein once again refocused his military at re-establishing control in the north. Despite the American ban on the Iraqi use of fixed-wing aircraft, helicopters were not covered under the terms of the cease-fire.¹⁵⁰ Thus, Saddam Hussein had at his disposal the Republican Guards units not decimated in the war and helicopter forces to attack the Kurds in the north. By all appearances, the United States through its inaction, was again sending the signal that it wished to see Iraq as a unified state, rather than being broken up into three parts: a Kurdistan in the north; a Shi'ite entity in the south; and the center of Iraq as the stronghold for the Sunni Arabs. Secretary of State James Baker reflected this concern when he stated “We believed it was essential that Iraq remain intact...”¹⁵¹ A British editorial put a realpolitik spin on this turn of events: “Both the Americans and, much more painfully, the Kurds have run up against the same truth: it is that in the late 20th century the rules of the international game set great store on sovereignty.”¹⁵²

¹⁴⁹ “Kurdish Leader Al-Talabani Reviews Situation,” Beirut, *Al-Safir* in Arabic (13 March 1991, p.6), FBIS-NES-91-052, 18 March 1991, 38.

¹⁵⁰ On 3 March, General Norman Schwarzkopf assumed this position in negotiations with his Iraqi counterparts. Secretary of State Baker later reflected “It certainly seemed reasonable from a military standpoint.” James A. Baker III with Thomas M. DeFrank, *The Politics of Diplomacy: Revolution, War, and Peace*, (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1995), 439.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² “The Hammer of the Kurds,” *The Economist*, (UK Edition), 6 April 1991, 9.

Not only did the United States fear the breakup of Iraq as previously mentioned, but it also feared that the Kurds on their own would be unable to fend off Iraqi forces, thereby requiring a significant American military commitment. This commitment would most likely include a large contribution of military forces, with the additional likelihood of a protracted American occupation that might not afford closure in an expeditious manner. Additionally, if the United States overtly supported the Kurdish uprising at this juncture, it might provoke the Kurds in neighboring states. The United States could ill-afford to lose the support of Syria and Turkey, if it wanted to isolate Iraq politically and economically.¹⁵³ Secretary Baker echoed this fear, stating “From a practical standpoint, nothing short of direct United States military operations would have guaranteed success by the insurgents.”¹⁵⁴

The realization that the United States was not about to step in to halt Hussein’s forces prompted a joint declaration by both Barzani and Talabani, which accused President Bush of abandonment: “You personally called upon the Iraqi people to rise up against Saddam Hussein’s brutal dictatorship.” The Kurdish leaders further pleaded for the United States to “prevent the Iraqi government’s war of genocide against the Kurdish people.”¹⁵⁵ However, although the Kurds were correct in their assertion that President

¹⁵³ Gunter, 54.

¹⁵⁴ Baker, 439. This concern regarding a Kurdish defeat if left on their own is similar to concerns held by Kissinger during the aborted Kurdish offensive on the eve of the Yom Kippur War in 1973.

¹⁵⁵ McDowall, 372, as quoted from the *International Herald Tribune*, 30 March

Bush had called for the Iraqi people to rise up against Saddam Hussein, never did the United States pledge to assist this effort from a military standpoint. A repeated occurrence of misunderstood signals on behalf of the Kurds from an ambiguous policy put forth by the United States. Baker would later comment about these confused signals:

Our detractors accused us of inciting the Kurdish and Shiite rebellions against Saddam...then dooming them by refusing to come to their aid, either through United States military action or covert assistance...We never embraced as a war aim or a political aim the replacement of the Iraqi regime.¹⁵⁶

Baker also revealed that the pace of events in Iraq after the war did not proceed as the United States had anticipated:

We did, however, hope and believe that Saddam Hussein would not survive in power after such a crushing defeat. Ironically, the uprisings in the north and south, instead of lessening his grip on power as we felt they would, contributed to it...When he managed to consolidate his power, Saddam scrambled our strategic calculations.¹⁵⁷

The Iraqi offensive into Kurdistan reached its peak on 28 March, forcing the Kurds to abandon the city of Kirkuk and other low lying towns. Estimates range between a couple of hundred thousand upwards to 1.5 million Kurds had fled the Iraqi invasion, thereby creating a refugee crisis that neither Turkey nor Iran were capable (or willing) to

1991. Also "After the War; Iraqi's Bear Down on Kurdish Revolt," *New York Times*, 31 March 1991, 8.

¹⁵⁶ Baker, 435.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

handle.¹⁵⁸ Concurrently, pro-Kurdish editorials in the American media were heaping a steady stream of critical articles condemning the Bush administration's failure to protect the Kurds, prompting Bush's Chief of Staff to comment that "the only pressure for the United States to intervene is coming from the columnists."¹⁵⁹ Likewise, international condemnation of American inaction was prevalent. A leading member of the Israeli government went so far as to suggest that "the United States administration made cynical and shameless use of the pretext of not intervening in sovereign countries internal affairs, a category within which the Kurdish revolt conveniently falls."¹⁶⁰

D. UNITED STATES RESPONSE TO KURDISH DILEMMA

Diplomatic dialogue regarding the international response to Iraqi reprisals against the Kurds and Shi'ites continued during the Iraqi move into Kurdish occupied areas. The culmination of these talks resulted in the 5 April United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 688, which concerned itself with "the repression of the Iraqi civilian population in many parts of Iraq, including most recently in Kurdish populated areas..." furthermore demanding "that Iraq as a contribution to remove the threat to international

¹⁵⁸ McDowall, 373.

¹⁵⁹ William Safire, "Bush's Bay of Pigs," *New York Times*, 4 April 1991, 23.

¹⁶⁰ "Minister Criticizes U.S. on Kurds, Palestinians," Tel Aviv, *Ha'aretz* in Hebrew, 9 April 1991, B1, FBIS-NES-91-070, 11 April 1991, 28.

peace and security in the region, immediately end this repression....”¹⁶¹

Of significance, Resolution 688 marked the first time at the UNSC that the Kurds were mentioned by name in a UNSC document. Resolution 688 also marked the first time the UNSC mandated UN interference in the sovereignty of a member state. Despite the language of this resolution, other provisions within the UN charter prevented the resolution from coming into force. However, the idea of infringing on Iraq’s territorial sovereignty to protect the Kurds would soon gain adherents from members of the wartime coalition.¹⁶²

In response to the growing media criticism leveled at the Bush administration, Secretary Baker was dispatched on 8 April to the Turkish border to gain a first hand account of the refugee situation. Baker recalled his “horror and shock” at the scale of the refugee problem and declared “What we’ve [United States] done so far is a pittance. We have to mobilize the world. We’ve got to think big. Otherwise this could be the systematic destruction of a people.”¹⁶³

In early April, the European Community (EC) adopted a British idea whereby under international auspices, the Kurds would be able to return to Iraq from the refugee camps in Turkey and Iran. The EC proposal would de facto create an autonomous

¹⁶¹ “Resolution 688” adopted by the Security Council at its 2928th Meeting on 5 April 1991, [gopher.undp.org:70/00/undocs/scd/scouncil s91/5]

¹⁶² McDowall, 375.

¹⁶³ Baker, 434.

Kurdish region in northern Iraq under the protection of an international military force. This idea drew immediate skepticism from UNSC members, particularly Russia and China, both of which were dealing with secessionist minority groups. The United States likewise was skeptical of the EC plan for fear “that Europe intends to fight to the last American for the sake of Kurdish rights.”¹⁶⁴ President Bush echoed this concern when he stated “I do not want one single soldier or airman shoved into a civil war in Iraq that has been going on for ages. And I am not going to have that.”¹⁶⁵ Ironically, this is exactly what would occur only a few days after this statement.

Mounting Turkish pressure to deal with Kurds amassed along its mountainous border with Iraq, pushed the United States and its coalition allies to declare a temporary safe haven in northern Iraq on 16 April. The terms of this safe haven precluded Iraq from operating any type of aircraft, fixed-wing or rotary-wing, from flying north of the 36th parallel.

Although not legally enforceable from the standpoint of Resolution 688, the American declaration of a safe-haven along with its protection of relief agencies operating in this area, directly saw the return of 250,000 Kurds. American led forces in northern Iraq, numbering 8,000 troops on the ground, with contingents in Turkey if required, provided an identifiable assurance to the Kurds for their safety upon their

¹⁶⁴ “That Slippery Slope,” *The Economist*, 13 April 1991, 39.

¹⁶⁵ “Cavalry to the Rescue,” *The Economist*, 20 April 1991, 41.

return.¹⁶⁶ The initial ground force, ostensibly under the United Nations, was led by American Lieutenant General Shalikashvili (later Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff). The program under his aegis would develop into Operation Provide Comfort. This would become the United States military's largest relief operation undertaken ever up to this point.¹⁶⁷

Iraq quickly condemned the United States' interference in Iraqi territory, motivating the Iraqi Foreign Minister to declare that the American action "constitutes a flagrant interference in the internal affairs of Iraq, an independent country and member of the United Nations."¹⁶⁸ An additional criticism leveled at the Bush administration was that had it not been for the television coverage of Kurdish living conditions in the mountains, the administration might not have acted so quickly in moving American troops into northern Iraq.

Nonetheless, the United States presence in the safe haven prompted an assessment of American aims vis-à-vis the Kurds. Questions to be answered ranged from what to do regarding protection of the Kurds after an American withdrawal; the duration of the operation; and most importantly, did the United States presence in the safe haven indicate a shift in American policy towards Kurdish autonomy?¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁶ Gunter, 56.

¹⁶⁷ Baker, 434-435.

¹⁶⁸ "Foreign Minister Denounces West's Move on Kurds," Baghdad INA in Arabic, 1716 GMT, 1 May 1991; as cited in FBIS-NES, 2 May 1991, 8.

¹⁶⁹ John Kifner, "After the War; US Generals seek Bigger Iraq Haven," *New York*

The expansion of the safe haven on the ground allowed for a greater repatriation effort from Turkey. This expansion stirred up hopes once again amongst the Kurds that this latest turn of events may have finally created what the Kurds had long aspired for: an area free from Iraqi interference strictly for the Kurds. A Kurdish leader commented “I think the creation of Kurdistan is now closer than ever before.” Further comments by other Kurdish leaders called for the further expansion of the safe haven to include all of Iraqi Kurdistan: “We want the zone to make up all of Kurdistan in Iraq only. We want the United States army to take over all of Kurdistan in Iraq.”¹⁷⁰ These suggestions by the Kurds raised the level of concern from the standpoint of the State Department, which was troubled over the expansion of scope and effort of the American military presence. A State Department official commented, “This is the most complicated refugee problem in the world... We’re talking megabucks. Megabucks and megaproblems.”¹⁷¹

Despite the creation of the safe haven, negotiations were undertaken by the Kurdish Front with the Iraqi government. Both Iraq and the Kurds had their own agenda for pursuing such talks. The Kurds hoped to alleviate the miserable conditions that the Kurds faced in the refugee camps and mountainous regions where many Kurds were still to be found. The Kurds were also wary of relying completely on the good will of the international community in maintaining the safe havens in the long-term. Barzani

Times, 6 May 1991, 1.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

revealed that “we also need a political solution for Kurdistan. Only when this is found will the refugee problem be solved.”¹⁷² Conversely, the Iraqi government faced considerable international diplomatic pressure to resolve Iraq’s internal problems, which in turn could possibly see the return of Iraq’s oil to the world market.

Both Talabani and Barzani were amongst the Kurdish leaders from the Kurdish Front who were engaged in the negotiations. Talabani would stun both the Kurds and the world when he publicly embraced Saddam Hussein on television during the talks, after promises were made by Hussein to abolish the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC) and establish free elections, which would later prove to be a ruse.¹⁷³

The basis for the talks centered on the 1970 Bazaaz declaration; an offer which had been repeatedly dangled in front of the Kurds for years without significant efforts on behalf of the regime to follow through with implementation. However, with history as a guide, the Kurdish Front wanted international guarantees by the United Nations, United States, or the European Community, to keep the Iraqi government to its word.

The Kurds came under strong criticism from other Iraqi opposition groups, who felt the Kurdish Front’s approaches to Saddam Hussein constituted a political caving in to the government. Barzani deflected such criticism when he stated “Our Kurdish people have struggled and made sacrifices alone and without a helper or support, that is, since

¹⁷² “Barzani comments on Kurd’s Fight Against Saddam,” Hamburg DPA in German, 2343 GMT 26 April 1991, FBIS-NES-91-083, 30 April 1991, 17.

¹⁷³ McDowall, 376.

the Iraqi state was established, for the sake of realizing these sacred aims [autonomy].”¹⁷⁴

A split developed between Barzani and Talabani in May over the potential of continuing talks with the Iraqi government. Talabani had grown increasingly frustrated by the lack of progress, while Barzani held out hope that he would be able to establish a deal to secure autonomous rights for the Kurds.

E. OPERATION PROVIDE COMFORT II

The United States meanwhile sought a United Nations force to replace the United States led force in northern Iraq. However, this effort was tied to the autonomy talks between the Kurds and Iraq. The Bush administration was eager to see an arrangement reached between the two groups, which could hasten the American departure. Despite Bush’s eagerness to extricate American forces, he voiced concern over future Iraqi intentions, “I don’t think that we can entrust the fate of the Kurds to the word of Saddam Hussein.”¹⁷⁵

By late June, the Kurdish Front had come to a preliminary accord with the Iraqi government, encapsulated in the Autonomy Draft Law.¹⁷⁶ However the Iraqi

¹⁷⁴ “Barzani Responds to Sa’d Salih Jabr’s Criticisms,” London, *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat* in Arabic, 7 May 1991,1:4, FBIS-NES-91-086 3 May 1991, 17.

¹⁷⁵ Patrick E. Tyler, “After the War: Bush May Seek U.N. Ruling for Force in Kurdish Zone,” *New York Times*, 16 May 1991, 16.

¹⁷⁶ Full text of the proposed autonomy agreement can be found in “Kurdish Autonomy Agreement Published,” London, *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat* in Arabic, 29 June 1991,

government placed an addendum to the law which included six demands that the Kurdish Front found unacceptable. The demands included: complete disarmament; termination of Kurdish Front controlled radio stations; cessation of contacts with foreign powers; commitment to cooperation with the Ba'athist regime; alignment with the regime in pursuit of Iraq's military and political goals; and further commitment to apply the above Ba'athist goals throughout Kurdistan.¹⁷⁷

This add-on to the Autonomy Law forced the Kurds to reject the law in its entirety. Baghdad had hoped that the imminent departure of coalition forces from the safe haven might push the Kurdish Front to sign a deal with the regime. However, news of a new American led rapid reaction force based in Turkey appeared to have strengthened the Kurds position in fending off the political advances of the Iraqi government.¹⁷⁸

As previously mentioned, the creation of an American led rapid reaction force based in Turkey, had become a reality by July 1991, dubbed Combined Task Force (CTF) Operation Provide Comfort II. This operation replaced the coalition ground forces that had been withdrawn from northern Iraq by 15 July. The CTF, was headquartered out of Incirlik Airbase in Turkey, under United States command. The mission was stated as

1, FBIS-NES-91-128, 3 July 1991, 17-21 .

¹⁷⁷ Gunter, 71.

¹⁷⁸ Alan Crowell, "Iraq's Kurds Reject Autonomy Deal as Allied Plan Stirs Confidence," *New York Times*, 30 June 1991, 6.

To ensure continued success of the humanitarian aid to the Kurdish and other Iraqi refugees. In pursuit of that, the CTF will also make sure that steps are taken so that Iraq complies with the appropriate UN Security Council resolutions that address this issue of humanitarian aid to the Kurds.¹⁷⁹

With the creation of the new rapid deployment force, the Kurds felt sufficiently strong to counter the Iraqi demands with demands of their own, refuting each of the Iraqi's unacceptable conditions. Despite the positive comments made by Barzani and Talabani in the press, the negotiations from this point forward had come to an impasse. As this stalemate became protracted, both the Kurds and the Iraqi armed forces began to test each other, as well as a potential coalition response, when pitched battles broke out between the two sides outside the major cities within Kurdistan. This fighting only served to highlight the state of negotiations between the Kurdish Front and the Iraqi government. A United States government official had earlier reflected on how this tenuous situation could fit in with American policy:

There is a lot of thinking about how to keep the pressure on, and we understand that it would partially strengthen Saddam if the Kurds sign an agreement with him...But I don't think there is anyone in the U.S. government who is telling the Kurds to hang in there with no agreement to keep the pressure on Saddam Hussein, even if in fact that is what is happening.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁹ Tim Ripley, "Operation Provide Comfort II: Western Force Protects Kurds," *International Defense Review*, October 1991, 1056.

¹⁸⁰ Patrick Tyler, "Iraqi Kurds Waver as Talks on Autonomy Hit an Impasse," *New York Times*, 4 August 1991, 14.

The stalemate in the talks further highlighted differences within the Kurdish Front's leadership. Barzani still pushed for concluding a deal with the government and working out the controversial issues such as the control of Kirkuk and its oil, at a later date. Talabani, who had earlier traveled to Europe and the United States to elicit support for the Kurds, urged the Kurds to hold out until the regime gave in more to Kurdish demands.

Talabani's visit to the United States in September 1991, allowed the United States to restate its position to the KNF. In a press release from the State Department the position was clear: "We do not back any particular opposition faction, nor is it our aim to shape a government to succeed Saddam Hussein....Similarly, the United States supports peaceful political reform within Iraq, not Iraq's breakup."¹⁸¹ Furthermore, the meeting also highlighted the growing relationship between the Iraqi Kurds and Turkey. The State Department statement commented "We welcome the improvement in relations between the Iraqi Kurdish leadership and the government of Turkey. We appreciate the clear Iraqi Kurdistan Front statements supporting Turkish sovereignty and denouncing the terrorist tactics of the Kurdish Worker's Party (PKK)...."¹⁸²

¹⁸¹ United States Department of State, "Meeting With Iraqi Kurdistan Front," Vol.2 No.40, October 7, 1991.

¹⁸² Ibid.

F. CREATION OF THE KURDISTAN REGIONAL GOVERNMENT

Barzani was convinced that the United States would not support further Kurdish military operations, yet at the same time was certain that the United States and its coalition allies would guarantee the autonomy of Kurdistan within Iraq from Saddam Hussein's armed forces. However, the Iraqi government would push the facts on the ground towards Talabani's position. In late October 1991, Iraq established a gradual blockade of Kurdistan, gradually reducing the flow of gasoline, electricity, and food. Hussein's goal was to prompt the Kurdish population to abandon the Kurdish political leadership, who would be shown to be impotent in the face of the blockade. This action prompted a Kurdish official in the United States to remark "I think this is Saddam Hussein saying that if you don't deal with me, you will all starve to death."¹⁸³

As winter approached, Hussein hoped that his blockade would force the Kurds' hand into accepting the Iraqi offer for autonomy. However, the Iraqi withdrawal from Kurdistan in order to secure the blockade had the opposite effect. The Kurdish Front recognized the power vacuum in northern Iraq as a Catch-22. If the Kurdish Front opted to establish themselves as a government, they would run the risk of alienating Turkey, Syria, and Iran, who did not want their respective Kurdish populations to get similar ideas. However, to not fill the vacuum would only exacerbate the economic problems brought on by the blockade. Thus, the Kurdish Front reassured the international

¹⁸³ McDowall, 378. Also Patrick E. Tyler, "Baghdad Now Seen Exerting Economic Pressure on Kurds," *New York Times*, 6 November 1991, 16.

community that secession was not on the Kurdish agenda and that the Kurds wished to stay within an Iraqi entity.¹⁸⁴

The Kurdish Front terminated negotiations with the Iraqi government and began to draft proposals for the formation of a Kurdish parliament to be elected by the Kurdish population in April 1992. The elections, which had been delayed a number of times, would prove to be a test of popularity between Barzani and Talabani. Both leaders represented the largest political organizations up for election, and the election of either would establish which path would be chosen as to how to deal with Saddam's Iraq.

Elections concluded in May 1992, with Barzani gaining a slight edge over Talabani for the leadership of the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG). Despite this, both leaders pledged to honor its results. Both leaders honored this pledge with a series of power sharing arrangements within the fledging government between the two political organizations (KDP and PUK).

Regionally, an unease descended as to what response should be taken vis-à-vis the KRG. Turkey was especially anxious to secure American assurances that "in the long run, the result should not be the emergence of a Kurdish state."¹⁸⁵ Turkey was also concerned that a prolonged CTF Provide Comfort II would only encourage the Iraqi

¹⁸⁴ McDowall, 379.

¹⁸⁵ Alan Cowell, "Turkey Says Bush Rejects Kurdistan," *New York Times*, 4 September 1992, 2.

Kurds to entrench themselves to the detriment of an Iraqi state, and to the potential detriment of Turkey's Kurdish population.

However, the Kurds clearly voiced their preference for autonomy versus independence, and had made it clear to Secretary Baker upon a Kurdish delegation visit to him on July. The United States likewise confirmed its position towards the Kurdish situation, when it released that the American policy had not changed and that it continued to "respect the territorial integrity of Iraq."¹⁸⁶

The United States, as well as most other countries, could not engage the KRG in direct dialogue for the fear of the unwanted implication of recognition of the KRG. This presented the KRG with a dilemma. With the Iraqi blockade showing no sign of relenting, the KRG's only access to the supplies and relief from the outside world would have to be through Turkey.

Turkey recognized this dilemma and parlayed Turkish aid in exchange for the Iraqi Kurds' assistance with Turkey's efforts to combat the Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK). The PKK was a Marxist oriented Kurdish political group that had been waging an armed struggle against Turkey since the early 1980s. The United States had implicitly given its support to Turkey's efforts in relation to its efforts to fight the PKK. The United States indicated its support after it negotiated an \$855 million deal to sell American made

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

Black Hawk helicopters to Turkey at the height of the Turkish-PKK conflict.¹⁸⁷

Throughout the 1980s, in order to secure Western support in its effort, Turkey had claimed that the USSR had been behind PKK support. However, since the breakup of the USSR, Turkey had been on its own with regards to its internal Kurdish problem, and now undertook a new effort to combat the PKK with assistance from the KRG. Thus, on 4 October 1992 the KRG voted to expel any PKK organizations from Iraqi Kurdistan, which resulted in open combat between the PKK and the PUK/KDP.¹⁸⁸

Nonetheless, the combination of the Iraqi blockade, along with inter-Kurdish fighting, provided for a desperate economic environment for the Kurds in northern Iraq. The United States Agency for International Development alone provided over \$43 million (out of an overall \$200 million in total international aid) to see the Kurds through the upcoming winter.¹⁸⁹

Ironically, despite the dire economic straits that had befallen the Kurds, the United States through its maintenance of the Kurdish safe haven, and by its ability to keep the Iraqi armed forces out of Iraqi Kurdistan, had de facto created a Kurdish state within the borders of Iraq. The Kurds, by the end of 1992 would claim to have an elected

¹⁸⁷ "The Kurds: One to the Turks," *The Economist*, 10 October 1992, 65.

¹⁸⁸ Chris Hedges, "An Odd Alliance Subdues Turkey's Kurdish Rebels," *New York Times*, 24 November 1992, 1.

¹⁸⁹ Chris Hedges, "Blockaded Iraqi Kurds Face Fearsome Winter," *New York Times*, 27 November 1992, 6.

parliament with a functioning administrative apparatus, but yet was still tied to the United Nations, United States, and Turkey via an economic umbilical cord.

G. 1993 - YEAR OF STABILITY

A period of relative stability would prevail within Iraqi Kurdistan during 1993. The American led CTF in Turkey still served as a guardian of Iraqi Kurdistan, and most importantly, the Iraqi Kurds refrained from their historical animosities with one another and maintained a peace within their territory.

Vocal critics of previous American policy vis-à-vis the Kurds praised the Kurdish effort in Iraq as a laudable example of American policy worthy of recognition. Additionally, the United States received a delegation of Kurds led by Barzani at the highest level yet afforded the Kurds: a meeting with Vice-President Gore, Secretary of State Warren Christopher, and National Security Advisor Anthony Lake. Despite this high level meeting and hopes by the Kurds that it might bolster American support, Barzani would claim in regards to the outcome of this meeting “I have no answers for my people.”¹⁹⁰

As late as January 1994, Barzani commented,

Here you have the foundation of a democratic experiment right in the center of the Middle East. We are an example for the people all around - - not just in Iraq but Iran and other neighbors. The United States and the European countries have a political and moral

¹⁹⁰ William Safire, “The Kurdish Example,” *New York Times*, 13 May 1993, 23.

commitment to protect the Kurds until there is a secure situation.¹⁹¹

H. INTRA-KURDISH CONFLICT

However, this period of relative calm was soon to be shattered by the Kurds themselves. By early 1994, Kurdish infighting between the KDP and the PUK had erupted. Additionally, an Islamic oriented Kurdish group, the Islamic Movement of Kurdistan (IMK) had entered into the fray in the fighting. Reports of KDP/IMK collusion against the PUK surfaced as the fighting escalated.¹⁹²

An Iraqi opposition umbrella organization, the Iraqi National Congress (INC), at the time widely believed to be largely funded by the CIA, attempted to mediate the conflict without success. However, fighting would continue to escalate between the rival Kurdish political organizations, continuing essentially what was a grab for power by both Barzani and Talabani.

Similarly, in July 1994, France with United States and Britain as observers, attempted to mediate between the KDP and PUK in Paris. The negotiations yielded an agreement signed by both warring factions on 22 July. The meeting concluded with two requests of the international community: first to find a way around the economic

¹⁹¹ John Darton, "Salahaddin Journal; A Son's Promise: That the Kurds' Dream Doesn't Die," *New York Times*, 28 January 1994, 4.

¹⁹² McDowall, 386-387. Also Sean Boyne, "Saddam's Move to Exorcise the Enclaves," *Jane's Intelligence Review*, October 1997, Vol. 9, No. 10, 465.

sanctions against Iraq so Kurdistan could receive supplies; and secondly, to maintain Operation Provide Comfort II until such time that Kurdistan could stand on its own.¹⁹³

Despite France's attempts, the fighting continued, with periodic escalations of heavy fighting, prompting the United States in September to officially ask for a cease-fire. The United States declared that if both factions could not come to terms, then the United States might reconsider its support of the safe-haven.¹⁹⁴ However, neither American efforts, nor pleas from the European Community could halt the fighting, as it continued into 1995.

The United States initiated its own diplomatic effort at the onset of 1995 to establish a peace. The initial contact between the United States and the Iraqi Kurds occurred in January. However, Turkey was concerned that if the United States could effectively work out a settlement, it could possibly lead to a potential Kurdish secessionist movement. Therefore, while the Americans pursued a cease-fire, Turkey urged the Kurds to re-establish talks with Iraq, contrary to American policy.¹⁹⁵

In March 1995, the Kurdish National Congress of North America (KNC) sponsored talks between the KDP, PUK, and IMK in Washington DC. This conference

¹⁹³ Michael M. Gunter, "The KDP-PUK Conflict in Northern Iraq," *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 50, No. 2, Spring 1996, 234.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 236.

called for the warring factions to adhere to the agreements worked out in Paris in 1994. However, despite agreements by all parties, reality in Kurdistan saw continued skirmishes between the main Kurdish political organizations.

This repeated failure prompted the State Department to dispatch negotiators to Iraqi Kurdistan in June; and again failed to establish a peace satisfactory to all parties. Meanwhile, Turkey was not distressed at the inability of the Kurds to normalize relations. This gave Turkey a stronger hand in dealing with the PKK in northern Iraq, while simultaneously freeing itself of the concern over a potentially independent Kurdistan.

Once again, in August, the United States launched an additional round of talks to be held in Drogheda, Ireland, under the supervision of Robert Deutsch, Director of the Office of Northern Gulf Affairs in the State Department. Deutsch was able to secure an agreement to maintain a cease-fire, but again the peace talks were overshadowed by tensions in Kurdistan. A second round of talks met in September, but as before, achieved an agreement only to be overcome by events in Kurdistan.¹⁹⁶

At this point, Syrian and Iranian interference in the conflict became readily apparent. Both countries were suspicious of American influence in the area. In this regard, they both incited the PKK to step up attacks on the KDP in order to derail any ongoing peace negotiations. Iran provided the PUK with assistance for aiding the PKK effort against the KDP, hoping to drive a permanent wedge between the PUK and

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 238.

KDP.¹⁹⁷ Likewise, both Syria and Iran were concerned, as was Turkey, of the possibility of an independent Kurdistan. Thus their efforts at maintaining tension in Kurdistan could be interpreted as having diminished this possibility.

Turkey, meanwhile, was accused by the PUK of arming the KDP in its fight against the PUK. Talabani claimed “Turkey has and is supplying arms to the KDP. This cannot be accepted because Turkey promised us it would not do anything to harm the balance of arms in northern Iraq.”¹⁹⁸ Iran followed suit in seeking talks with the Kurds, hoping to edge out the United States as leader of any negotiations. Iran “expressed concern over the meddling of outsiders [United States] in the region which has led to tension and instability.”¹⁹⁹

The United States once again attempted to establish dialogue under the auspices of Deutsch in November in Salah-al Din, Iraq (the seat of the KDP). Both Turkey and the INC were seated at the talks as observers, and again the United States failed to secure a peace.

The year 1995 would end as it began: with both parties squaring off against one another. A relief worker in northern Iraq aptly summed up the situation: “Barzani thinks

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 239, as cited in Ilaver Cevik, “Exclusive Telephone Interview,” Turkish Daily News, 20 September 1995, pp. 1, A7, as cited in FBIS-WEU, 26 September 1995, p. 28.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

he's the true leader of the Kurds. So does Talabani and they'll fight each other down to their last peshmerga to prove themselves right."²⁰⁰

I. 1996 - YEAR OF UPHEAVAL

The two factions moved into 1996 having divided up Iraqi Kurdistan into sectors, controlled by either the KDP or PUK. The KDP controlled much of northwest Kurdistan along the Turkish border. The PUK held the center and southeast. Since the inception of hostilities in 1994, thousands of Kurds had died in the wake of the Kurdish conflict. The United States continued in its efforts at mediation, albeit at a low level within the State Department. However, the balance was soon to be turned on its head.

Critics of American policy for having failed to achieve a comprehensive peace between the Kurds, point to American indifference during the first six months of 1996. The same critics believed that this indifference allowed Iran to increase its influence in Kurdistan, particularly with the PUK, at the expense of American influence. The Kurds, the detractors argued, questioned the American commitment to solving the Kurdish problem. A critic stated, "At a time when we are harassing Iran on so many other fronts, why suddenly not pay attention to northern Iraq?"²⁰¹

In July 1996, Iranian armed forces entered northern Iraq to pursue Iranian rebels.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 240

²⁰¹ Scott Peterson, "While US Slept, Iran Gained Toehold in Northern Iraq," *Christian Science Monitor*, 18 April 1996, p 1.

Barzani's KDP claimed that upon the Iranian withdrawal on 29 July, the Iranian forces left behind supplies to aid the PUK's effort.²⁰² Following the Iranian withdrawal, on 17 August, the PUK launched an offensive against the KDP. The rapid advances of the Iranian supplied PUK forced Barzani to play what he felt was the only card left for him to play: Saddam Hussein. On 22 August, Barzani appealed to Saddam Hussein to halt the PUK advance. On 31 August, the Iraqi government responded by sending 30-40,000 troops, with artillery and armor support into Kurdish territory north of the 36th parallel.²⁰³

After the initial PUK attacks on 17 August, the United States stepped up the level of dialogue with the Kurds. Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs, Robert H. Pelletreau Jr., personally called upon Barzani and Talabani for talks in London. State Department officials were able to achieve two cease-fire arrangements on 23 and 28 August respectively, but as in the past, fighting continued as the talks went on. CIA officials commented that they provided the Clinton Administration with warning of the impending Iraqi attack as early as 28 August. However, regarding the failure of the talks, an American official stated "Part of them [Kurds] were working with us for a cease-fire and part of them were looking for advantages, for a way to put it to the other."²⁰⁴

²⁰² Jonathan C. Randal and John Mintz, "In Absence of Sustained U.S. Influence, Old Kurdish Feuds Flourish," *International Herald Tribune*, 2 September 1996, [Lexis-Nexis].

²⁰³ The 36th parallel marked the southern limit of the no-fly zone, and did not pertain to ground forces. However, the CTF had kept Iraqi forces from moving into this area en masse since its inception in 1991.

²⁰⁴ Steven Lee Myers, "A Failed Race Against Time: The U.S. Tried to Head off

Iraqi officials, commenting on the Iraqi advance into Kurdish held territory, stated “The leadership has decided to provide support and military aid to Massoud Barzani and his comrades to enable them to confront the vicious aggressors.”²⁰⁵ American officials, while attempting to determine the extent of the invasion would comment “This is perhaps in some ways a more nuanced situation.”²⁰⁶ Ultimately, the United States’ response came in the form of a series of cruise missile attacks against military targets in southern Iraq, as punishment for the Iraqi incursion into the north.

Barzani, commenting on his alliance with Saddam Hussein, stated “We don’t have any alliance with the Iraqi regime. It is just a temporary arrangement.”²⁰⁷ Iraqi troops did withdraw after the PUK had been driven from its key positions within northern Iraq, thereby allowing the KDP to capture all of the key cities in Iraqi Kurdistan. The result of the KDP victory was another refugee situation near the Iranian border. After completing the rout of the PUK, Barzani commented “The problem is finished.”²⁰⁸

Iraqis,” *New York Times*, 5 September 1996, 1.

²⁰⁵ Steven Lee Myers, “U.S. Calls Alert as Iraqis Strike A Kurd Enclave,” *New York Times*, 1 September 1996, 1.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ Stephen Kinzer, “Key Kurd Calls Deal With Iraq a Stopgap,” *New York Times*, 5 September 1996, 11.

²⁰⁸ Douglas Jehl, “The Winner Says He’d Play His Baghdad Card Again,” *New York Times*, 11 September 1996, 6.

J. THE FALL OF CIA BACKED OPPOSITION

CIA involvement in the Kurdish enclave during this time period can be traced back to the post-war months after Iraq's defeat and the resulting Kurdish refugee crisis in the north. President Bush on May 1991 signed a presidential finding which authorized covert activity to oust Saddam Hussein. An administration official commented on this program, that "It was a minimal program."²⁰⁹

In 1992, the CIA sponsored the formation of the Iraqi National Congress (INC) as an attempt to unite the two main Kurdish organizations (KDP and PUK) under the auspices of a larger political umbrella than the KNF. The INC was looked to by the CIA as a potential replacement for the Ba'athist regime. However, Turkish pressure kept the United States from funding the INC sufficiently to seriously threaten the Iraqi government.

The new Clinton administration continued to fund the INC as the Bush administration had, despite internal pressure to slash its funding. By 1994, the CIA established an office in Salah-al Din in Iraqi Kurdistan, to provide a closer look at the INC operation. As many as fifty agents had been based at this facility since 1994.²¹⁰

A key Iraqi defector, Wafiq Hamad Samarrai, the former director of Iraqi military intelligence, defected to the INC in November 1994. Samarrai offered his services to the

²⁰⁹ R. Jeffrey Smith and David B. Ottoway, "Anti-Saddam Effort Cost CIA \$100 Million," *International Herald Tribune*, 16 September 1996 [Lexis-Nexis].

²¹⁰ Boyne, 464.

CIA/INC to assist in overthrowing the Iraqi government through the use of his contacts and networks. In March 1995, following a plan devised by Samarraï, yet approved by both the CIA and INC, the INC launched an attack on Iraqi forces that was supposed to have created mass defections in the Iraqi army. The attack failed for a number of reasons. Foremost, the planned mutiny of Iraqi forces did not materialize. Secondly, supposed CIA promises of American air support never came to fruition.²¹¹ Thirdly, anecdotal evidence suggests that rumors of Iranian involvement with the plan dampened Clinton administration enthusiasm for the effort. Ultimately, the plan failed and consequently Samarraï fled to Damascus.²¹²

The failure of the plan to achieve any success, and the growing rift between the KDP and the PUK, prompted the CIA to shift funding away from the INC, to another opposition group associated with the CIA, the Iraqi National Accord (INA). Headquartered in Amman, Jordan, the INA favored a military coup to topple Saddam Hussein, rather than a protracted civil conflict envisioned by the INC.

Two days prior to the Iraqi invasion of Iraqi Kurdistan on 31 August, the CIA presence in northern Iraq departed for Turkey. Overall cost estimates of CIA operations in support of the INC and INA in northern Iraq fall around \$100 million since the

²¹¹ The KDP did not take part in the attack due to the lack of air support for the operation by the United States.

²¹² Boyne, 464, and Smith and Ottoway, "Anti-Saddam Effort Cost CIA \$100 Million."

beginning of operations in 1991. The resulting Iraqi invasion shattered the INC/INA operations in northern Iraq. Politically, a Defense Intelligence Agency report suggested “Saddam’s departure from the Iraqi political scene does not appear imminent.”²¹³

Following the collapse of the CIA sponsored opposition, Pentagon officials suggested that the collapsed operation from the very beginning was “ludicrous” and was “naïve to believe that such a force could topple the regime.”²¹⁴

The unintended consequences of the Iraqi invasion and the collapse of the CIA sponsored opposition were the thousands of Kurds who were now endangered by their affiliation with either American sponsored NGOs or with either the INC or INA. Regarding the plight of these Kurds, President Clinton commented that “Now, we’re doing everything we can to get out of Iraq American citizens and those who have worked with us.”²¹⁵

The United States response came in the form of a convoy of vehicles to move the endangered Kurds to the Turkish border. The United States ruled out any military action to assist the beleaguered Kurds, stating “These plans depend on them [the Kurds] reaching the border between Turkey and Iraq on their own. Our assistance will begin at

²¹³ Smith and Ottoway.

²¹⁴ Tim Weiner, “Iraqi Offensive Into Kurdish Zone Disrupts US Plot to Oust Hussein,” *New York Times*, 7 September 1996, 1.

²¹⁵ Steven Lee Myers, “U.S. Trying to Help Trapped Iraqi Dissidents,” *New York Times*, 10 September 1996, 8.

that point.”²¹⁶ The withdrawal of the Kurds associated with the INC resulted in the eventual airlift of the Kurds to Guam and then on to the United States.

K. CONCLUSION

As in 1975, many point to American complicity in the failure of the Kurds to achieve either peace or autonomy within Iraqi Kurdistan following the 1991 war. However, as in 1975, a confluence of circumstances resulted in the Kurds’ failure to achieve any semblance of autonomy.

Foremost, infighting between the KDP and PUK in light of their elected parliament, the KRG, were unable to capitalize on the military cover provided by the CTF in Turkey. Animosity between the two rival groups scuttled any hope of the KRG achieving any success politically.

Again, as in 1975, international politics played a role in ensuring that the Kurds would be unable to parlay their success in establishing the KRG into any meaningful autonomy. Iran, Syria, Turkey, and Iraq all favored keeping the Kurds fighting amongst themselves. This effort of keeping any peace negotiations off balance effectively precluded the KRG from pursuing autonomy, with its potential ramifications for Kurds in the aforementioned countries.

²¹⁶ Steven Lee Myers, “U.S. to Help Refugees in Iraq,” *New York Times*, 13 September 1996, 1.

IV. CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY OPTIONS

The trans-national character of the Kurdish problem in the Middle East presents the United States with a dilemma. The dilemma stems from whether the United States should pursue a policy which risks upsetting the regional status quo by engineering the break-up of Iraq and creating de jure a Kurdish state; or does the United States continue a policy which this paper has documented: that the United States continue to support its regional allies (presently defined as Turkey) and the regional balance of power, to the detriment of the Kurdish quest for autonomy.

A. POLICY OPTIONS REVIEWED AND CRITIQUED

The often-repeated maxim that the Kurds are the largest nation in the world without a state belies the complexity of the issues surrounding Kurdish autonomy. The United States, as mentioned earlier, has demonstrated that the maintenance of the status quo is preferable to upsetting the regional balance of power, as well as preferable to upsetting one of the United States' primary allies in the region – Turkey. Yet simply pursuing the maintenance of the status quo is fraught with sustaining the instability that the United States seeks to overcome. Graham Fuller has suggested that to do nothing but maintain the status quo, “the Middle East could opt for extreme violence and repression designed to crush dissatisfied minorities in every state....”²¹⁷

²¹⁷ Graham Fuller, “The Fate of the Kurds,” *Foreign Affairs*, Spring 1993, 119.

The perseverance of Operation Provide Comfort, despite the Iraqi invasion of Iraqi Kurdistan in 1996, the subsequent Kurdish civil conflict, and repeated Turkish invasions of the safe haven, underscores the paradox reflected in the present policy vis-à-vis the Kurds.

1. Creation of a Kurdish State

The creation of a new state in the Middle East, derived from the territories of other states, is a problematic issue. The United Nations has passed resolutions alluding to the rights of oppressed peoples, and that “the authorities of a state should not use force to prevent self-determination in connection with a people’s right to complete independence.”²¹⁸ However, as mentioned earlier, with regards to the Kurds, the status quo powers today regard present day state boundaries as inviolable. Additionally, countries at risk of losing territory paint a scenario whereby the same separatist agenda could spillover into neighboring countries with sizable minorities, thereby upsetting state boundaries not linked to the Kurdish issue.²¹⁹

Michael Lind has argued that American insistence on the maintenance of the status quo, which has been clearly to maintain Iraq’s territorial integrity is misguided. This argument states that “reflexive support for multinational political entities, especially

²¹⁸ Kirisci, 185. The General Assembly Declaration of December 1960 on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples discussed this ambiguous idea. Additionally, UN General Assembly Resolution 2625, October 1970, discussed the right to secede based upon oppressive governments’ dealings with a repressed minority.

²¹⁹ This argument hits home with the Russians and Chinese, both members of the UNSC, and both with secessionist minded ethnic groups.

despotic ones, is as misguided as the automatic rejection of movements that seek the sovereignty of national homelands.”²²⁰ Lind continues that the Kurds would be more secure in their own state, rather than as part of Iraq. Lind, has oversimplified the Kurdish example, ignoring the very schisms that he suggests are the building blocks of a political entity.²²¹ He states that “it may be a waste of time to try to hold together and democratize a multinational state, even a relatively liberal one, where a common national identity is lacking.”²²² This may very well be true, particularly in Iraq’s case, however, political tensions in the area would preclude the dissolution of Iraq, particularly in the present atmosphere of hostility between the regional actors: Iran, Syria, Turkey, and the United States.

Referring to Yugoslavia, yet having the same implications for Iraq, Lind comments that “the United States may appear to license vicious repression, as the Bush administration’s statements in favor of Yugoslav unity....”²²³ Kurdish political leaders have suggested this very idea as the impact that the American policy of supporting Iraqi

²²⁰ Michael Lind, “In Defense of Liberal Nationalism,” *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 1994, 88.

²²¹ Lind suggests that “the linguistic-cultural nation is today generally accepted as the basis for the political community because it is the largest particular community that can still command sentimental loyalty....” *Ibid*, 88. This remark, as applied to the Kurds glosses over linguistic, religious, tribal, and cultural schisms that have prevented the Kurds from capitalizing on achieving autonomy in a number of instances throughout the 20th century.

²²² *Ibid.*, 97.

²²³ *Ibid.*

unity has on the Kurds, i.e. repression by a corrupt regime intent on suppressing Kurdish autonomy.

Lind's argument has been elaborated on by Daniel Byman who has looked into the issue with more detail. Byman's argument suggests that United States' concern over Iraq's territorial integrity is a relic of the balance of power game played by the United States throughout the Iran-Iraq war. American hopes for an overthrow of Saddam Hussein by a moderate from within the regime, the argument concludes, is just a hope. Byman suggests that a powerful Iraq that is capable of fending off the advances of Iran, as the United States had worked for throughout the 1980s, is just as capable of continuing previous Iraqi regimes' policies of internal repression against the Kurds and Shi'ite populations.²²⁴ However, Byman's call for a Kurdish state, as well as a Shia state in the south, overlooks the Kurds' present inability to politically unite to promote their own autonomy. Since the Kurdish elections in 1992, the Kurds have had their chance, under the protection of the American led CTF in Turkey, to pursue their autonomy without a direct threat from the Iraqi army. However, personal jealousies between Barzani and Talabani, with external interference from Syria, Iran, Iraq, and Turkey, have prevented the Kurds from realizing a workable autonomy. Byman's argument for the breakup of Iraq would indeed have its advantages, however, the viability of a Kurdish state, without a working relationship between the primary Kurdish political leaders, is presently untenable.

²²⁴ Daniel Byman, "Let Iraq Collapse," *The National Interest*, Fall 1996, 1-3.

2. Kurdistan as a Regional Non-state Actor

The idea of an autonomous Kurdistan can take a number of forms. The primary option, widely touted by the Kurds, calls for a federal scheme whereby political power is devolved from a central government to a Kurdish entity. A separation of powers between a central government and a Kurdish government would be clearly defined, with the central government retaining certain privileges such as national defense and foreign policy. An additional type of autonomy could be established, as Gidon Gottlieb suggests later in this paper, for a form of trans-national autonomy with international recognition, but yet working within the confines of established state boundaries.

Referring back to the Wilsonian principle of self-determination, Gottlieb suggests that “states bent on extinguishing smoldering embers of ethnic strife without the traumatic surgery of secession must make it possible for restive nations to carry on their life free from alien rule... A states-plus-nations approach...”²²⁵ This option requires a regional solution than a state by state approach. With regards to the Kurds, it would require Turkey, Syria, Iraq, and Iran to overcome political differences and recognize the Kurds as a national community that supersedes state boundaries. Gottlieb concedes that the creation of a Kurdish state would not solve the Kurdish question vis-à-vis these states, and that “this step [statehood] would require major changes in the map and geopolitics of

²²⁵ Gidon Gottlieb, “Nations Without States,” *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 1994, 100.

the Near East that are opposed by the powerful states of the region.”²²⁶ In this light, Gottlieb calls for a new type of international recognition for nations such as the Kurds. “Nations that do not have a state of their own should be granted a formal non-territorial status and a recognized standing internationally, albeit one that differs from the position of states.”²²⁷ Gottlieb suggests that this framework would offer the Kurds, particularly those of Iraq, the greatest security in the present political arena. This option he contends would ensure the territorial integrity of all states concerned, yet grant formal guarantees by an international body for the safety of the Kurds.

Graham Fuller has remarked, concurring with Gottlieb, that a fundamental new approach towards the region needs to be achieved if ever this matter should be brought to a peaceful resolution. Fuller concedes that

In reality, it is far more preferable that the Kurds be able to achieve their ethnic and cultural aspirations without having to take apart three nations [read states] to create their own. But if the states involved are unable to make the necessary political and cultural changes, their borders will inevitably face change.²²⁸

Fuller’s policy option for the United States would cause the least unrest in the region, particularly where the inviolability of borders has been the major stumbling block for the Kurdish quest for autonomy. This policy proposal, as Gottlieb has suggested,

²²⁶ Ibid., 104.

²²⁷ Ibid., 107.

²²⁸ Graham Fuller, “The Fate of the Kurds,” 120.

would require international guarantees, backed by American influence, to secure such an arrangement. However, while the United States maintains its policy of dual containment, two major countries with Kurdish populations, Iran and Iraq, would be non-participants in such talks. In this light, such a solution without Iraqi or Iranian compliance at present is unworkable.

However, while unimaginable as long as Saddam Hussein remains in power, the belief that Iraq could approach the Iraqi Kurds with a proposal for a form of federalism within the Iraqi state is not farfetched. Iraq has put forth similar proposals in years past, but has failed to act on these proposals in a timely manner, thereby exacerbating Kurdish displeasure with the regime in Baghdad. If a future government within Iraq is able to offer the Kurds such an offer, backed up by international guarantees, the pressure for Turkey and neighboring countries to follow suit would be immense. Fuller recognized the possibility for this potential turn of events, and remarked that despite Turkey's efforts to undermine Kurdish autonomy, that events may be out of Turkey's control. Fuller noted that "overlooked by Ankara is the possibility that Iraq may choose a federated solution to its ethnic and religious divisions, as it has in part attempted to do in the past."²²⁹

²²⁹ Henri J. Barkey and Graham E. Fuller, "Turkey's Kurdish Question: Critical Turning Points and Missed Opportunities," *The Middle East Journal*, Vol. 51, No.1, Winter 1997, 76.

B. CONCLUSION

The previously mentioned policy proscriptions that are currently being articulated fail to take into account the inherent instability found within Iraqi Kurdistan. The 20th century has not been kind to the Kurds. However, a lasting solution must encompass the cooperation of the Kurds if it is to get the support of the international community. In this author's opinion, the United States needs to seriously reevaluate its current position on the Kurds within Iraqi Kurdistan.

First, if the United States wants to be recognized as a serious peace broker between the warring factions in Iraqi Kurdistan, the United States must elevate its level of engagement from minor officials within the State Department to a more visible level. The current administration's policy of utilizing office chiefs, when other conflicts such as Bosnia and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict warrant ambassadors, Cabinet Secretaries, and their Assistant Secretaries sends a clear signal to neighboring countries with interests in the outcome of the Kurdish problem, that the United States is not fully committed to solving the problem.

Secondly, the United States ought to consider carefully the repercussions of inadvertently siding with a particular Kurdish political organization. This bias, conscious or not, led to the latest round of fighting, when the KDP opted out of the CIA backed INC insurrection in 1995. Currently, a majority of humanitarian aid destined for the Kurds in northern Iraq is funneled through the PUK, potentially alienating other Kurdish factions

at the expense of peace. Additionally, the latest round of fighting between the Kurds has devolved into a conflict of personalities, between Barzani and Talabani. The United States should indicate that this fighting only serves those who wish to see the Kurds weak and in no position to effectively parlay autonomy into a workable settlement. In this light, the United States should attempt to utilize whatever political and economic leverage it has to forcefully bring an end to this costly conflict.

Thirdly, the United States needs to engage Turkey on its human rights records with regards to its Kurdish population, and likewise with its protracted occupation of Iraqi Kurdistan. Turkey ought to be held accountable for the evolution of its anti-PKK foray into northern Iraq into a protracted occupation, drawing it into the KDP-PUK conflict on the side of the KDP. Comparisons have already been made by regional politicians of the similarity between the latest Turkish incursion, and the protracted Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon.

Lastly, in line with the long-held American policy of respecting the territorial integrity of Iraq, the United States must ensure that whatever regime emerges after the inevitable change in leadership within Iraq, that the follow on Iraqi regime respect the autonomy accords drafted by previous Iraqi governments. This would allow the development of a workable autonomy within Iraqi Kurdistan.

The bottom line is that this conflict will not be resolved quickly. A number of factors external to the Kurdish question play heavily on American policy in the region.

Foremost of these factors is the policy of dual containment, which works against the Kurds by alienating two of the states with sizable Kurdish populations against any American diplomacy that attempts to solve this trans-national problem. Additionally, our traditional support to Turkey in its decade long fight against the PKK, has muted American condemnation of Turkey's harsh treatment of its Kurdish population in southeastern Turkey.

As Fuller and Gottlieb have suggested, fresh thinking regarding the international status of stateless nations needs to be realized if the Kurds are to achieve the peace that they have sought for so long. Likewise, the Kurds need to overcome their historical animosities against other Kurds in order for the international community to be able to effectively deal with the Kurds as a nation, rather than as a disparate group of warring tribes.

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